

Just Ask!

By Wan Wee Pin, Acting Manager, INVENT

Singapore has been in the throes of a burgeoning new beginning for the last few years with words like “innovation”, “re-training” and “creativity” being bandied around almost on a monthly basis through all stratum of society. Many seem totally caught up with the need to see things with new eyes or to think out of the box as they chase the latest fad theory or thinking.

However, they fail to realise that the elixir they are looking for is just right in front of them if only they pay a little attention? How do you get people to think differently? You get them to ask questions. It's that simple. More than just a quest for answers, the act of asking a question enforces a change physiologically and mentally because it is a reflection of one's desire to know more and one's admittance of one's inadequacies.

The latter is crucial; only until we are able to admit we do not know something, will we be able to get on the path of finding the answer. If we know it all, what else is there to intrigue and stimulate our curiosity? Human progress and growth cannot be possible without the desire to search for alternatives or to discover the new. With no curiosity, the human race will cease to exist.

For a long time, we always claim that Singaporean students do not like or do not want to ask questions; they are too quiet and keep their views to themselves. Check ourselves this instance and ponder: Do **we** ask questions? Do **we** try to find out more?



A story relates that a group of teachers, wanting to find the impetus to get their students to ask questions, went to Japan for a study trip. However, when they were there, not a single one of them asked their Japanese hosts any questions!

That is the basic premise of the new campaign that the National Library Board (NLB) is introducing. A multifaceted campaign, *Just Ask* aims to educate, cultivate and encourage library patrons to ask any questions they may have and to inculcate in them a questioning mind and culture.

Just Ask has three major components: Skills, Services and Content

Over the next six months, patrons will be exposed to workshops and programmes that will teach them how to ask questions and how to find the answers for themselves. The skills they learn will equip them to deal with questions and questioning techniques throughout their lifetime.

NLB will also be introducing new research and enquiry services that will allow participants who have questions to easily gain access to the answers through different mediums. The newest kid on the block will be the SMS Reference Service where patrons can merely punch a few buttons to send in their questions.

Finally, NLB will be showcasing the databases and resources that we possess. For a start, we will be targeting the three sectors of *Business, Arts and Education* and show how we can become a valuable information support system for these professionals.

To raise the profile of the campaign and to spread the need to ask questions, *Just Ask* has also created what we call *Just Ask* Ambassadors. Our line-up of interesting Ambassadors includes the likes of Dr Woffles Wu, cartoonist Colin Goh, Dr William Tan and the NUS Everest team.

Look out in the coming months ahead for many related activities, promotions and workshops all geared towards getting people to ask more questions and to develop a more innate enquiring character.

We are not trying to “evangelise” but simply reminding everyone of the truth they may have forgotten; to get them to reflect, dramatise and grossly magnify what we already hold true. If the *Just Ask* campaign can plant the seed of a questioning culture amongst the people, we would have succeeded, for the real quest for knowledge begins not with information but with inquisitiveness.

For more details of the series of activities related to Just Ask, visit our website www.nlb.gov.sg or pick up a brochure at a library near you.