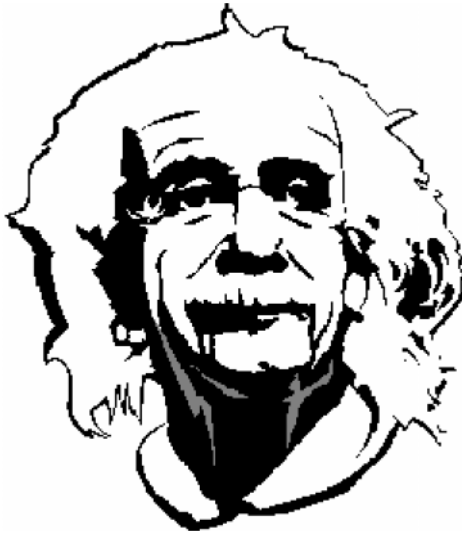




By Stephen Harvill



EINSTEIN'S NOTEBOOK

I am easily fascinated. This is both a good and bad thing. On the positive side, I find inspiration in many places. On the negative side, I am a horrible driver whose attention is constantly drawn in as many disadvantageous directions as a five-year old's. Since my entire profession involves the creation, design and implementation of strategic ideas, the good part of my personality far outweighs the bad, as long as I can keep my car on the road!

During a recent stay in Las Vegas I had a few hours between projects and went on a typical "walk-about"...a wandering journey with no goal

other than to look around for anything that might generate or support an idea. Armed with my trusty iPhone that functions as voice recorder and camera, I hit the many malls that serve as depositories for the scant winnings of earnest gamblers. I saw the new fall fashion color palettes, the latest in bright shiny technology, cakes carved to resemble swans, watches--check that--expensive watches (a gambler's favorite luxury), and lots of beautiful and odd people (the mainstay of any Las Vegas experience).

During this unfocused stroll, I stumbled upon a store specializing in rare books. Being an avid reader I was drawn to the books on display, all locked in glass cases protected from whatever natural (and toxic) elements are found in a mall. I saw a signed first edition of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* for \$15,000. There were Hemingways, Dickenses, and Steinbecks galore, all magnificent examples of the power of the written word. It made me kind of sad that I have switched to reading on the Kindle, but it was just a transitory nostalgia that passed as I remembered the weight of those hardbacks I used to haul through every airport in America.

In the middle of this glorious shrine to printed intellect and imagination stood a separate glass case with a small, inconspicuous item at its center. I stood over the glass case in wonderment, seeing an asking price \$80,500. Breaking my fascination was the very proper proprietor of this book museum who politely asked, "Are you a buyer?" Dressed in my traditional baggy surf shorts, aloha shirt and flip flops, I jokingly answered, "Do I look like a buyer?" His highly professional response was, "In Las Vegas one can never tell." Great understated sales response.

In a humbled voice I asked, "Would it be possible for me to hold that for just a moment?" To my surprise he replied "Sure". He carefully unlocked the box and handed me a small notebook. I gingerly held it in my hands, awestruck and speechless. You heard right, SPEECHLESS. For I was holding one of Albert Einstein's notebooks in which he had scribbled and figured his way toward the Theory of Relativity. I was holding Einstein's Notebook.

Thoughts engulfed me like a waterfall. First, I am a huge fan of old Albert. I have read countless books and articles on his unique and

fascinating mind. I have wondered what he was he thinking. What was his mind's eye seeing? How did he connect thoughts to outcome? Where did mistakes turn into ideas? Where did needed proof take a backseat to vision? Perhaps all of these answers were in this small notebook. Alas, my Las Vegas imagining was brought to a screeching halt when the very polite salesman interrupted my reverie with an abrupt "That's enough." I thanked him and numbly wandered out of the store.

I had just held the physical evidence of an active and brilliant mind. And at the same time, I realized those elements exist in each of us...but we just let the damn world beat them into submission. We all dream, we all see, we all wonder. We just don't see these exercises as being of value. We have become foolish humans systematically beaten into submission.

Albert played with thoughts. He experimented, he wrote, he erased, he wrote again. He tried and then tried again. He created a new way to see the universe.

The challenge sits before us today, not unlike it sat before Albert as he stared at a dysfunctional compass. The world is not slowing down. The requirements of discovering success are changing at a rate unheard of in human history. The way you thought before WILL NOT form the behaviors and discipline you will need tomorrow, plain and simple. Systems that govern outcome are becoming stale, stagnant, harmful and very rapidly obsolete. Your constant attachment to the way things are hinders your ability to see things the way they can be.

I observe this blindness all the time as I work with business leaders. They spend hours explaining and justifying systems that no longer serve their designed outcome. They are unthinking people who have no idea WHY they are doing the things they do.

The challenge to change seems daunting, but really it isn't. It does not require a large investment of capital or resources. Believe it or not, the solution is simple once the thinking problem is identified. It involves a very uncomplicated formula of thinking and courage.

Take a look at the things that dictate your life and ask a simple question for every system: “WHY?” Einstein’s notebook was full of “why.” He never stopped thinking, he never stopped challenging, and he never stopped “asking why.” It’s clear to me that *thinking* has become a lost skill. Yet thinking itself is merely the process of asking questions, the right questions. And “why?” is the best of questions.

During two recent projects I sat patiently while the different clients tried with all their might to explain to me how their processes work, how their systems connect to produce an outcome. Now I’m a pretty smart guy, but I’ll be damned if I had any idea what they were talking about. They saw a system built on their reality of learned comfort. They operated within its constricted confines everyday. It made sense to them. To me, a fish outside their bowl, their systems appeared cumbersome and awkward. I carefully posed questions regarding the need for this and that and was met with defensive postures worthy of a Stanley Cup goalie. These executives felt threatened by the WHY question and seemed helpless to handle the outcome such a journey: “Steve, I can’t change the way we do this, I just need help building the relationships that can get me through it.”

I wonder if, as chalk dust flew off the blackboard, Albert had those same feelings. He had to have run into brick walls of known physics, he had to have thought, “I can’t change gravity. How in the hell am I supposed to tell people time and distance are all bending together?” Yet he still had the courage to ask WHY. He was open to change our understanding of the universe, the universe! Now we all have our own universe where systems rotate around our reality not unlike the eight planetary siblings to the sun. Changing things, making us ready for a new future may all come down to a simple question: WHY?

As I stood in Las Vegas holding Albert’s scribbled notes I felt a sense of wonder fill me and thought, “Perhaps, just maybe, my discoveries remain to be found in my simple asking of ‘why’.” And so do yours.

Albert’s vision was blooming uncontrolled.
-from “Einstein on the Beach” by Counting Crows.