

ask.

what if everything started with a question?

the ask dinner playbook

four parts:

the idea
the planning
the dinner
the notes

the idea

It all started 4 years ago. It was a simple idea then and it's a simple idea now. Let's set out to ask 1 question to a wide range of leaders from all around the world.

In a short time, **ask.** has been an incredible experiment. We've had the great opportunity and pleasure to [ask questions](#) and learn from the tech rock stars, NGO leaders, professional athletes to CEOs of Fortune 500s. Since then it's become a way of life, not just an interview blog. The dinner takes it to the next level by having personal and intimate conversations through asking questions. The belief of the **ask.** dinner is as follows;

- The entire evening is driven by questions and a moderator.
- Everyone is equal and everyone has a voice. There are no "speakers" or "podiums."
- Checking out and being present, personal. No cell phones or computers allowed during dinner. Must be turned off.
- The dress is black and white attire. A classy gathering.
- Everyone receives an ask notebook to take notes and share the experience afterwards.
- 10-12 people dinners to keep intimate and let everyone participate.
- Questions will be curated beforehand and anyone can bring their own questions.
- People need do nothing except show up.

Read the notes from the first ever ask dinner here: <http://bit.ly/OPTjIM>

the planning

It's all about the details. Below is a checklist that should provide the must have items to host a successful **ask.** dinner.

Checklist: *(Scratch all these off in order and you're good to go!)*

- Pick a date.** *(Usually, Monday or Tuesday work best for busy people's schedules. Most people are booked on weekends)*
- Order ask. notebooks.** *(Do so at least 15 days in advance and ship to your residence. The softcover @ \$13 works great (<http://bit.ly/P8L0sX>)*
- Book a reservation for dinner from 6-9 p.m.** *(Private / Semi-Private table for 10-12 @ \$50-\$75/Person dinner + drink. Keeps total cost <\$100)*
- Optional: Find a bar close by to go to afterwards.** *Price not included, people are responsible for drinks after the dinner.*
- List out 20-40 awesome, diverse people you'd want to join.** *(shoot for 10-12 to join. Can be less, shouldn't be more. Be selective, shoot big. Never know unless you ask.)*
- Identify the moderator.** *(This can be yourself but remember that this person keeps the night flowing and makes the dinner.)*
- Determine cost per person.** *(Dinner + Wine + Notebook + Pens - Don't go overboard on wine, it's not what the night is about. Save it for the bar afterwards)*
- Set up an event on <http://wepay.com>, connect your checking account.** *(Have people pre-pay so no awkward experience at the end of dinner (or any other way you'd like to collect pre-payment) See the last dinner page here: <http://bit.ly/SebsEX>)*
- Send invites.** *(Include other people's names in the invite as they say yes so more people will join. People like to know others are going. Include venue, date and payment link (Sample invite here: <http://bit.ly/PKptaV>)*
- Find volunteer photographer.** *(The shoot should only take 15-30 minutes towards the end of event. They should capture people and notebooks.)*
- Send bios of people to moderator.** *(They should prep for the talker and the quiet person.)*
- Ask for dietary restrictions.** *(Share with dinner chef beforehand)*
- Follow up with people who still need to pay 2 days before event.**
- Buy pens for event.** *(Black Sharpies, fine point)*
- Buy plain white notecards.** *(Write names on, assign seats for people.)*
- Send email excited 1-day before.** *(Sample email: <http://bit.ly/OLuh36>)*
- Send thank you email to all people after the dinner.** *(Include the photos and any other amazing, funny or awesome notes from the night. Photos should include ask. watermark. Bold Helvetica white 50% opacity. Submit your post to the ask. blog here too: <http://asksummit.tumblr.com/submit>)*

the dinner

The main thing to know is that there is no set plan. As the host and/or moderator, feel free to run the night however you feel comfortable. This agenda should serve solely as a guide to what we feel was a great way to flow the dinner from breaking the ice to getting really personal. This is not about business, it's about being personal, intimate and trusted. Use this framework as a guide for your **ask.** dinner.

Details/Questions/Opportunities

- 9-11 attendees, square or round table preferred (Can be less, shouldn't be more)
- 1 moderator
- Photographer for 15-30 minutes around 8 pm. Invite them to sit down and chat.
- Request confidentiality w/ dinner location to create a "safe" environment for sharing
- Less is more. Maybe each hour is driven by 1 to 3 key question as opposed to trying to get through too many with 9 people

The 5 p.m. Hour - (*Set up for dinner*)

As the host, you should arrive an hour early.

- Notebooks should be placed on the table at each person's seat.
- Black Sharpie pens should be placed angled across the top of the notebook.
- Plain white name cards in all lowercase should be placed. Arrange people in a way you feel bring intimate, diverse conversation.

The 6 p.m. Hour - (*Welcome/Get To Know You/Break The Ice*)

6:00: Cocktails/getting comfortable/journals placed on table with name cards for their seat

6:15: Welcome from host & moderator lays out the evening

6:30: Take a seat, starting question idea -What is something about you that we can't find on-line?

6:45: First question should be one everyone can answer short and sweet, full participation.

- What's the biggest misconception about you?

The 7 p.m. Hour - (*Business/Society*)

Sample Questions

- What's your biggest breakthrough because of something that didn't happen?
- Will the American dollar fail before a global economy exists
- How will the workforce evolve in the next 5/10 years?
- What will college as an institution fail?

- When leading and getting people to join you/your idea, is it more about having confidence even if you know you're not going to be right or being open that you don't know?
- What negative impact, or will, technology have on our lives in the next 10 years/future.
- Is there a line between work/play - The future of work (12 vs 150)

****Short Break if needed*

The 8 p.m. Hour - (Wildcard/Singled Out Questions)

Pre-selected questions directed towards certain people based on previous answers. Moderator has to understand the people and direct questions to them.

**Photographer should arrive and take shots*

Sample Singled-Out Questions

- Money: Is it really not about the money?
- Qualities of an amazing lover?
- Who do you need to forgive
- What was a key "decision point" defining moment in your life before you "made it?"
- What haven't you said tonight that's on your mind?
- What is one thing you've never told anyone publicly but was a pretty major decision?
- Who is someone you dislike that made you better?
- Is there one lover you still think about and why?
- If you knew you were going to die in 30 days, what would you change about what you're doing right now?
- What worries you most about the future?
- What do you sometimes pretend you understand, that you really don't.
- When did you not speak up, when you should have?
- What have you given up on?
- Qualities of an amazing lover?
- What's something
- What's something you know you do differently than most people?

Closing - (End on time, take it to the bar if you want to have more drinks)

This dinner is about becoming better friends and trusting with each other. That's what I hope you got out of this dinner. Will you join me in a toast? Thank you all for coming.

the notes

*There are a few things we want all hosts to know about the belief and brand of **ask**.*

To start, there are a few words we never use. Anything that is associated with an event should never be used.

So, words like this should never be used in anything **ask**.;

- Event
- Attendee
- Speakers
- Lineup
- Venue
- Q&A (this is the entire brand, **ask**.)
- Tickets

Instead, it should always be personal and include words like;

- Dinner
- Interviews
- Conversation
- Questions
- Intimate
- People
- Discussion
- Invited

Also, as the host, you should ask yourself these questions below to ensure a night that will be remembered forever.

What would every person say to their best friends after this event about the ask dinner?

Answers we've heard from past dinners:

- Do whatever you have to do to get an invite to the next one
- I'm a better person because of the dinner
- I can't remember the last time I've been so intellectually stimulated and laughed so much
- I compiled more brilliant ideas/thoughts in my ask notebook that night than I have in ages

What's the one thing you want them to take away?

Answers we've heard from past dinner hosts:

- An intellectual orgasm
- Inspiration + Action

- Community
- "Getting elbowed," in a good way. The way that being pushed in sports drives you to push harder. To be better.
- To make each other better
- 1 or 2 key relationships moving forward

What makes a great intro and welcoming to the night?

Welcome intros we've heard from past dinners:

1. A quick history of ask.
 - Started with interviews about one question. Always wanted to be a gathering all about questions and answers. Most events feel like the best part is about the questions yet not everyone is comfortable asking questions. Why shouldn't people talking know what people want to hear by the questions that people have? The notebook is all about indexing and remembering what's important as well as checking off of technology. Being present with your thoughts. Indexing is just a way to log what's on every page of your notebook to find it later.
2. Minimum / Maximum
 - A simple note: "At minimum, we should all have an amazing dinner tonight. At maximum, we will all remember this night and the people here, forever."
3. Jaz-Z Quote
 - Kick it off with a little quote like this "Tonight, you could be anywhere and you chose to be here with us." - Jay Z
4. Cheers and thanks for coming.

ask. was founded on February 13th, 2009 by [Shane Mac.](#)

the end