



## Episode 5: “A Year of Questions”

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Rich: Welcome to 1 Insight. My name is Rich Litvin. I grew up in London and I now live in LA. This is a podcast for extraordinary top performers.

You see, I've coached some of the most successful and talented people on the planet. I see what most people cannot see and I dare to say what most people wouldn't dare to say. What I know about success is that on the other side of it, it can actually be lonely. You can feel like more of an imposter, the more successful you become. When you're the most interesting person in the room, you're actually in the wrong room. I coach around insight. Life looks one way, something happens, the world looks different and your entire world changes. It can happen in an instant. This podcast is called 1 Insight because a single insight can change everything.

You're about to hear me coach Niiamah. Niiamah is a man who loves complexity. He used to be an actuary and then he worked for one of the top consulting firms in the world and then he became a coach. Today we talk about thought leadership, which seems like something so far out there, so we break it down into its two parts. Thought and leadership. What does it mean to think? What are you thinking about? What does it mean to lead and how are you leading? We discover that becoming a thought leader is far less complex than he had imagined. It's probably far simpler than you imagined too. Enjoy.

Hi, Niiamah.

Niiamah: Hey there, Rich.

Rich: Thanks for saying yes to being here with me. What's going on? Where should we go today?

Niiamah: Yes, okay. What's coming through me right now is just this element of practice of being in the not knowing right here. There is a lot that's going on right now. In this current moment with Black Lives Matters. I'm showing up in different ways. I've been invited to be a resident coach as a part of a program. That's happening in an hour. Much has taken place that is beyond where I've been in the past. At least that's the story I'm telling myself. I like to go out and continue to grow forward from there, but I do have this element of... Just that preparation that's coming into mind and just trying to be with that. That's one thing that's going on.

Rich: Interesting, right. I said, what's going on and a lot is going on out in the world, in all sorts of ways. I was talking to my wife. We're exhausted right now, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. It's a lot. Monique took the kids out before for a play date in the park to be socially distant, but to play and one of the kids was a little bit nervous and getting cheeky with her, but she could tell, well, he's not really been out in the world meeting people and so it's suddenly strange to be back in the world meeting people again.

Niiamah: Yeah.

Rich: There is a lot going on.

Niiamah: It's interesting when you say that. I just feel really... I'm present with that. Yeah, there is a lot going on. There is a part of me that is seeing... I live in Singapore, they just opened up the doors again, so life is starting to happen again. You can come into restaurants, you can start to meet one another. Three months of not having that. I don't feel any real urgency to go out, back into the world at all. I feel like I'm on my direction. I feel like I'm working on my craft and I'm excited around those opportunities. It's very interesting, what's really taken place over the last few months.

Rich: Yeah. I hear you. Well, you said yes to being with me and you're here and sometimes coaches treat coaching in a way that I call remedial coaching. Tell me your problem. Let me help you solve it. Now we've solved it. Tell me your next problem. Let's solve that. There's a place for that, but it's not really where I like to play. I like to play in the place of vision, creativity. That's fun for me.

Niiamah: Yeah, that feels like a fun invitation. I can feel myself just smiling right now.

Rich: Nice. Well, I'll tell you what comes to me because I can see it behind me right now. That's a pile of books by clients of mine. I'm thinking a lot about thought leadership right

now. What that means to be a thought leader, to express and you have a big grin on your face right now. Why is this landing so much?

Niiamah: I think it's the conversation I really want to have. The conversation around thought leadership and really... There's questions in my mind around being a thought leader. Just questions in my mind, I say that very specifically because these are brain chatter. I feel that I'm already showing up in this way and I think the idea of really being able to get closer to what that vision is, how my thought leadership comes out in the world. There's a twinge of me that's like, I would love to never make a blog post ever. I'm already making the videos and such and I'm trying to see how do I bring my thought leadership into the conversations that I organize for my community-

Rich: Let me slow you down for a second. I think what's important is that we define what thought leadership is in the first place. I think one of the problems is that we think about our Malcolm Gladwell, Brene Brown, Seth Godin, particularly in our field, people like that who have... Esther Perel, millions of views of her Ted Talk, a podcast with hundreds of thousands of listeners. Tim Ferris, millions of listeners and then there's little old us and there's people over there. Let's define thought leadership for a moment.

There are two words. There's thought and there's leadership. Let's look at them. Number one is thought. What are you thinking about? What's on your mind? What do you think about when no one's listening? What do you think about? What you read about? What do you watch? There's your thinking. I'm holding off on answering that question yet, but I can see it as an answer bubbling inside.

Then there's leadership. Where do you take a lead? Where are you afraid to take a lead? Where would you like to take a lead? What does that mean? What does leadership mean for you? There's different ways of leading. You can lead from the front. You can be a noisy leader, a big leader and there are people like Tony Robbins who lead on a stage, larger than life. I'm a more of a quiet leader. I lead in a very different way. There's the thinking and there's the leading. What do you get when I separate those two words out?

Niiamah: One, I just feel myself relaxing. I felt myself just sit back in my seat right here because that was a scene. When you talked about thought. It's like, what am I thinking? I have a lot of thoughts and I'm constantly thinking, so there's an element of, oh, it can be that simple. There's something in my mind that just came out like, oh, it could be that simple. What if it was really just about my thoughts and separating the thoughts from the leadership, because I think it's in the leadership part that I get all wonky. My element of leadership, defining what leadership is for me, the thought part actually feels pretty... Okay, here's what's going through me. I'm willing to be open, transparent and vulnerable and visible with it, but the leadership part is where I'm like, well, what does that need to look like and what does that look like for me?

Do you mind if I share with you what I do know about leadership?

Rich: No. I would like to hear.

Niiamah: What I do know. The vision that I have of being a leader, really it's just, it's a leader who competes. That's my leadership. I'm really about having conversations that open up space and it's through the conversations that we have where the leadership takes place. I think that the part for me is like, that leader leading from the front, I actually can have a larger than life personality. It's not foreign to me to see like yes, being one of those big names at some point, it's on its path. It's on its way. The part for me that's really interesting is being a leader amongst others and choosing to be going down the path with them. It really comes back to being in that space of I don't know. The things that I'm thinking, I want to explore. I want to explore things that I don't know the answer to and we don't know the answer to.

You know I like complexity and so I like to take on the most complex problems that are out there. It's what gets me into social problems, that gets me into how are we operating as a world, as a society, how we bring that into our worlds. There's questions that I'm thinking about, that really say, yeah.

Rich: That's where I had gone. You are a man who loves complexity. You used to be an actuary and then you were a consultant at one of the top firms. Now you're a coach. You live in the place where most people are afraid to go in this world of complexity. What has struck me before you even said that is we think being a thought leader is about having the answers, but what if that wasn't your flavor of thought leadership? What if you were really good at, as you call it, convening and your only job as a thought leader was to create great questions?

Niiamah: There feels freedom in that. Let me really ask myself that question. As I ask, I feel a rising in my chest, a smile that comes to my face and all I have to do is come up with questions. We're good.

Rich: I get paid a lot of money to ask questions all day.

Niiamah: That's it. I think I get how that works in the one on one context and I'm starting to understand how that works in larger groups and such, but I think that the idea of I have this question on my mind, let's meet. Whether I'm coaching or facilitating, whatever needs to happen in that session, again, I'm versatile. Once the people come in the room, I know what needs to get done. I think that's what makes it my flavor. It's like I almost can't prepare the answer in advance, but if I can come up with the question and the question that's worth exploring, that to me feels really good. To me, I'm realizing that the future is created through our questions. That is my vehicle of creating the future. It's like, let's make sure that we're opening up possibilities through questions and then we get back into being able to create the future right now.

Yeah. The idea of having a session, that's just like, here's a question on my mind. I feel the smile on my face and I smile a lot, but I also smile when I'm nervous, so I'm just checking in as to where is that smile? It's not just excitement right now. There's an

edginess to it. There's a, can it really be done question to it? Which is an exciting question for me. Can I push the boundaries for myself and for others around me. It's just the question I'm going to ask here.

Rich: What do we see? You're in it right now asking questions. It's not about the answers. I'll give you a challenge. Here's my challenge for you. 365 days of questions. Once a day, share a question and that can be whether it's on your social media profile, whether it's to your small community, whether it's to a group of friends, whether it's in our community and for BC. Once a day share the most interesting question you have that day. We'll talk in 366 days and we'll see where you are.

Niiamah: Yeah, that's a date there. I love that because it's no pressure on any one question, any one day and I love volume. Yeah, I'm down for that. 365. I'm glad you didn't even say five days. Five days would not have gotten me up, but to do this for 365 days, I'm already seeing how that's coming to light. That practice and being in the questions... I think that's what I love about it. It's a practice of questions and where I will be in a year from now, the types of questions I'm asking that really excites me.

Rich: Yeah. You'll begin to notice things after a week, after a month and you'll look back and you'll scan that 30 questions in that first month and you'll go, oh, there's three themes here or they're just completely random. What if they weren't? You'll have questions about the questions, as time goes on. 365 days of questions feels really good. A year of questions. Great book title, by the way. A year of questions.

Niiamah: Yeah. Well, I'm writing it, starting with the first question I asked today. It just feels that the amount of alignment that's in there just feels really nice. It also just feels like, to create myself out in the world as the person who's going to ask the questions and then I can logically see where on day 14 it's like, this is a question that's on my mind. I want to answer it. I want to work with this with you. Come on in. It's consistent, but at the same time, just there's so much possibility in it. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. To not have to know, I think that's been one of the biggest things. To be able to just be in the not knowing and allow that to be my strength, as opposed to this thing that I'm frightened about, that I'm meditating on and I'm journaling on. What if it was just lighter? Hey, I don't know this. Let's use that as a beginning of something, as opposed to coming to me for the end of things.

Rich: Nice. If we were going to begin today, what's a question that comes to mind? Maybe a question that challenges you, rather than trying to worry about whether it will affect other people. What's the question that challenges you right now?

Niiamah: The question that challenges me right now. It's a "how" question. How do I bring coaching into the diversity and inclusion space? That's a question that's been on my mind-

Rich: Pause there. That's it. That's the question. Great question. We don't need to answer it. We're complete. You've got question one. See you 366 days and we'll talk.

Niiamah: Bravo. I'm feeling it. Thank you so much. Yeah, that feels good.

Rich: Thanks Niiamah.

Niiamah: Thank you Rich.

Rich: For most of human history it wasn't called coaching. It was called a leadership and it's what I love to do. To coach people, to lead people and to mess with people's thinking. If you'd like more of this or if you'd like to learn more about our community of extraordinary top performers, go to [richlitvin.com/1insight](http://richlitvin.com/1insight).