

Questions That Make a Difference Every Day

by Marshall Goldsmith



Talent Management
Magazine

My colleague, Andrew Thorn, taught me this fascinating daily-questions process and tried it out on me. Since then, I have been using it with my good friend, Jim Moore, (former CLO of Sun Microsystems). Both Jim and I have been amazed at how well this works.

Every day Jim asks me the same 24 questions. Every day I ask Jim the same 17 questions. A key to the success of the process is that each person writes his or her own questions. Each one of our questions can be answered by “yes,” “no” or a number. This keeps the process moving quickly. We send each other weekly results from an Excel spreadsheet.

One rule: no negative feedback. No matter what the other person has done, we say nothing that might produce guilt. On the other hand, we make positive comments that reinforce success. Recently, I asked Jim how much he weighed. Since we began, he had lost 12 pounds. I said, “Great job!


That’s a new record!”

Jim and I live miles apart and both travel extensively. We are still able to connect by phone on about 80 percent of the days. When we miss a day or two, we simply catch up later.

For example, I will share some of the questions that I have written for Jim to ask me. Please remember my questions reflect my values, and might not work for you.

Jim’s first question for me is, “How happy were you today?” I answer on a one-to-10 scale with 10 being the highest score. I am a Buddhist. 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.



Jim then asks, “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. Yet writing is a critically important part of my life. Through my writing I have reached more than a million people that have never heard me speak. Writing is how I am communicating with you now.

Some of my questions are about health, such as “How many sit-ups did you do?” (This works. Today I did 370 sit-ups at once. Not bad for a 57-year-old guy!)

Disciplined follow-up is 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 is helping me get better.

Why does this process work so well?

For one, it forces Jim and I 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.

I asked my wife Lyda (also a psychologist) if she thought this process would work as well with a computer-generated list of questions instead of a friend. She said, “No, it is a lot easier to blow-off a computer than a friend.”

Imagine a friend of yours was going to call you every night and ask you questions about your life. What questions would you want this person to ask you? In the past several months, I have had more than 1,000 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 would want a friend to ask you 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, recruit a friend and start asking daily questions to each other. You might be as amazed at the results as I have been.

Goldsmith's *MOJO: How to Get It, How to Keep It, and How to Get It Back If You Lose It* is a *USA Today-Money* and *Wall Street Journal* best seller. *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* is the Harold Longman Award Business Book of the Year for 2007. All of his articles and videos online are complimentary at www.MarshallGoldsmithLibrary.com.