

The Daily Question Process

by Marshall Goldsmith

I would like to share a process that I use almost every day. It is incredibly practical and efficient! I find that it does a wonderful job of keeping what is most important to me 'in my head'. I am amazed at how well it works!

Every day I challenge myself by answering 32 questions that represent behavior that I know is important, but is often easy to neglect. There is nothing magical about '32'. Just use the number that works for you.

Each question is put on an Excel spreadsheet and is answered with a 'yes' (use a 1 on the spreadsheet) and 'no' (use a 0) or a number. This exercise moves very quickly!

In my case, I pay a person to call me every day. She just listens to me read my questions and provide my answers.

One person asked me, "Why do you pay someone to call you every day, just to listen to you read questions *that you wrote* and provide answers *that you wrote*. Don't you know the theory about how to change behavior?"

I replied, "I wrote the theory. That's why I pay someone to call me. I know how difficult this is to do on my own."

By way of example, I will share some of the questions that I use for myself. Please remember my questions reflect my values, and might not work for you.

I now begin with six 'active questions' that have been proven (in my research involving over 2,500 people) to lead to higher satisfaction with life. You will note that each question begins with, "Did I do my best to..."

Did I do my best to...:

1. Set clear goals?
2. Make progress toward goal achievement?
3. Be happy?
4. Find meaning?
5. Build positive relationships?
6. Be fully engaged?

The good thing about beginning these questions with "Did I do my best to..." is that it is almost impossible to blame someone else for my failure. No one can be responsible for "Did I do my best to..." but me!

In terms of the happiness question, my philosophy of life is simple: Be happy now. I have a great life—wonderful wife and kids, good health, don't have to work, love my job and don't have a boss. If I weren't happy today, someone screwed up—that would be me!

In spite of all my blessings, I can still sometimes get caught up in day-to-day stress, forget how lucky I am and act like an idiot. It helps to get a daily reminder of the importance of happiness and gratitude.

Another question that I ask myself is, “How many minutes did you spend writing?” This is harder for me. I am an extrovert who loves teaching, coaching and just being with people. It is sometimes hard for me to sit by myself and write.

Some of my questions are about health, such as “How many sit-ups did you do?” (This works. Today I did 120 sit-ups at once. Not bad for a 66-year-old guy!)

Disciplined follow-up is the key to the success of my teaching and coaching. One question is “With how many clients are you current on your follow-up?”

My relationship questions include, “Did you say or do something nice for your wife? Your son? Your daughter?” I am certainly not a perfect husband or dad, but this process helps me get better.

Why does this process work so well?

For one, it forces us to confront how we actually live our values every day. We either believe that something matters or we don't. If we believe it, we can put it on the list and do it! If we really don't want to do it, we can face reality and quit kidding ourselves.

Imagine a person was going to call you every day and listen to you answer questions about your life. What questions would you want to ask yourself, every day? In the past several months, I have had more than 100,000 participants in my training programs write their own questions. The results are very revealing and sometimes even profound.

Try it out. Write the questions that you should ask yourself every day. Even the process of writing questions will help you better understand your own values and how you live or don't live them on a daily basis. If you really have courage, have someone listen to your answers every day. You might be as amazed at the results as I have been!