Transcript: bigQUEST Podcast | S1, Ep 02
Andy Murray on The Secrets to Problem Discovery

Andy Murray: In the field of human culture. How do you measure such an astonishing moment in history?

Ben Ortlip: You're listening to the bigQUEST podcast with Andy Murray in a high stakes unpredictable world. Every day is right with the blue ocean adventures just waiting to be discovered. You need the mindset, the methods, and the motivation to lead with confidence into the unknown. Come along as we talk to today's top leaders known for simplifying challenges, outsmarting variables, and inspiring greatness.

Welcome to the bigQUEST podcast. This season we're focused on the 5 Big Questions that every great leader wrestles with while launching a bigQUEST and blue ocean initiatives, game-changing adventures. So let's bring in our host. Here is Andy Murray.

Andy Murray: Hey there Ben, how are you today?

Ben Ortlip: Good. I feel a little underdressed. You're rocking the blazer. You look very distinguished. Got that.

Andy Murray: You've got to at least look smart in case I don't say something that sounds smart.

Ben Ortlip: You don't have the Sean Connery accent, but just about everything else is going on there. Yeah, exactly. The other Andy Murray. All right, we're going through these five questions, but can we just back up for a second and talk about who is this content for the bigQUEST framework? We're going to get through the 5 Big Questions, but when do these come up for people?

Andy Murray: They come up most frequently when you're trying to do a new initiative where you can't really just work through the incrementality and optimize something that currently exists. The type of initiatives I'm after from a helping standpoint comes from a place where you can't rely on past patterns and past experiences.

So you're going to have to use a bit more right-brain thinking, and we'll get into that. But it takes a different approach to go after those types of initiatives where you're meeting to go in and come up with a new value proposition you haven't done before, or bring something new that the organization perhaps hasn't seen before or done before.

And those have a very different set of challenges to them, and yet in today's environment, we're seeing more and more of a need for leaders that are skilled in their ability to do that.

Ben Ortlip: All right. I'm looking at the bigQUEST website. You listed these different scenarios where somebody might need this type of thing.

And you've got senior corporate leaders who are trying to lead a breakthrough. You talk about senior account leaders, who are trying to build that sort of top alignment, product owners and managers that are leading the sort of Agile adventures, nonprofit leaders, entrepreneurs who are maybe launching a new offering, professionals wanting to up-skill, their leadership toolbox. Those are all great. And what I'm understanding from that is that we're really talking about scenarios, where it's a little different from every other day. Isn't it?

Andy Murray: Yeah. And those particular examples of roles that people might be in, they do share some common elements and I've had the opportunity, for example, to work on a top-to-top client/supplier relationship when I was at Procter & Gamble working on the Walmart team. There were some unique things that happened there. Tom Muccio, who we'll hear from through our podcast series, took a different approach on building a really strong, powerful Quest on taking that relationship to the next level and those principles really work. They became a game-changing model for the industry. Many suppliers are following that model that Tom and the team pioneered.

But the elements of being able to define a problem and go through these 5 Big Questions I'm talking about are very applicable to any type of big client and supplier relationship where you want to get more, and you can think of a way to partner together so that one plus one equals three. And often, both companies are faced with different problems, and to come up with a shared problem, a shared idea of the outcome you want, is usually pretty unique. Because a lot of times a supplier will come with their sales list of what they want to sell, and the retail or client will have their list of what they want to get, and it isn't really a joint vision to go create something bigger. And that's just one example and I hear that all the time, working with different suppliers in my last role, where they actually wanted to do more. They wanted to do bigger things and move from a transactional "let's just improve the relationship."

And certainly, there's a lot of work to be done to incrementally do that, but then how do you go about trying to do something you both haven't done together ever before? There are some steps that you could work through to make that happen.

Ben Ortlip: When we start talking about these 5 Big Questions in just a minute, one of the things that I noticed is that it starts to sound, at least there's a part of my brain that goes off and says, "Yeah, but isn't this just strategic planning? Isn't this just, begin with the end in mind kind of stuff?" And I can tell it's a little different, but how do you defend that? When that thought comes up?

Andy Murray: Typical strategic planning has a bit longer time horizon to it. And most strategic planning has a framework to it where you look at a three-year outcome and you're trying to get to an objective, and that objective is typically what you both want to achieve. And then you start building a three-year detailed plan behind that, and that usually ends up being a financial plan. And I've said before, I think sometimes those three-year plans are built to make astrology look credible because you know down deep that's not really based on something that inspires and motivates and most strategic plans don't consider one key element.

And that is: *How do you engage the hearts and minds of an entire organization that needs to get behind that and make it really happen?* And today, very few strategic plans are going to spit out an outcome that says, the top/down can make it all happen by themselves. Usually the types of problems we're in today, you have to unlock a whole bunch of ideas across an organization that are all in the front lines. It gets that energy moving in the right direction to come up with loads of ideas, rather than what a strategic planning process typically leaves out.

Ben Ortlip: And one of the things that you talk about early in the process here is just the need to pause and think about, "Gosh, why would I be spending all this time to identify the problem, to clarify the problem?" And as we get into this, the first question you're really talking about is the difference between right brain and left brain thinking and how the human brain is wired to analyze problems efficiently, but not always effectively.

So if you're a left-brain person, this is really an invitation to view things differently. And it seems if, as you pointed out, most leaders are left-brain thinkers. Why do you think that is?

Andy Murray: I think it's for a very good reason and that is, we want to be successful.

And with an achievement-based mindset, which is different than maybe one whereby you could do something original. But if you're trying to achieve results, the smart and wise move would be to pull from things that you might've done before, in that past, that work. You want to pull from your memory banks of repeatable patterns and things that you can spot quickly and you've got to move at pace.

And so a person that wants to achieve quite a bit in their career will typically focus on the things that don't invite in more risk or don't invite more uncertainty. That's the last thing you want to have added to your set of challenges. So we've rewarded it. Actually, most corporations are set up to have a bit of a bias against creativity and original ideas because you want to go after what's certain and what works. And so that desire to achieve is often more powerful than the desire to do something original.

Ben Ortlip: But the downfall that is —I've heard you point this out, too — is that customers are making decisions, not so much on a rational basis, but on a part that it's not necessarily emotional.

And I think one of the things I've heard you talk about is the way that, this whole process, the bigQUEST Framework is really a leadership strategy or framework that allows you to include that sort of right-brain component as well.

Andy Murray: Yeah, it is. You can't do this with a kind of a left-brain planning mindset because you have to address things that take you to some unknown spaces and let your preconceived notions be set aside regarding what's going to work or not work, and that starts to activate the right brain.

When you look at what's happening: Yes, there's some really clear, big strategic objectives — and strategic planning processes will kick those out, and I think that's still necessary. This isn't meant to replace strategic planning. But once that senior leadership team or that entrepreneur defines those big things they have to go after, we do have new processes at the bottom, which is called Agile. It's getting rolled out, and it's obviously on trend and on fire right now — Agile is getting rolled out everywhere, which kind of came from the pure play place. But it has the core elements, the essential elements to put new ideas into play with a test-and-learn, a scientific model to go explore new ideas, hold back your assumptions on what's going to work. So the bottom elements are there and the top objective is there. It's the gap in between the top and the bottom that doesn't really give leaders, mid-level leaders, senior leaders, the tools to be able to connect those two worlds.

And so that's the piece that you've got to have that I feel has been quite missing.

Ben Ortlip: One industry that has done this famously is the advertising industry, and both you and I both have backgrounds in the advertising world. And I think I've heard the story that Bill Bernbach was the first guy that said, "Hey, why are the art directors and copywriters on different floors, and why are the account executives...". And really, he got to look at the advertising industry as a great example of an industry that has not separated or gone completely left brain or right brain, but they're constantly managing the tension that exists between them.

And really what you're describing is, "Yes, strategic planning is important, but let's not check our brains at the door. Let's keep being creative as we work within the confines that we've agreed to. never surrendering that creative process."

Andy Murray: And I think, as you and I both know, working in the advertising industry, you really are challenged to come up with new blue ocean type ideas regularly.

And so you get a bit more wired with that in mind. And then you're working with organizations that tend to be more process-related, so you have to relate to the kind of a left-brain model. And so you live in that tension quite a bit inside the agency and between the client and the agency environment.

So why bigQUEST was so compelling for me is that I've spent the last 6 years in a big corporate environment and the first 10 years in corporate environments, and I believe that

the principles you learn inside an agency about how to make that creative idea ecosystem work is also now in demand in corporate culture, corporate America.

There's a demand for that creativity, and that ability to come up with ideas that will actually work in scale. It's easy to come up with a bunch of ideas. That's the one thing within the creative agencies — inside an organization you do need to calibrate with the question: *Is that a great idea that will also scale?*

I've seen loads of great ideas presented by very creative agencies, but a number of them wouldn't get past a rollout of a couple of stores before it started to implode under its own weight. And so creating ideas that actually scale is a big part of what I'm talking about.

Ben Ortlip: And also the fact that you can't just give over to right-brain thinking and creativity.

Andy Murray: That's exactly right.

Ben Ortlip: One of the things that cause people to maybe reel a little bit at the idea of right-brain leadership is that we need structure and they know that. The great thing about the bigQUEST framework is that it creates these sorts of agreements of context in which great creativity is encouraged, and still honoring the structure that has been agreed upon. And that sort of brings us to our first question of the 5 Big Questions. Take us into that and tell us what that question is and what it means and why it's so important.

Andy Murray: Question 1 of 5 Big Questions is really about defining the single biggest problem that you're trying to solve.

And that is such a focusing question to make sure that you're not just starting with a solution or saying, "Here's a great idea." You can't believe how many times I've been looking at a new idea that's come in and you start to work through the question: *What is the problem that you're really trying to solve?* and it hasn't been very clear. It hasn't worked. It was just a shiny new object or a new technology. And with technology changing so quickly, it's easy to get excited about a solution, but then not really clear on what's the use case on how that solution is going to solve a problem that's really important to the customer.

The problem to be solved is *What problem do we need to go out and solve — what's the single biggest, most important problem to the customer?* And being really clear that's the kind of problem that we're after. Rather than just balancing it by here's a bunch of ideas that we should maybe go build a Quest and go do something with.

You'd be surprised how often people start on a journey with a solution in mind or an idea in mind. And they haven't thought about, "Are we really solving a problem that matters to the customer and how so?"

Ben Ortlip: I remember, back in my agency days, the Young & Rubicam Creative Work Plan would come around and one of the great disciplines that we did was figuring out how to populate that, you know, answer all the questions.

The one that was the trickiest on, there was the problem statement. And I remember specifically that there were so many different ways to write the problem. You could write it as the customer's problem, you could write it as the client or advertiser's problem, you could write it in many different levels.

How do I validate that I've got the right problem statement here if I'm working through this?

Andy Murray: I think it has to start with asking *How does the problem affect your customer's life?* It should be really clear what the impact of that problem is on their life.

Now, when I say customer, I am generally talking about customers of your company, but it also can be a key stakeholder. So this works as well if you're leading in a finance department and your key stakeholder is the marketing organization or the salesforce. They are a key customer for you.

So if you're going to start out on something, ask how this problem affects their life. Go at it from that standpoint. One way you know you're on to it is when you playback that problem to the customer and they respond with, *"That's right! That's exactly what I'm talking about!"* and you get this emotional response and visceral response that says, *"You know exactly what I'm talking about. When you articulate that problem back, that's exactly what I'm feeling."*

It comes from being great at empathy. And we've talk about mindsets — the mindset of being able to be very empathetic as a leader to make sure you can get to that space where the customer is giving you that visceral response back.

Ben Ortlip: All of those things are triggers or symbols of the right-brain thinking. You've included the right brain component when somebody responds viscerally and when you are incorporating empathy into the equation.

Andy Murray: A hundred percent. Yes. We look for these patterns and we want to play the pattern that we've seen before because our brains are trying to spend the least amount of energy it has to on solving that. I mean, our brains are mentally lazy, right?

It reminds me of what I heard once around how big 52 factorial is, so let me explain. If you take a deck of cards and you randomly shuffle it three or four times, the idea that you're holding a deck that someone else has held before in that same order is 52 factorialized, which is six quintillion.

Six quintillion — that's the odds that you're holding a deck of cards that had ever been shuffled before, or will again. To get your head around six quintillion, you would have to go around the globe and place dollar bills end-to-end to cover the earth, the whole surface of the earth, and you do that until you reach the height of Mount Everest. And then you turn

around and do it again. Now you're starting to make a dent into how big six quintillion is, just to give you a look at that. But if you actually take that deck of cards and look at it, there are 52 variables there that you're dealing with — that the same 52 variables have been there forever for four different suits in 13 cards.

Those variables are consistent. If you didn't know that in terms of how the data really works, the way that math works exponentially, it's very easy to say, "Oh, I've seen that deck before I played that hand before. I know." Probably not. The variables are always dynamic and changing every single day.

And so that's the fallacy of trying to reach in and pull these set patterns. The variables we live with every single day are so different and dynamic, especially in the uncertain space we're in today, that it's very difficult to find a pattern that you could just pull out and execute quickly even though the variables feel familiar.

They feel familiar, but the patterns in how they go, don't operate that way.

I'm just reading a book that I found fantastic. It is by Maria Konnikova, and it's called *The Biggest Bluff*. She is a psychologist that decided to try to get in the world series of poker, within a year.

So she got with Erik Seidel, who won the one World Series of Poker several times — he's got several bracelets — to coach her on how to do that. And the thing about poker that's so interesting is that you've got a pretty straightforward game to play, but there is uncertainty because you've got luck, then you also have the skill. You have to put luck and skill and uncertainty and skill together to learn how to play that game, and play it well.

And so she asked him in the book, "What's the most important advice that you can have that you can give to be a champion at this game?" And he came back with two words, *pay attention*. Pay attention. And it's about the power of observation. It's a very right-brain game to win even if one might feel that he lives in a high-math, high-analysis type space.

And a lot of those guys are using high math, high analytics, and algorithms to calculate the best odds of playing any single hand a certain way. Yeah, they do win well. **But he wins by paying attention**. And that is a very right-brain thing to be able to observe and understand. And when you start looking at a problem with a blank sheet of paper and you don't take in preconceived notions, you might find that the solutions and the outcomes you want are exponentially better than what you went in with, and it almost always happens that way. And that's why I say, "Start with a problem." Although our nature is to start with, "Hey, I've got three ideas," or "I know the answer to that very quickly." and then you just jumped into it.

Ben Ortlip: Yeah. And what you're pointing to here is the reason that this type of leadership, this right-brain leadership, and this bigQUEST approach to things, is so important today because of the variables that come up. That's right.

56 quintillion variables that we face today, even though we've already made a strategic plan decision, there's still somebody that comes up that you have to pay attention to. As you're saying, that would be a great recommendation for anybody. If you had enough money to travel the earth and stack up to Mount Everest, my only recommendation would be don't play cards. Stay away from the whole card game.

Andy Murray: Exactly.

Ben Ortlip: So on the right-brain thing, the storytelling is also something that you talk about a lot and the ability to not only ask a question but to incorporate storytelling into the equation. How does storytelling fit in if I'm trying to answer the first question?

Andy Murray: I look at storytelling has a way to engage hearts and minds, but also to communicate ideas that tend to travel because people remember stories. There are two parts of storytelling I think it's important. In every great story arc that's ever been written, the protagonists encounter a problem.

And that's where books start, that's where movies start, when the protagonist encounters the problem. That's the starting point of any great story. It has to be the starting point of a Quest — what you're trying to get done as a protagonist really gets clear about the problem.

Another way that storytelling helps quite a bit, I'm a big fan of using storytelling, which is how there's nothing more powerful than when you've identified that problem, and then you sit down with a customer and you get them to explain how that problem affects their life in their story. So many things I've experienced over my career that have been helped and amplified when I can take a customer story and put a real context, real-life and real truth from a customer's point of view into that way of talking about the problem. Those are two different elements where storytelling is really important.

Ben Ortlip: All right. For the people listening, let's give some examples of what it looks like to write a problem statement, the correct problem statement. Is the storytelling element in the problem statement or is that something that I do to communicate the problem statement once I've figured it out?

Andy Murray: It's both/and. What we've done with these 5 Big Questions is put them in a way that you can create a mini-story about what it is you're trying to do.

Ben Ortlip: So, collectively tells a story

Andy Murray: Collectively, it tells a story and it lets you connect the threads so that you don't lose the plot. You don't want to lose the plot between what you're trying to solve and the outcome that you get and how you're going to measure — those things have to stay connected, and you want them connected. It also lets you find out where you've got big holes in your story. If you're trying to sort out and go for something important, but then you leave out how you're going to measure progress, you've got a major hole in your story, and that's

going to become a problem down the road. So we've tried to write these questions in a way that makes it clear how they hang together, and then secondly, it will be clear where you've got a hole in your plotline.

So I start looking at writing the problem itself, what problem we're trying to solve. Then I look at it to make sure that I don't put the solution into that because that's really easy to do, but let me give you an example.

Let's say that hypothetically — and I talked about this in the checklist that accompanies the [5 Big Questions Checklist & 5-Part Video Series](#) — let's say you're a company, and you've got a call center that may not be performing as well as you'd like. Customers are not really getting a consistent experience from that. You've got a sales floor and you probably have a brand purpose that talks about how important customers really are.

But when customers interact with the call center, they may not get that great experience because of a variety of reasons. And so, one easy thing to do is you saying, "You know what we need to reshore that. Maybe the call center has been offshored; let's reshore that."

And that's the answer, let's just jump in and start solving it, or let's put in new metrics or whatever. No. What is the problem you're trying to solve? And if it really is inconsistent then you need to give a really clear. Look, here's the problem we're trying to solve: We're creating an inconsistent brand experience with our call center as compared to other aspects of interacting with customers, and that is creating mistrust with our customers. So now you've got the mistrust, you know the emotion, what they're feeling, and you've got the real clarity: this is what we're trying to fix, this inconsistency, that's creating mistrust.

Ben Ortlip: So any other examples you can give us? Let's say that, internally working, to try to sell an idea upstream in the company. How do I look at the problem statement in that context? Do I look at it from the problem I'm trying to solve departmentally? Or do I think about the problem that my superior is trying to solve?

Can we put that in the context of some specifics?

Andy Murray: You're trying to solve a problem that matters again to the customer and is tied to your brand purpose.

Ben Ortlip: Customers being my superiors at that point?

Andy Murray: The question is going to be that problem worth solving if it's just a problem that you have.

Ben Ortlip: That you have to be trying to solve it on the behalf of the customer as well, right?

Andy Murray: I'm talking about knowing if it's a simple problem. Let's say we need to reduce costs. You're really then talking about areas where there's a lot of data, versus where there's not.

The first thing I'd look at Ben is to say there are two types of problems: there are complicated problems and there are complex problems. A complicated problem is when the data's there and it's just a lot of it may be to sort through, but it's complicated on how to put it together. That I would call a puzzle. It takes work, but there's a way to go about that. That's pretty straightforward. You find the edges, the corners first, and then you start putting the pieces in. It takes time. A lot of projects that we talk about and problems to solve are just complicated problems that you've got to work through, but you have the data.

The complex problem is when you don't have the data. That's the key thing — you don't know. And so I call that a mystery. You solve a mystery very differently than you solve a puzzle.

Ben Ortlip: That's where bigQUEST framework comes in.

Andy Murray: Exactly. It helps you go into, to solve that as a mystery. I don't know Ben if you've ever gone through any of those escape rooms. They're really popular right now. If you take your family through an escape room…

Ben Ortlip: I'm afraid to go.

Andy Murray: I was too, by the way, but I've been to a couple, and it's quite an experience to take with your family, depending on what kind of personality types you have amongst your tribe, right? Or go with some friends because it can really result in some challenging conversations, but you're really trying to get through it.

You get in there, you realize that there's no instruction. You just have to get through this room — out of the room into the next room. You don't have a lot of clues.

You get a few clues, but what you're looking for there is what's not there, what's not familiar, what seems out of place. You're looking for the unfamiliar things to make connections, to say *That might go over here with that.* And that takes, like what Eric Seidel says: You have to really pay attention. You have to really pay attention.

There's nothing in your memory bank that's going to help you pull that forward to say, "I've solved this one before" because they're really difficult problems to solve. But they take imagination, and they take the ability to absorb new things and powers of observation to get through it.

That's what you have to do when you're solving a mystery that's very different than solving a puzzle.

Ben Ortlip: Okay, so the first question again: *What's the single most important problem that we can solve?* It's not the single biggest necessarily. It's the single *most important* to our Quest that we're going to solve. Any other final advice to give?

Andy Murray: I could probably give one more example how this might be helpful. When you look at a problem we were having when Procter & Gamble launched Oil of Olay into Saudi

Arabia. I was at Saatchi at the time. Sales weren't going well because we took a global brand proposition that "this cured the problem of the seven signs of aging" and we thought that was the customer problem, that's what we thought customers wanted.But sales weren't working. And so we spent some time on the ground, the planning team from Saatchi, to go in and really understand the customer problem and what was the problem with the brand?

After two weeks of being in a home with a family, with a lady in her three more adult children, they built a relationship. They started talking. And after a couple of weeks, the hijab head coverings came up and they saw some things they didn't expect: they saw that there were some intricately painted faces, and it was beautiful. They started to have a conversation.

They asked, "What do you use Oil of Olay for? And they said, "It creates the most beautiful canvas."

You're a creative guy, top creative director. When you hear a customer say it creates a beautiful canvas, it's almost the copyright itself. But isn't it a powerful insight if you get that as a creative director to go chomp on and say, "This is about creating a beautiful canvas." Man, that's a creative dream because you've got the clarity of what exactly did it mean and feel like *in the customer's words.*

And so that's what I mean by maybe that's where the story comes in a bit, but that's when I get excited about it. Go spend some time following up with the problem because when you get into the problem, sometimes the epiphanies that come out when you really interrogate and do the archeology to get to the root of it, often the answers are right there inside it.

And a real quick story. Brian Chesky, co-founder of AirBNB (when he was still with Y Combinator with Paul Graham, a company innovation accelerator) got some advice to go spend some time with his customers. He didn't have a lot of customers at the beginning. They're all in New York and he's in California.

So he flies out and spends time interviewing host by host the handful of customers he had in AirBNB. And he tells a story about how remarkable it was to hear, when you really go deep into that, and how they use Airbnb to solve the problems. The roadmaps were all inside them — how to take care of AirBnB into the future of where they needed to go.

And that has become a practice of his to spend that time really listening and talking. And then, all of a sudden the solutions come from the customer themselves.

Ben Ortlip: Great. So the lesson that we take from Question 1 is to slow down and really embrace the problem and think through it, from every angle, including the sort of storytelling and brain angles, and the whole benefit of that is if you don't rush past it you actually get a chance to discover what the problem is. I think that's a good place for us to pause here.

That'll do it for this episode of the bigQUEST podcast as always visit the [bigQUEST website](#), where you can find an ever-growing repository of valuable resources to help simplify your challenges, outsmart the variables, and celebrate those victories.

Go to the [bigQUEST.com](#). And while you're there, be sure to download the FREE [5 Big Questions Checklist & 5-Part Video Series](#) to walk your team through the 5 Big Questions that every successful right-brained leader follows when launching a Quest.

We at the podcast are also on a bigQUEST so please subscribe and share this episode with your friends and colleagues, and be sure to join us in the next episode where we'll explore Question 2.

For Andy Murray and the rest of the bigQUEST team, thanks for listening.

Until next time! Think big and Quest on.

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