

Pre-Intermediate 3
Unit 3: Reading
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Silly Questions, Brilliant Answers

silly = foolish, stupid
brilliant = excellent

Masaru Ibuka was a Japanese electronics industrialist and co-founder of Sony, along with Akio Morita. He was born on April 11, 1908, and died on December 19, 1997. He was a pioneer of transistor technology and consumer electronics, and also a supporter of education and culture. He received many honors and awards for his achievements, including the IEEE Founders Medal and the Order of Culture.



Masaru Ibuka



tape = cassette



**Tape Player or
Cassette Player**



Sony Walkman

Several years ago, Masaru Ibuka, the chairman of Sony, was at a company planning meeting. Suddenly he had a brilliant idea. He stopped the meeting and asked everyone present what would happen if Sony removed the recording function and speaker and sold headphones with a tape player instead. Almost everyone thought he was crazy. Still, Ibuka kept thinking about his idea and worked at refining it. The result, of course, turned out to be the wildly successful Sony Walkman.

several = some; an amount that is not exact but is fewer than many
chairman = manager
planning = offering plans for future
present ≠ absent
everyone present = all the people who were present in the meeting
remove = delete

What would happen if Sony removed the recording function and speaker and sold headphones with a tape player instead? => **a conditional sentence Type II**

What would happen => **Main Clause**

if Sony removed the recording function and speaker and sold headphones with a tape player instead => **If-Clause**

instead (adverb) = alternatively

➤ *We didn't go to the movies. We went to the park instead.*

instead of (preposition) = as an alternative to

➤ *We went to the park instead of the movies.*

crazy = stupid, out of his mind, foolish

Still = But, Yet

keep = continue

refine = improve

turn out = become known

wildly = very, really

successful ≠ unsuccessful

Bill Bowerman was an American track and field coach and co-founder of Nike, Inc. He trained many Olympic athletes and NCAA champions, and also invented some of the most popular running shoes in the world. He was born in 1911 and died in 1999.



Bill Bowerman



Waffle



Waffle Iron



The Logo of NIKE Company

Good ideas often start with a really silly question. Bill Bowerman was making breakfast one day. As he stood there making waffles for his son, he wondered what would happen if he poured rubber into his waffle iron. Later, he tried it and the result looked something like the bottom of most sports shoes we see today. Still, when he took this idea to several existing shoe companies, he was literally laughed at. In fact, every single company turned him down. Though rather discouraged, Bowerman persevered and went on to form his own company, making NIKE athletic shoes.

as = while, when

wonder = want to know, ask oneself

rubber = an elastic material

pour = to make a substance flow from a container, especially into another container, by raising just one side of the container that the substance is in

What would happen if he poured rubber into his waffle iron? => **A Conditional Sentence Type II**

What would happen => **Main Clause**

if he poured rubber into his waffle iron => **If-Clause**

exist = to be or to be real

existing = available

He was literally laughed at. = They laughed at him a lot.

every single company = all the companies

turn down = reject, decline

though = although

rather = fairly, to some extent

Though rather discouraged = Although he was rather discouraged

persevere (verb) = try hard and not give up

perseverance (noun) = tenacity = continued effort to do or achieve something, even when this is difficult or takes a long time

go on = continue

form = found, establish

➤ *Steve Jobs founded the Apple Corporation.*

➤ *Steve Jobs is the founder of the Apple Corporation.*

athletic shoes = sports shoes

Fred Smith is the founder and executive chairman of FedEx, the world's largest transportation company. He was born on August 11, 1944, in Mississippi, U.S. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, where he received several medals for his bravery. He launched FedEx in 1971, after coming up with the idea for an overnight delivery service in a term paper at Yale University. He is one of the most successful and influential entrepreneurs in the world, with a net worth of \$5.5 billion (as of January 2024). He is also a philanthropist and a supporter of education and culture.



Fred Smith



The Logo of FedEx

Sometimes good ideas grow out of frustration. When Fred Smith was a student at Yale University, he had some paperwork that he needed to have delivered across the country the next day. Smith was amazed to find out that overnight delivery was impossible. He sat for a long while wondering why. Why couldn't there be a reliable overnight mail delivery service? He decided to design one. Smith did just that and turned his design into a class project. His business professor gave him only a "C" for his efforts. However, Smith was not through. He refined the

ideas in that class project and eventually turned them into one of the first and most successful overnight mail services in the world — FedEx.

grow out of = originate from
frustration = annoyance
across = from one side to another side
amazed = surprised
a long while = a long time
reliable = قابل اعتماد ≠ unreliable
just = exactly
effort = attempt
however = but
through = finished
refine = improve
eventually = finally, at last
FedEx = Federal Express

We know today, of course, that each of these ideas led to an incredibly successful product or service that has changed the way many of us live. The best questions are usually open-ended and are often silly. Children aren't afraid to ask such questions, but adults frequently are. Think how different the world might be if people never asked "silly" questions!

lead to = result in
lead => led, led
incredible = unbelievable
incredibly = unbelievably
frequently = often

The lesson that we learn from this reading:

Creativity + Perseverance = Success

Creativity = the ability to think differently
Perseverance = trying hard and not giving up
Success = being successful

Here are some other examples of silly questions that led to brilliant answers and inventions:

What if we could bounce newspaper off a blob of goo?

This question led to the invention of Silly Putty, a popular toy that was originally a failed attempt to create synthetic rubber.

What if we could squeeze our thighs to get fit?

This question led to the invention of the ThighMaster, a fitness device that became a sensation thanks to Suzanne Somers' infomercials.

What if we could make a fish fit in our pocket?

This question led to the invention of the Pocket Fisherman, a collapsible fishing rod that was marketed as the perfect gift for anglers.

What if we could talk to furry robots?

This question led to the invention of Furbies, the interactive electronic toys that could learn and speak different languages.

What if we could shake our way to a toned body?

This question led to the invention of the Shake Weight, a dumbbell that vibrates and claims to sculpt muscles faster than regular weights.

What if we could vacuum our floors without lifting a finger?

This question led to the invention of the Roomba, the robotic vacuum cleaner that can navigate and clean different surfaces.

What if we could make our clothes sparkle with gems?

This question led to the invention of the BeDazzler, a device that attaches rhinestones and studs to fabric.

What if we could hula hoop while sitting down?

This question led to the invention of the Hula Chair, a chair that rotates and simulates the motion of hula hooping.

What if we could cut our hair with a vacuum cleaner?

This question led to the invention of the Flowbee, a hair-cutting system that uses a vacuum to suck and trim hair.

What if we could wear a blanket with sleeves?

This question led to the invention of the Snuggie, a fleece blanket that has sleeves and allows the wearer to move freely.

Full Text:

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he was literally laughed at. In fact, every single company turned him down. Though rather discouraged, Bowerman persevered and went on to form his own company, making NIKE athletic shoes.

Sometimes good ideas grow out of frustration. When Fred Smith was a student at Yale University, he had some paperwork that he needed to have delivered across the country the next day. Smith was amazed to find out that overnight delivery was impossible. He sat for a long while wondering why. Why couldn't there be a reliable overnight mail delivery service? He decided to design one. Smith did just that and turned his design into a class project. His business professor gave him only a "C" for his efforts. However, Smith was not through. He refined the ideas in that class project and eventually turned them into one of the first and most successful overnight mail services in the world — FedEx.

We know today, of course, that each of these ideas led to an incredibly successful product or service that has changed the way many of us live. The best questions are usually open-ended and are often silly. Children aren't afraid to ask such questions, but adults frequently are. Think how different the world might be if people never asked "silly" questions!

Sample Summary:

The text “Silly Questions, Brilliant Answers” highlights how seemingly absurd questions can lead to groundbreaking innovations. It recounts three instances:

1. **Masaru Ibuka**, chairman of Sony, proposed the idea of a tape player without recording capabilities or speakers, leading to the creation of the **Sony Walkman**.
2. **Bill Bowerman**, while making waffles, pondered the idea of pouring rubber into his waffle iron, which eventually led to the distinctive sole design of **NIKE athletic shoes**.
3. **Fred Smith**, frustrated by the lack of reliable overnight mail delivery, designed a system for it as a class project at Yale University, which was the foundation for **FedEx**.

These stories illustrate that innovative ideas often begin with questions that defy conventional wisdom. The narrative encourages embracing curiosity and the willingness to ask “silly” questions, as they can lead to significant advancements and changes in our lives.

Sample Summary:

The story “Silly Questions, Brilliant Answers” tells us that sometimes, asking a strange question can lead to a great new invention. Here are three examples:

1. **Masaru Ibuka** from Sony thought about making a music player without the parts to record or play out loud. This idea became the **Sony Walkman**.
2. **Bill Bowerman** was cooking waffles and wondered what would happen if he put rubber in the waffle maker. This experiment helped create the special soles for **NIKE shoes**.
3. **Fred Smith** was a student who needed to send papers quickly. He couldn't find a fast mail service, so he made a plan for one. His teacher didn't like it much, but he didn't give up. His plan started **FedEx**.

The story says that asking simple or “silly” questions is good because it can lead to big changes and new things that help us in many ways.

Source:

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