



# **52 Brilliant Questions**

**CREATED AND EDITED BY  
MICHAEL BUNGAY STANIER**

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## The Best Questions and Delightful Combinations

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There is a wonderful wine shop called Bossanova around the corner from where we live.

Ben—the founder—loves wine more than anyone I’ve ever met. It’s a constant joy to talk with him because he has all the wisdom of a highly trained sommelier and all the enthusiasm of a young kid. It’s brilliant.

I feel the same way about questions as Ben feels about wine. I’ve spent thirty years or more collecting the very best questions I know. Over that time, my enthusiasm for a well-asked, powerful question has only grown.

The first book I wrote—*Get Unstuck & Get Going*—used a unique format to generate more than a million question combinations.

The book I’m most famous for—*The Coaching Habit*—ended up with seven carefully curated questions. An early draft had 108. Cutting 101 questions was not easy.

Now, the *Do Something That Matters Journal* is its own carefully constructed question ecosystem and experience.

There are, in a rock’n’roll way, the “four on the floor”—four daily questions that provide a steady, daily backbeat and help ground you in presence, courage, momentum, and gratitude.

Then, there are more than fifty other questions for you to use at the start and end of a week. These questions will provoke and challenge you to go deep into, orient yourself toward, and reflect on the week’s progress and growth.

But, am I the only person in the world with great questions? Of *course* not!

As a bonus and supplement to the journal, I reached out to 52 friends and asked for their best questions. You’ll notice that I know, like, and admire all these people.

To make it more than just a list, I’ve curated the questions in pairs. I’ve combined them so that each question illuminates and deepens the power of its partner question.

It was a lot of fun finding the right combinations. I had Claude.ai help me, and we went through multiple options before finalizing what you’ll read here.

Thank you to all my brilliant contributors. There are links so that you can find them. I hope you'll check them out, sign up for a newsletter or two, or buy a copy of their books. You won't be disappointed.

Thank you for your encouragement and support.

You're awesome and you're doing great.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'MBS' in a cursive, stylized font.

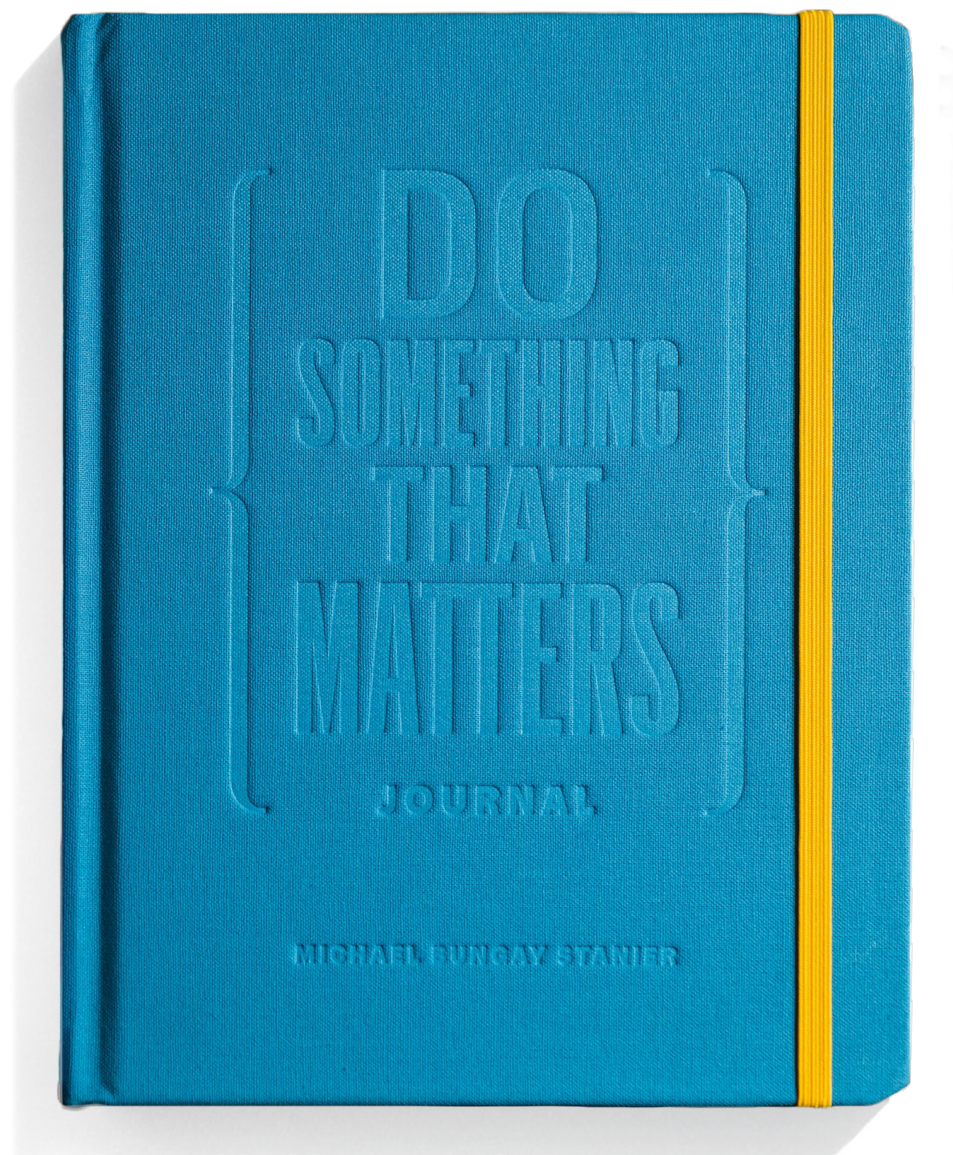
Michael Bungay Stanier

PS You're welcome to share this resource with anyone you think will appreciate the collection of questions. (I reckon that it's too good to keep to yourself.)

PPS There's a bonus question at the very end with its own very special look and feel.



Get Started. Keep Going.  
Do Something That Matters.  
With a Journal that Truly Works.



# DO SOMETHING THAT MATTERS JOURNAL



## Get Started. Keep Going.

There comes a time in your life when the pull to do something that matters overrides the fear, comfort, and inertia that's been holding you back.

Lots of people never break out of this cycle.

It's not easy.

There's always a reason why now isn't the time; why here isn't the place.

But, some people escape. Some crack on with it and start something that, for them, is thrilling, important, and daunting.

Perhaps that's you right here and now.

[You can find your own journal here.](#)



**52**  
**Brilliant**  
**Questions**

## What are you aware of—in your body and mind—when you slow down and pause at this threshold? ~ Eric Klein

This question is best used when someone (perhaps you) is at a threshold in their life; something new is beckoning but they're unhappily stuck. The question reframes this "stuckness" as an invitation to shift from struggle and self-judgment to loving curiosity. It honors the nature of stuckness as valuable and deserving of attention. This isn't a "hack" to secretly move things along. Rushing produces more stuckness later on.

### Why I admire Eric

Eric is one of my very best friends. He has the heart of a spiritual teacher (which he is), the mind of a top business consultant (which he also is), the perspective of an artist (ditto), and the humor of a kind and generous man (again, ditto).

His website is [WisdomHeart.com](http://WisdomHeart.com)

## Why do you do this every day? ~ Chris Guillebeau

For many years, I've thought about this question as I go about my work. Life largely consists of repeating tasks. Why am I doing them? What's the point?

And, by saying "yes" to these tasks, what am I saying "no" to?

When you ask and answer this question, you don't need to make any other big changes in your life. Sometimes, you simply end up doing things differently once you focus your attention on it.

### Why I admire Chris

Chris has been creating to the beat of his own drum for decades. His adventures include founding the World Domination Summit, visiting every country in the world, and hosting the daily Side Hustle School podcast. He's also the author of many books, including *Time Anxiety* and *The Money Tree*.

His website is [ChrisGuillebeau.com](http://ChrisGuillebeau.com)

Combine with **Eric** and **Chris's** questions to surface your **habits** and **patterns** and see them with fresh eyes.



## Who do I choose to be? ~ Dr Susan David

This is the ultimate litmus test for any action. Even in the face of extreme challenges, who do I choose to be?

Life presents us with this question over and over again. It's a gift, really—this opportunity that renews itself. It's a chance to redefine ourselves with each new hurdle. After all, our growth doesn't come through denying or suppressing difficult emotions. It comes through engaging with those emotions, learning from them, and using them as a source of inspiration in our lives.

Emotional agility is the application of all our wisdom, compassion, and courage in the moments that test us most.

### Why I admire Susan

Susan is a Harvard Medical School psychologist and author of *Emotional Agility*. This wise book helps people bring forth their best selves in both good and bad times. She's also a transplant to the Northern Hemisphere - I'm from Australia; she's from South Africa - and I love her humor and her edge.

Her website is [SusanDavid.com](http://SusanDavid.com)

## Who are you when you have nothing to offer or give anyone? ~ Luvvie Ajayi Jones

This question is critical because we are often defined (and define ourselves) in terms of what we do, our credentials, and our accomplishments. Then, one day, we look up and realize that we've lost sight of the actual individual behind the titles. In an increasingly shallow world, this type of clarity and vulnerability can heal.

### Why I admire Luvvie

Luvvie brings fire to all she does. Her first book—*Professional Troublemaker*—is in the spirit of John Lewis' concept of "good trouble." Luvvie is a role model with fierce courage, humor, and a determination to make things better.

Her website is: [Luvvie.org](http://Luvvie.org)

Combine **Susan's** and **Luvvie's** questions to strip away layers in your quest for **wisdom, self-knowledge**, and **generous self-acceptance**.

## What would this look like if it was easy? ~ Chris Ducker

When faced with challenges, we often overcomplicate things due to stress, fear, or over-analysis. This question encourages you to cut through that complexity and identify the simplest, most efficient path forward. It's about streamlining your approach and focusing on high-impact actions. This leads to faster progress with less frustration.

### Why I admire Chris

Chris always gives more energy than he takes, and that's delightful. When we talk, I'm always struck by this combination of possibility and vulnerability—a rare combination. Chris is the author of the inspiring book *Virtual Freedom and Rise of the Youpreneur*.

His website is: [ChrisDucker.com](http://ChrisDucker.com)

## Is it worth being rejected for what you want to say or do?

### ~ Prof Todd Kashdan

This question encapsulates the essence of courage and individuality. It asks you to weigh what truly matters against the potential consequences of the kind of pushback that might lead to negative evaluations, unwanted feelings and thoughts, and even ostracism.

Everything in life is a tradeoff, and we must ask ourselves questions like this: “What do I want to do with my short time on this planet?” And, “Do I have a social support system that allows me to withstand some dislikes?” If there is no risk of rejection, then there is really no opportunity for courageous action.

You should be putting yourself in positions where rejection is possible. And, if you have deep convictions, then you should be taking occasional risks—risks that lead to some rejection.

### Why I admire Todd

Todd combines an academic's rigor and a great communicator's accessibility when he writes about well-being, curiosity, resilience, and purpose. He is a professor of psychology and founder of the Well-Being Laboratory at George Mason University. Todd's most recent book is *The Art of Insubordination: How to Dissent and Defy Effectively*.

His website is: [ToddKashdan.substack.com](http://ToddKashdan.substack.com)

Combine **Chris'** and **Todd's** questions to make it easier to be **courageous** and **resourceful**.

## What am I pretending not to know? ~ Dr Tasha Eurich

This question is a powerful self-reflection tool because it pushes us to face the truths we're dodging or downplaying. It does so in, at least, three ways:

First, it helps uncover the priorities we've been avoiding—the important, but inconvenient, tasks or values that actually matter.

Second, it cuts through the noise when we're being pulled in different directions. This is because deep down, we usually know what is most important to us.

Third, it tackles procrastination (something I know too well!). Often, what we're pretending not to know are the uncomfortable things we've been putting off. Although painful, these things are also often painfully necessary.

### Why I admire Tasha

Tasha is an expert on self-awareness. She's written several great books and has a much-viewed TEDx talk. I'm really looking forward to her upcoming book *Shatterproof*, which promises to shift the conversation about resilience to the next level.

Her website is: [TashaEurich.com](http://TashaEurich.com)

## What guidance would you offer a friend who's dealing with the same challenge? ~ Leanne Hughes

When I'm stuck, asking myself this question clears the mental clutter fast. It's so easy to get caught up in self-doubt and overthink things when we face challenges.

But, when we flip the spotlight onto someone else, we naturally become more generous, less critical, and more solution-oriented.

It's a friendly (pun intended) reframe, one that helps us get moving without all the second-guessing.

### Why I admire Leanne

Leanne brings speed, color, and smarts to everything she does. She is a brilliant and generous facilitator. And, when I'm in a room with her, I always feel brighter and braver. She's the author of *The 2-Hour Workshop Blueprint*.

Her website is: [LeanneHughes.com](http://LeanneHughes.com)

Combine **Tasha's** and **Leanne's** questions to increase the **fierceness** and **kindness** you bring to your self-reflection.

## Which opportunity could this emotion of \_\_\_\_\_ be signaling to me? ~ Cassandra Worthy

Get quiet. Shift your focus within. Identify the emotion(s) present.

Which is most dominant? Name it. Then ask the question above with the relevant emotion filling the blank.

Our emotions are an infinite well of data—data that serves as both signals and guideposts. Often, difficult emotions like fear, frustration, and anger signal our greatest opportunities for learning and growth. Become more in tune with your emotional energy, and you'll grow more in tune with your inherent life force. Even in your darkest times, you'll be able to maximize your personal evolution.

### Why I admire Cassandra

In a world of change, Cassandra is a spark of light and a surge of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm!—what a gift for the world. Her most recent book is *Change Enthusiasm*.

Her website is: [CassandraWorthy.com](http://CassandraWorthy.com)

## What do you want to avoid in your life? ~ Ayse Birsel

Decide what you want to avoid in your life. This allows you to make space, time, and resources available for more things you want—things that bring you joy, whether it's habits, objects, or people.

This is even more urgent when you realize that you've got a long life ahead of you. Those who live the best and are happiest when they're older have mastered this discipline. They have no time and energy to waste on toxic friendships, suffering fools gladly, losing their identities in a relationship, ruminating endlessly, and engaging in negative self-talk (to name just a few). It's no wonder that people who live longer seem to be wiser. We can all learn to avoid negative things, and the sooner, the better.

### Why I admire Ayse

Ayse (Eye-shay) is known to some as the "Design Evangelista," and has broadened her focus from product design to life design. As I get older, I particularly admire *Design the Long Life You Love*. This book combines provocation and plans to help people live their best life for as long as possible.

Her website is: [AyseBirsel.com](http://AyseBirsel.com)

Combine **Cassandra's** and **Ayse's** questions to get clear about what you need to **step toward**, what you should **commit to**, and what to **turn away** from, put **down**, or **abandon**.



## If you were to look at yourself with a loving gaze, what would shift? ~ Danielle LaPorte

Possible answer: Everything.

I think that this is the work of our lifetimes: To adjust our perspectives on what's "right" and "wrong" within ourselves, which then helps dissolve outer polarities.

This question melts limiting stories. It makes way for forgiveness, relaxation, and the kinds of revelations that pour from the heart's intelligence. It's only a loving gaze that can see the Truth.

### Why I admire Danielle

Over the twenty years I've known Danielle, she's moved ever closer to the truth of her own message: Tap into the full intelligence of the heart. She's what it looks like when you find the essence of your message for the world (this is one reason why she hangs out with Oprah).

Her website is: [DanielleLaPorte.com](http://DanielleLaPorte.com)

## What am I making this mean? ~ Eric Zimmer

Anais Nin said, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

We are almost wholly incapable of just allowing something to happen without attaching meaning to it. Why did it happen? How did it happen? What does it mean for me? Who is to blame? It should or shouldn't have happened—the list goes on and on.

If we can't turn off the meaning-making machine, then what can we do?

We can earnestly ask, "What am I making this mean? And, what else could it mean?" This helps us see the meaning-making process happen. It also allows us to construct other meanings that might help us live better.

I've often joked that if we are truly making it all up, why not tell ourselves helpful stories?

### Why I admire Eric

Eric has one of the best podcasts around. The One You Feed constantly and generously probes the ambiguities and messiness of life. Eric has an elder's energy and a hard-won gift of side-stepping the glib and easy.

His website is: [OneYouFeed.net](http://OneYouFeed.net)

Combine **Danielle's** and **Eric's** questions to start **freeing yourself** from the **limiting stories** you hear and tell yourself.

# What would you do if you had all the money in the world? What would you do if you had no money in this world? ~ Mike Michalowicz

These questions must be asked in concert. They are powerful because they invite deep reflections on our true desires and motivations.

The first question allows individuals to dream without constraints, which reveals their passions and aspirations. The counter question challenges them to consider what truly matters when financial limitations are stripped away. If the answers to both questions align, then that indicates a profound connection to one's inner desires and potential sources of income.

I asked myself these exact two questions, and both came back as "I would be an author." And, guess what, that is my reality: Fulfillment and financial independence.

## Why I admire Mike

Mike is first and foremost a mensch. He's constantly in service to people—not just the entrepreneurs whose businesses he helps simplify but everyone he meets. He is relentlessly generous. Mike is the author of a range of books, including *Profit First*.

His website is: [MikeMichalowicz.com](http://MikeMichalowicz.com)

## What will you do for sheer enjoyment today?

### ~ Octavia Goredema

This question is important to me because I often get a puzzled reaction when I first pose it to people. We tend to focus on the things we need to do and how to stay on top of never-ending to-do lists. But, life is short.

When I repeat the question, I often see the person's eyes light up as they think of the answer. No matter how busy things get, be sure to make fun happen.

## Why I admire Octavia

Octavia has reinvented herself at least three times since I've known her. She's currently building a tech platform to help people capture their wins at work. Brilliant. Octavia is the author of *Prep, Push, Pivot: Essential Career Strategies for Underrepresented Women*.

Her website is: [OctaviaGoredema.com](http://OctaviaGoredema.com)

Combine **Mike's** and **Octavia's** questions to move beyond **capitalist transactions** and get closer to what you **truly want**.

## A year from now, which decision will you most regret NOT making? ~ Dr Marcia Reynolds

When I coach, people are often stuck in their 'should' and fears in the moment. When I transport them to the future, they quickly come to know what they will most regret not doing. It's like the old exercise: On your deathbed, what will you say you are sorry you didn't do? Standing in the future gives us a better perspective on our choices in the murky present.

### Why I admire Marcia

Marcia is one of coaching's OGs. There is a nuance and mastery in her work that I aspire to. All of her five books are terrific, but, if I was backed into a corner and forced to pick, I'd probably point to *Coach the Person, Not the Problem*.

Her website is: [Covisioning.com](http://Covisioning.com)

## When was the last time you did something that made you lose time in the best of ways? ~ Jonathan Fields

We all have access to a state beyond emotion, one that is utterly absorbing and transcendent. It brings a myriad of benefits and unlocks incredible levels of insight, creativity, and productivity. Plus, it just feels amazing.

This well-researched state is often described as being in "flow," and one of its hallmarks is losing time. An hour might feel like ten minutes. A day might feel like an hour. Losing time can be a powerful signal. It helps us identify activities that might deliver us into flow and spend more time doing so.

### Why I admire Jonathan

Jonathan is a relentless creator and has launched a bunch of brilliant projects. These include a summer camp for adults, the hugely popular Good Life Project podcast, and, most recently, the Sparktype personality assessment. One of Jonathan's most impactful books is *How to Live a Good Life*.

His websites are: [goodlifeproject.com](http://goodlifeproject.com) and [sparketype.com](http://sparketype.com)

Combine **Marcia's** and **Jonathan's** questions to keep the most important things **central** to the **life you live**.

## What are some recent examples of interactions you'd like more of (with both yourself and others)?

~ Haesun Moon, PhD

This question contains three important assumptions about a client's resources. First, they have a good idea about (and reason for) their preferred future. Second, they have already experienced that future in some ways. Third, their reflection on existing progress will remind them of their resources.

Coaching is about curating one's sense of purpose, possibilities, and progress. This question invites people to look at both their preferred futures and their existing progress. They then co-author yet another life story, one that they might not have accessed before.

### Why I admire Haesun

Haesun is the author of a truly elegant book, *Coaching A to Z: The Extraordinary Use of Ordinary Words*. She also has a modesty, preciseness, and lightness to how she shows up in the world.

Her website is: [CoachingAtoZ.com](http://CoachingAtoZ.com)

## What experience would I like other people to have after spending time with me? ~ Todd Herman

This question is important because I would often place myself at the center of all my thoughts. "What do I want?" "What do I want in a wife?" etc. But, this question forced me to think about how other people will feel after our interactions, in our relationships, or during a conversation. It's helped me crystallize my behavior into something more useful and meaningful to others.

Essentially, it's helped me get out of my own way.

### Why I admire Todd

Todd is the secret to a lot of other people's success. He is brilliant at helping ambitious people get out of their own way so they can go further. He's also one of the champions for democratizing coaching and making it more accessible to more people. I recommend his book *The Alter Ego Effect*.

His website is: [ToddHerman.me](http://ToddHerman.me)

Combine **Haesun's** and **Todd's** questions to better understand the impacts you seek to **experience** and **deliver** in the world.

## What did you love most about being alive? ○

~ Britt Wray, PhD

Imagine yourself suddenly being sucked upward by an unknown force. You ascend until you're floating above the space where you currently are, then you're floating above your neighborhood, your country, your continent, until you're no longer on the planet and are just hanging out in the darkness of the cosmos. You're not dead or anything. You're just transmuted to outer space for a while, and you're thinking about your time back on Earth. What did you love most about being alive?

I love this question, which requires the above setup. It creates some fertile distance between people's daily experiences of the world and their feelings about those experiences. Their answers often reconnect them to a sense of enchantment around aspects of their life that otherwise go relatively unsung. Through a kind of alien observation, the process of explicitly naming what you love can strengthen gratitude and connection to core values and a sense of well-being.

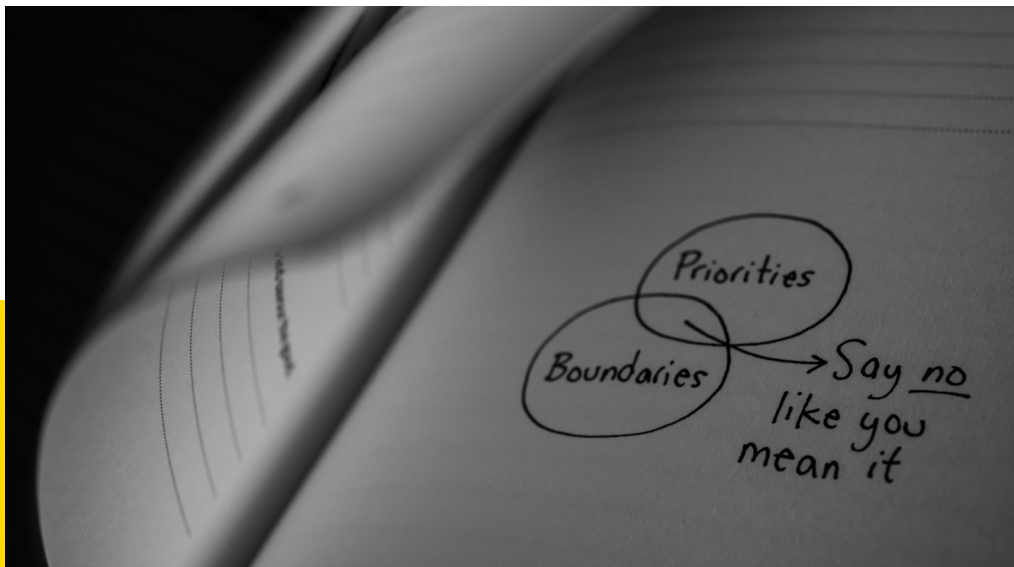
I often follow up this question with another: "What broke your heart about the world?" It's fascinating to see how people's biggest loves and biggest hurts are often deeply intertwined. Awareness of this interconnection can bring out meaningful and courageous efforts to protect what they care about most.

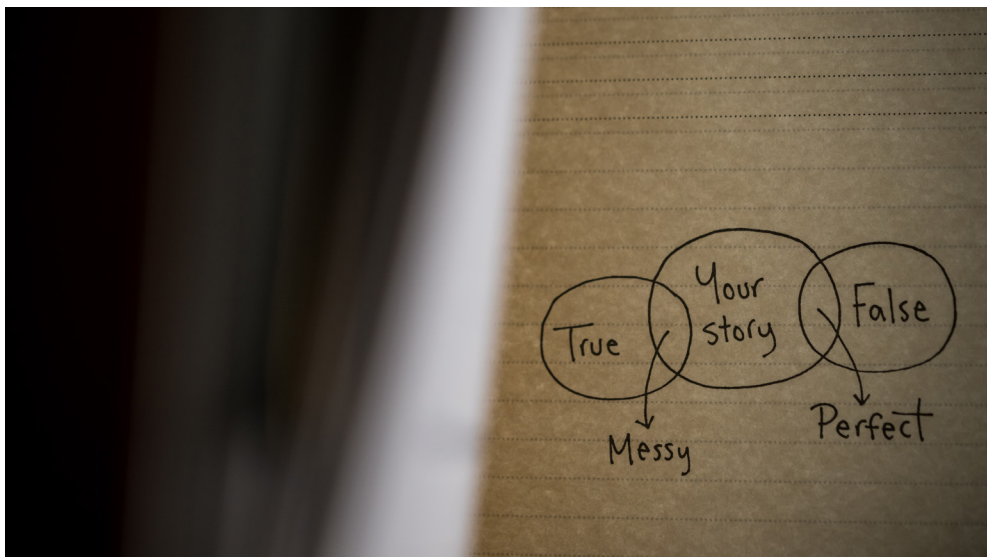
These questions are adapted from an exercise called "Open Sentences," which was created by Buddhist scholar and active hope activist Joanna Macy.

### Why I admire Britt

Britt is a champion for staying both urgent and sane during the climate crisis. She weaves together her gifts for questions, stories, and understanding science to present just the right blend of concern and optimism. Britt is a lighthouse during tough times.

Her website is: [BrittWray.com](http://BrittWray.com)





**What are you doing when you feel the most alive—  
like you're lost in your thoughts, time flies by, you barely  
notice, and you wish the moment would never end?**

**~ Modupe Akinola**

This question offers insight into the elements that are critical for us to incorporate into our work and personal lives. It captures when you are in your groove, feel joy, and are likely operating in your purpose.

Once you have clarity on the answer to this question, the next question to ask is, “Am I being courageous enough to make sure I experience this regularly at work and at home?” If not, then it may be time to reassess and reconfigure your journey.

### **Why I admire Modupe**

Modupe is the wise host of TED Business and an organizational psychologist at Columbia Business School. She brings academic depth, organizational acuity, and a commitment to the human. Her work focuses on how stress influences employee success and diversity.

Her website is: [ModupeAkinola.com](http://ModupeAkinola.com)

Combine **Britt's** and **Modupe's** questions to hone in on what's **truly worth** the minutes of your one and only **precious life**.



## What would it look like to do this with love? ○

~ Stephanie Harrison

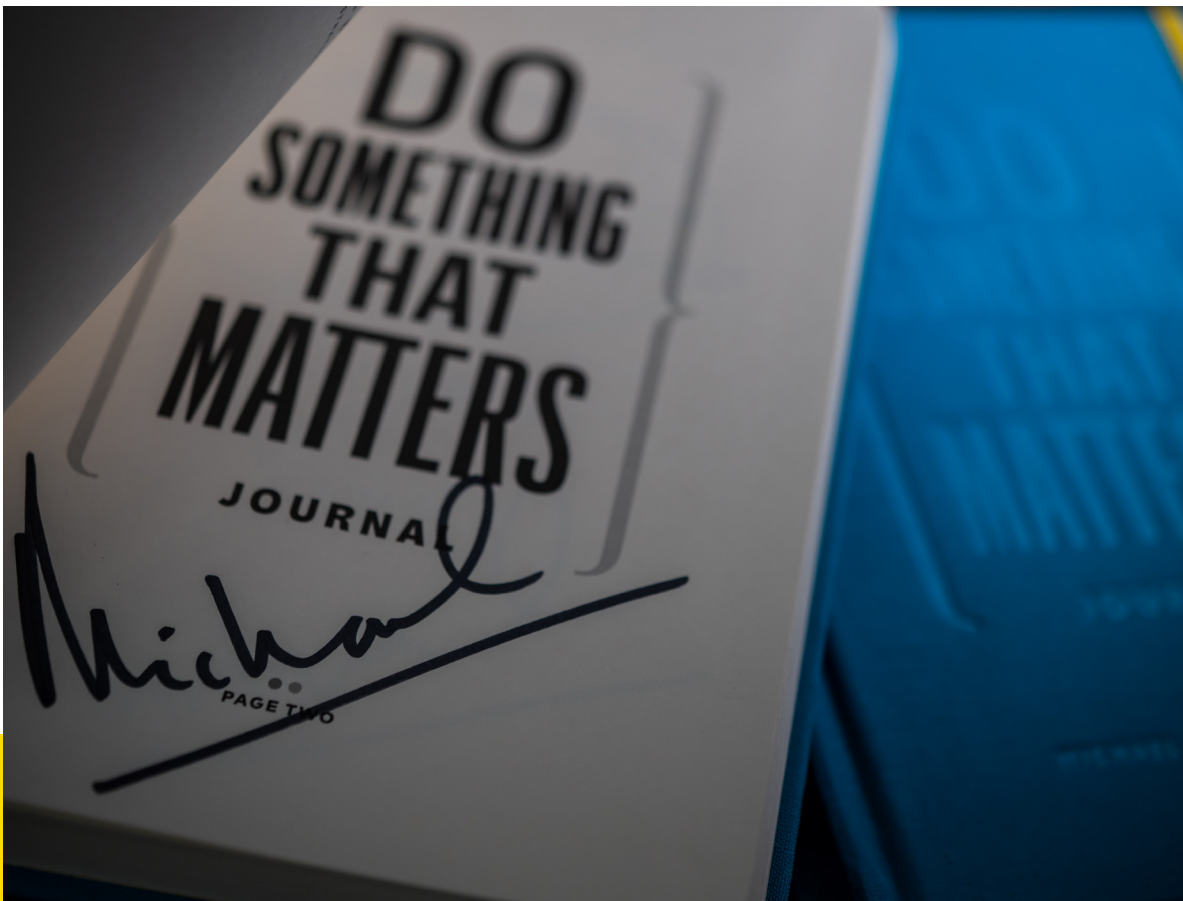
I find it so easy to forget the following truth: When we do things with love, they can bring profound joy to both ourselves and others.

This question helps me reconsider how I'm approaching a task, conversation, or experience. It's a gentle invitation, one that can transform my daily experiences.

### Why I admire Stephie

Stephanie is on a quest to reset how we understand and pursue happiness. She is brilliant at describing the world and our feelings in color and geometric shapes. This genius is evident in her newsletter and her book *The New Happy*.

Her website is: [TheNewHappy.com](http://TheNewHappy.com)



# In [this situation] is being right better than being good?

~ Dr Shannon Minifie

Last summer I read Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State*—a harrowing depiction of a woman who is kidnapped and held captive in Haiti for almost two weeks. The woman's father is a prominent Haitian businessman but is too proud to negotiate a ransom with her captors—an act that would have significantly curbed her torture.

After the novel's protagonist has been rescued and spent some time away from her family, she reunites with her father in what she hopes will be a chance to convey the immensity of the suffering she experienced due to his righteousness. Yet, she has a change of heart just as she is going to share the hardest truths about her captivity and the trauma she has since endured:

"I looked at my father, the man who had been the uncompromising measure of all things in my life for so long. There was still some good in me. He did not need to know the truth for me to feel more alive."

And so, she doesn't share what she came to share.

Later, her husband guesses that she's changed her mind about telling the truth and forgiven the father. She then says, "I didn't forgive my father. I lied because that lie cost me less than the truth would have cost him."

A related question to this could be, "Is it better to be truthful or kind?"

## Why I admire Shannon

Shannon is the CEO of Box of Crayons—a company I founded to champion the ideas in my book *The Coaching Habit*. I hired from behind the bar of my local pizzeria (it's a long story), and it's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Her website is: [BoxOfCrayons.com](http://BoxOfCrayons.com)

Combine **Stephanie's** and **Shannon's** questions to help **soften** your heart in **difficult** moments.



## Ten years from now, what will you regret if you don't do it or learn it now? ~ Chip Conley

Anticipated regret is a form of wisdom, one that can be a catalyst for taking action. I moved to Baja, Mexico at age 56 to create the world's first midlife wisdom school, MEA. I asked this question and realized that at 66 I would regret not learning Spanish or how to surf. Although my fixed mindset about my age got in my way ("I'm too old to learn a foreign language or how to surf"), this question opened up the possibility of growing and learning.

There's a question you can ask before this one, which can serve as a great preparation: "What have I done or what do I know now that I wish I'd learned or done ten years ago?"

### Why I admire Chip

I'm at the age where I'm figuring out what my "second mountain" might be. Chip is one of my guides. He's also the author of *Learning to Love Midlife* and the founder of the Modern Elder Academy, which has campuses in Baja and Santa Fe.

His website is: [ModernElderAcademy.com](http://ModernElderAcademy.com)

## What advice would you give your current self, when you are twenty years older? ~ Will Storr

I like this question because it focuses us on the wisdom we already have inside us. I believe that we mostly know what's up with us and where we need to push ourselves. But, we're excellent at delay, distraction, and denial. Imagining an older you giving your current self advice that cuts through some of that obfuscation.

### Why I admire Will

Will is one of the savviest commentators talking about how we show up in the world. His books *Selfie* and *Status* are both classics—not just because they're wise but because Will is an outstanding teacher and storyteller.

His website is: [TheScienceOfStorytelling.com](http://TheScienceOfStorytelling.com)

Combine **Chip's** and **Will's** questions to help **bend time**.

## What would you do if you knew you could not fail? ○

~ Sarah Lewis

I saw this question on a little metal paperweight when I was a freshman in college. I bought it and then lost it during one of the many moves in my life. But, I still think of this question nearly every week. It's a question that lets you address how resistance and doubt might be holding you back from your dreams.

It's a question that lets you stay 'blue sky' in your thinking about life.

### Why I admire Sarah

When I heard Sarah talking on Brené's podcast about her book—*The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery*—I knew that I wanted to know her. And, I'm delighted that I reached out to say "hello." She's a professor at Harvard University and a wise commentator on what it means to create a just world.

Her website is: [SarahElizabethLewis.com](http://SarahElizabethLewis.com)

## Who is the first person that comes to mind when you hear the word "successful?" Why? ~ Jayson Gaignard

Carl Jung famously said that "until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate." For many of us, especially early in our careers, it's easy to adopt a model of success that isn't really ours. It's the usual things: money, status, fame, and the like.

I've come to recognize that those who live 'happy and content' lives often have a refined, nuanced, and deeply personal definition of success. Constantly seeking and refining your own definition of success does not only mean you end up pursuing goals that will make you happier. It also means that you'll better enjoy the journey along the way.

### Why I admire Jayson

Jayson is head curator at MMT—a delightful group for entrepreneurs that I'm privileged to be part of. It's a community of generous people looking to do good and live good lives. This has a lot to do with Jayson's ability to encourage people to be generous and bring their best.

His website is: [JaysonGaignard.com](http://JaysonGaignard.com)

○ Combine **Sarah's** and **Jayson's** questions to **disrupt** your usual thinking about **success**.

## What will you commit to say “no” to? ~ Jessica Abel

This is one of my favorite questions to ask. I ask it constantly, and it takes a myriad of forms (just yesterday, it was “What will you suck at this week?”).

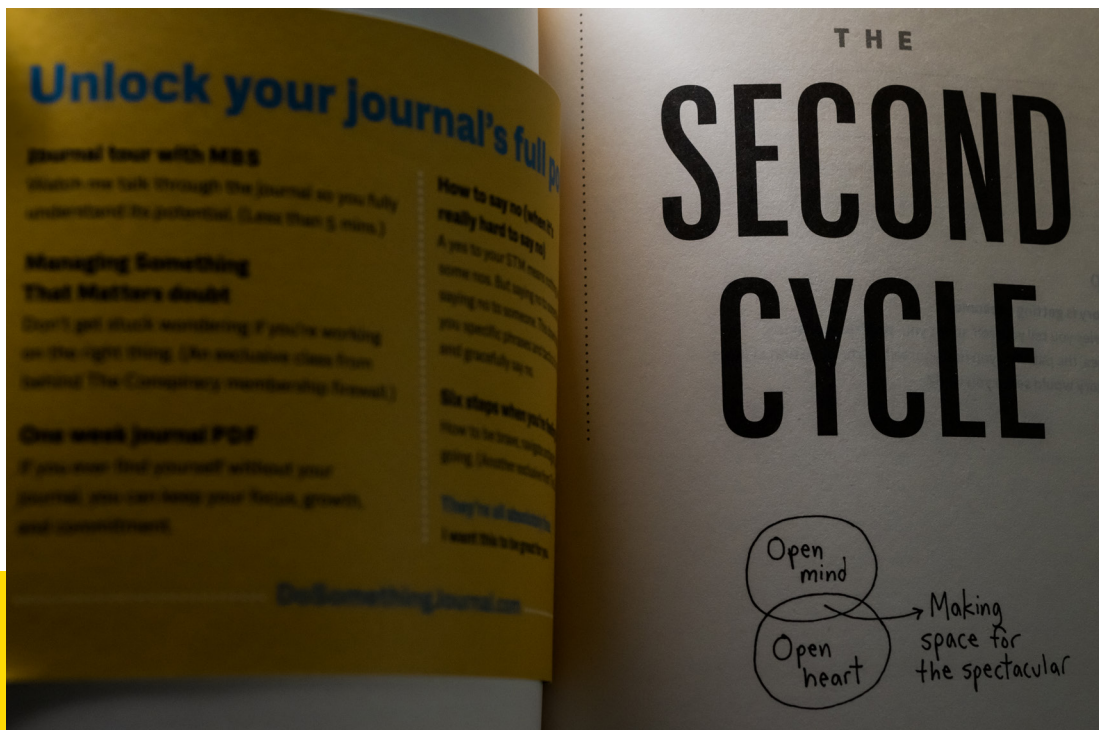
This question is often my go-to because helping my community spend more time on the things that really matter to them necessarily entails stopping a lot of other things! For all kinds of reasons (both internal and external), our default state tends to be massively overcommitted, stressed out, and borderline burned out. And, in the face of that, we’re simply not equipped with the kind of robust decision-making tools we need to confidently sort out what’s really important and should stay versus what needs to go.

That’s what I help with. But, even with the strategy I teach, committing to ‘No’ is one of the hardest things I ask of people. There is, however, nothing more powerful than realizing that you can say “no.” You realize your time and attention really do belong to you. It’s transformational.

### Why I admire Jessica

I discovered Jessica through her book *Out on the Wire*, which is about radio and podcast storytelling. I’ve come to admire her because of her commitment to helping creative people finish their work (which is hard) and get well paid for it (which is even harder).

Her website is: [JessicaAbel.com](http://JessicaAbel.com)



## When did you last say “yes” to something even though you wanted to say “no?” ~ Monika Jiang

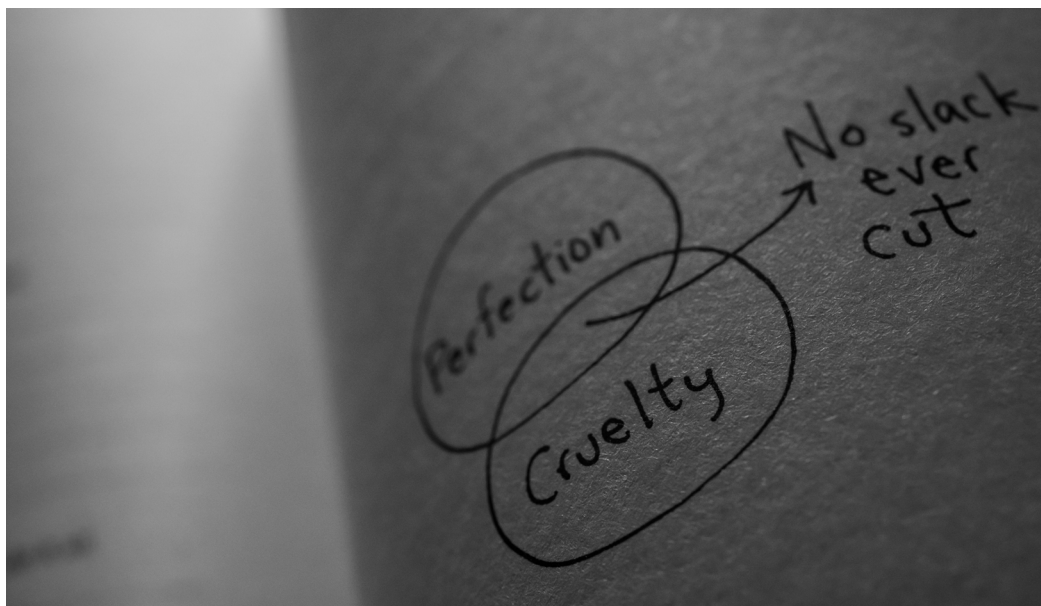
This question is important to me because it’s something I want to become more aware of. I want to shift my inner fear of being confronted with consequences (my no-saying) and become more comfortable and confident with who I am and how I am.

To me, this goes beyond the ‘people-pleasing’ aspect. It’s a deeper sense of validating and reassuring my self-worth (and self-love) by making all responsibilities mine and, with those, all positive and negative effects. In my surroundings, and especially with female friends, I see the need to become a better no-sayer. This involves both standing one’s ground and standing by one’s principles and the essence of who one is.

### Why I admire Monika

I first met Monika when she curated at one of my favorite conferences: The House of Beautiful Business. Now, her focus now is on loneliness—helping us notice it and navigate it. Monika helps make more feelings known, more faces seen, and more voices heard.

Her website is: [MonikaJiang.com](http://MonikaJiang.com)



Combine **Jessica’s** and **Monica’s** questions to build **capacity** and **nuance** around holding boundaries.

## What would be fun? ~ Bree Groff

We're often tempted to do what will deliver acceptable results. But, we are built for so much more than "acceptable!" Rather than asking what work, process, or strategy will satisfy some objective, it is better to ask, "What will be fun?" or "What will fill me with the energy of an eight-year-old with a new LEGO set?"

That's the work you'll do brilliantly.

### Why I admire Bree

Bree brings a delightful blend of hard-headed practicality and whimsy to the work she does. I imagine that this has been shaped by her successful career at a supercool design firm. I'm very excited about her new book *Today Was Fun: A Book About Work (Seriously)*.

Her website is: [BreeGroff.com](http://BreeGroff.com)

**Of all the items on my to-do list today, which will have the most meaningful impact on my personal or professional life? And, which one will I commit to doing first, before anything else? ~ Hal Elrod**

Human nature makes us gravitate toward tasks that are easiest or have the least risk. This usually keeps us busy, but it prevents us from making meaningful progress toward outcomes that matter most.

By taking a few minutes to thoughtfully consider and evaluate which task will make the most significant impact in your life, you move from being busy to being truly productive. Asking yourself this question each day will enable you to make meaningful progress toward the outcomes that matter most to you. (It's a good idea to ask it each night when preparing for the next day or first thing in the morning when preparing for the day ahead.)

### Why I admire Hal

It's not just that Hal's book—*The Miracle Morning*—has sold over three million copies. It's that he remains deeply dedicated to helping people start their day in a way that sets them up for a life well lived.

His website is: [MiracleMorning.com](http://MiracleMorning.com)

Combine **Bree's** and **Hal's** questions to illuminate the 'dance' between **self-expression** and **self-development**.

## What are you tolerating? ~ Rich Litvin

Ouch, right?

This is a penetrating question. It points to the hidden energy drains in your life—the habits, goals, and even people silently eroding your potential.

### Why I admire Rich

I talk about bringing “fierce love” to the people I coach. More than anyone I know, Rich embodies this in his work. We might call him “the coach’s coach.” Rich notably co-authored *The Prosperous Coach*—the second-best-selling coaching book this century. (Yes, Rich knows that *The Coaching Habit* is the best-selling one 😊.)

His website is: [RichLitvin.com](http://RichLitvin.com)

## What should I know about you as a person to give you the best care possible? ~ Dr Kathryn Mannix

I love this question because it makes no assumptions at all. It gives the power and control to the patient, it is genuinely curious, and it shifts the unspoken, but hard to ignore, power imbalance in medical consultations.

This beautiful question can open a conversation, one that is like entering the lobby of a big house: The first question and its answer opens the door to the lobby. Behind it are all the other doors. Each is opened by a curious question. These are questions that allow a real exploration of someone’s life, experience, values, and wishes.

This question was originally devised by Prof Harvey Max Chochinov—a distinguished Canadian scholar and pioneer of dignity therapy in palliative care.

### Why I admire Kathryn

Over a forty-year medical career, Kathryn has championed bringing cognitive behavioral therapy to palliative care in the UK. Her book—*The End in Mind*—stories of how dying people and those surrounding them find some peace in death. It is an extraordinary read.

Her website is: [KathrynMannix.com](http://KathrynMannix.com)

Combine **Rich’s** and **Kathryn’s** questions to understand what fills you with **energy** versus what **drains** you.



## What's one thing you've been thinking about lately? ○

~ Neil Pasricha

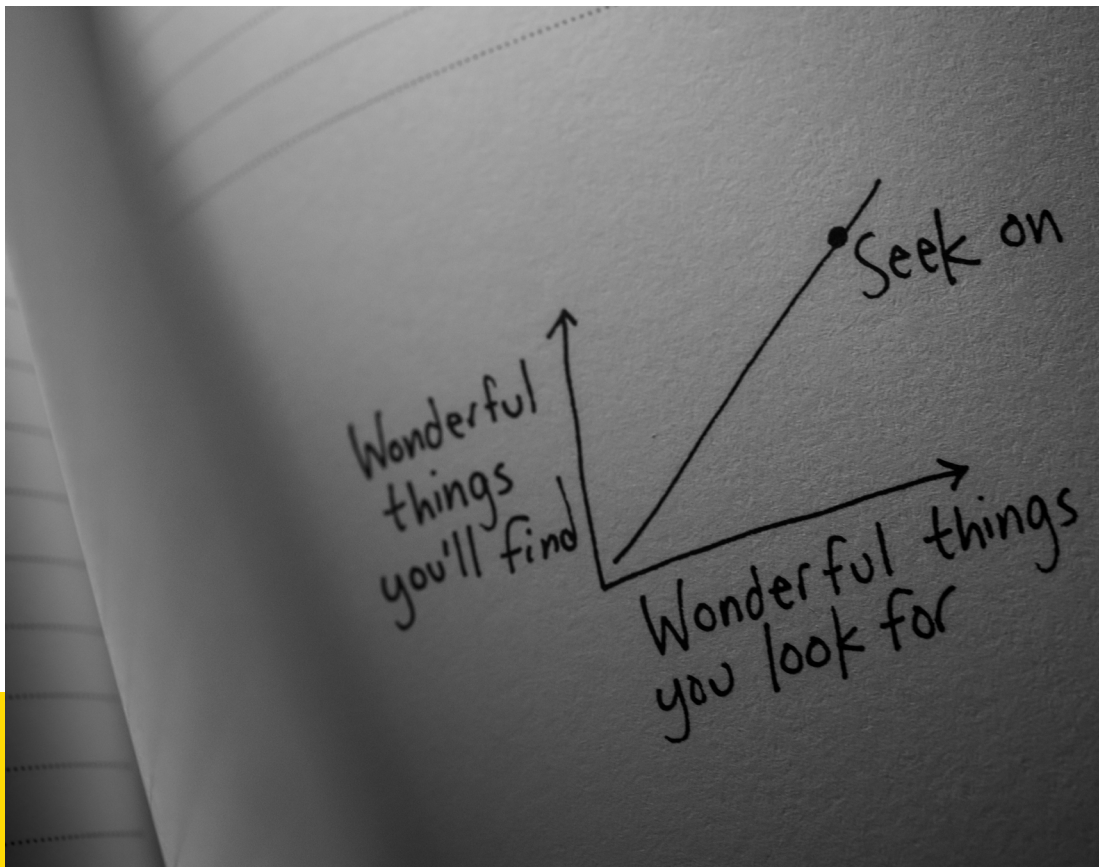
This is my “big party full of many little chats” question. I use it in place of both “How are you?” and the dreaded “What do you do?” I think that “How are you?” has faded into ambiguous chitter while “What do you do?” has ‘gone performative.’

“What's one thing you've been thinking about lately?” is just different enough to force a pause and a potentially introspective reply. It allows for a deeper connection while (importantly) avoiding being so weird that it kills the conversation.

### Why I admire Neil

Neil and I flaneur together—we take long walks around Toronto—and it's always delightful. He has a quicksilver mind, thinks hard about how to live a happy and intentional life, and practices what he preaches.

His website is [Neil.blog](http://Neil.blog)



**Imagine yourself many years in the future.**

**It's the last day of your life and you're looking back at the things you created, developed, nurtured, and contributed.**

**What would you like to see? ~ Pamela Slim**

Your body of work is everything you create, contribute, affect, and impact over the course of your life. Imagine zooming forward in your mind to the last day of your life and then looking back on your desired body of work. When you do so, you might see things that you have not done yet, such as writing your great novel, finally moving to the South of France, or repairing and nurturing the fractured relationship with your father. These things will not happen without plans. So, make sure to add at least one new thing each planning cycle.

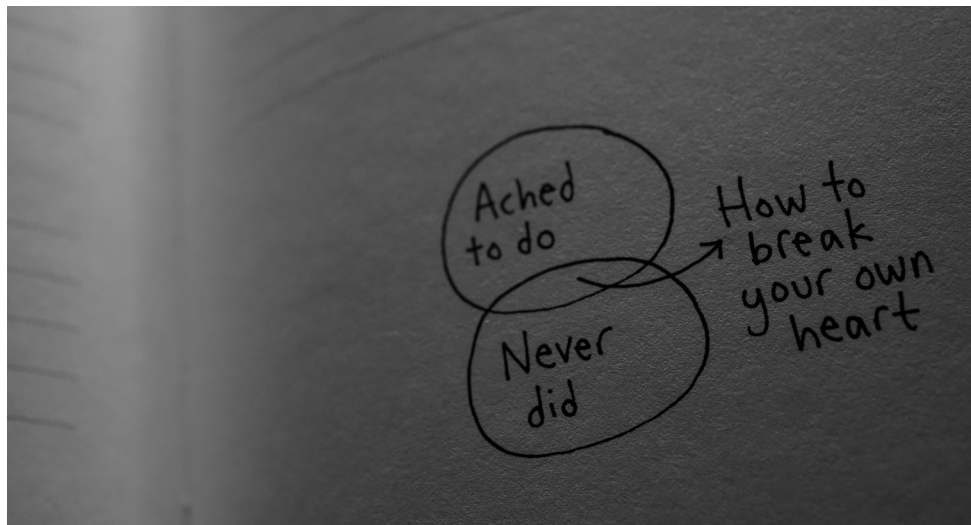
Life is short. Add the most important things first.

### **Why I admire Pam**

Pam has a genius for connecting the work you're called to do with the community you're called to serve. It sounds obvious, but many miss that bridge.

*The Widest Net* is one of Pam's best books.

Her website is: [PamelaSlim.com](http://PamelaSlim.com)



Combine **Neil's** and **Pam's** questions to explore the **present**, the **future**, and how the two relate.



## What are you afraid to know? ○

### ~ Katherine Morgan Schafler

This question is important because it helps loosen our resistance to inconvenient or painful truths that we need to see.

People often respond to this question with something they already know, for example, "I'm afraid to know that I chose the wrong job," "The person I love is cheating on me," or "I'm wasting my time with X." We resist awareness because awareness is scary.

Once you're aware of something, you either have to accept it, actively do something about it, or both. Yet, we don't go to sleep unaware of a truth we need to see, and then wake up suddenly aware of it. Awareness flickers on and off like a faulty lamp. If you ask yourself what you're afraid to know, then it fixes the flickering. The lamp shines bright and steady.

Answering this question will reveal, at least, one of two things: (1) You'll learn what you already know but are afraid to be more aware of, and/or (2) you'll learn what scares you and where you might consider inviting support regardless of whether your fear is based in reality.

### Why I admire Katherine

When I interviewed Katherine on my podcast, I fell in love with the nuance, enthusiasm, and clarity she brought to the messy questions of life. She's a psychologist and author of *The Perfectionist's Guide to Losing Control*—a great book with a super title.

Her website is [KatherineMorganSchafler.com](http://KatherineMorganSchafler.com)



## What would I do if I wasn't afraid? ~ Jay Clouse

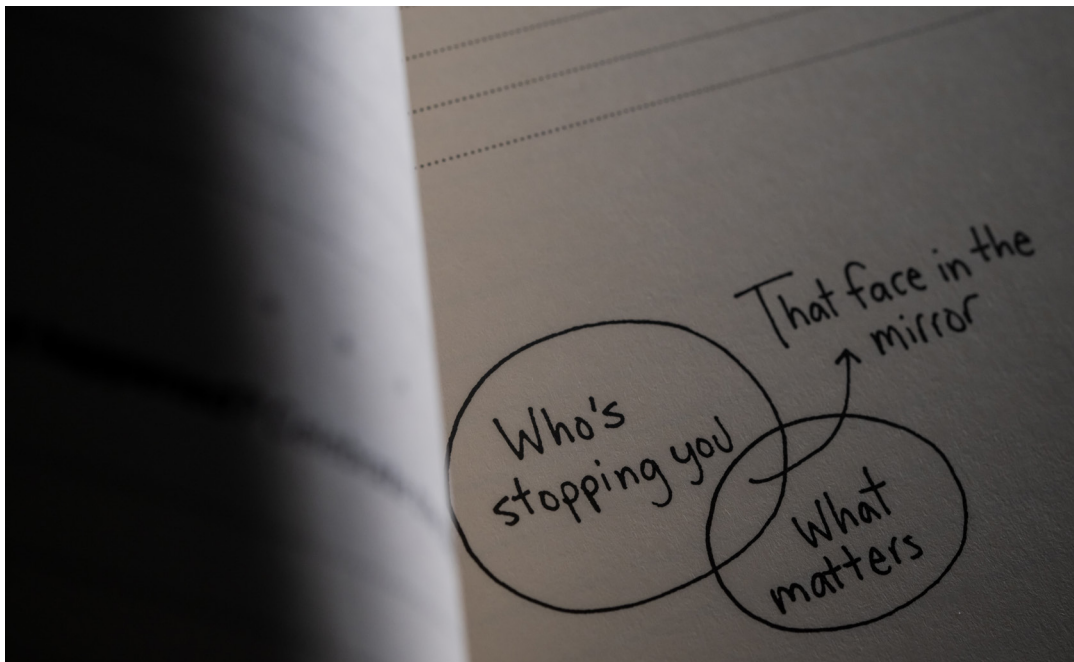
This question is flexible in that it can be applied in both macro and micro contexts. It can be applied to big questions like “What do I want to do for a career?” or small ones like “How should I reply to this email?”

This question presumes that we're all afraid all the time (to some degree). If we just assume that is true and that decision-making is colored by fear, then what will happen if we put that fear aside for a moment? How would I approach this situation without a fear lens? I find that I often have a clear answer—the only thing holding me back is that fear. And, if I acknowledge that, then it becomes easier to let go.

### Why I admire Jay

Jay's podcast is one of my must-listen-toes because he champions the hopes, needs, and fears of a creator better than anyone I know. He's a great guide to what it means to make a living as a creator without losing your life.

His websites are: [JayClouse.com](http://JayClouse.com) and [CreatorScience.com](http://CreatorScience.com)



- Combine **Katherine's** and **Jay's** questions to **reset** your relationship with **fear**.

## What is it that you want? ~ Madeleine Dore

As simple as it is to ask ourselves what we want, our desires can be buried under comparisons, expectations, fears, indecision, or shame.

In place of a connection with our wants, there can also be borrowed wants. An example is comparing yourself to other people and then thinking that you want what they have or want to do what they do.

There can also be expired wants—goals, relationships, or projects that we have shifted away from yet are hard to let go of. There can be shallow wants—things that advertisers tell us to want. There can also be ‘shoulds’—things we do out of a people-pleasing reflex or a need to stay busy even when doing so no longer serves us.

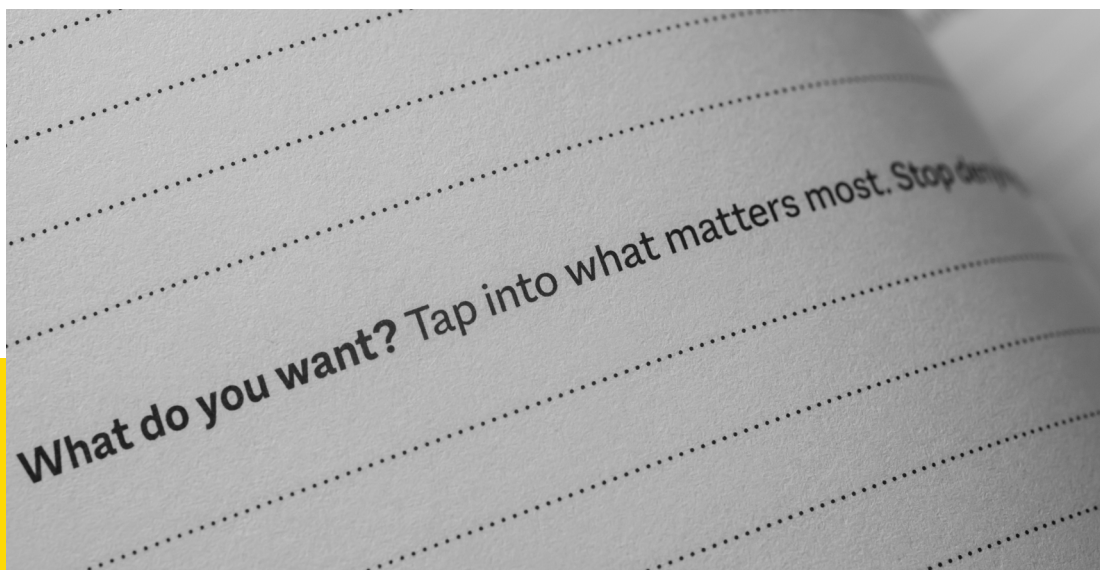
Such misaligned wants take up space and keep us on a hamster wheel. They limit our potential to connect to ourselves, others, and our days in a more meaningful way.

If we regularly ask ourselves what we want in a given circumstance, on a given day, or in a given relationship, then we can practice letting go of what no longer serves us and make space for what can. This doesn’t mean that we’ll get everything we want or that what we want will arrive immediately or just as we expected. Yet, it provides a reminder of what’s most important and congruent with who we are.

### Why I admire Madeleine

This is the perfect question for Madeleine to share. She truly lives this question, and I’ve seen her shape her work and life as she asks and answers it. Her book is the brilliantly titled *I Didn’t Do the Thing Today*.

Her website is: [MadeleineDore.com](http://MadeleineDore.com)



# When taking your next step forward on something that matters, what feels most true for you in this moment? Fear of failure or fear of failing to meet your imagined potential?

~ Henna Pryor

When I work with high performers, I find that they're less afraid of failing and making mistakes. They've worked their way through that psychological challenge already or have experienced failure enough that they know they'll recover and grow from it. What holds them back—what holds ME back to this day—is a fear of failing to meet the absolute maximum potential I believe myself to be capable of.

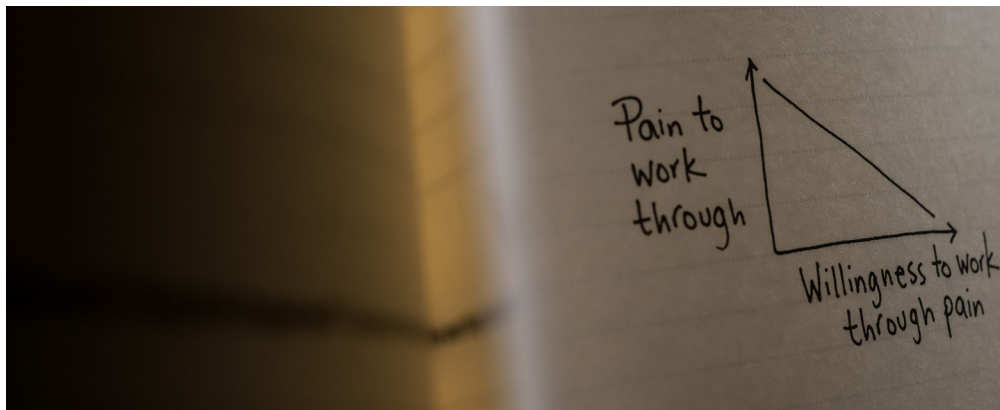
This fear will often keep me from starting something at all.

If I push through and start, then I might end up working long hours, polishing ideas or content to an unreachable standard of perfection, or saying “yes” when my mind and body are screaming “NO.” I find myself imagining that there's something I'm leaving on the table. Those who share this wiring know that it can be paralyzing and exhausting. It's a sneaky, back-door type of fear, one that we don't surface and explore often enough.

## Why I admire Henna

Henna's most recent book is *Good Awkward*. All of us have a bit of awkward in who we are: embrace it, don't smooth off the edges. Her focus is on workplace performance, but she encourages the kind of performance that embraces bumps along the way.

Her website is: [PryorityGroup.com](http://PryorityGroup.com)



Combine **Madeleine's** and **Henna's** questions to deeply hear the **whispers** of what truly **drives you**.

# What if none of this absolutely needs to be done? ○

~ Oliver Burkeman

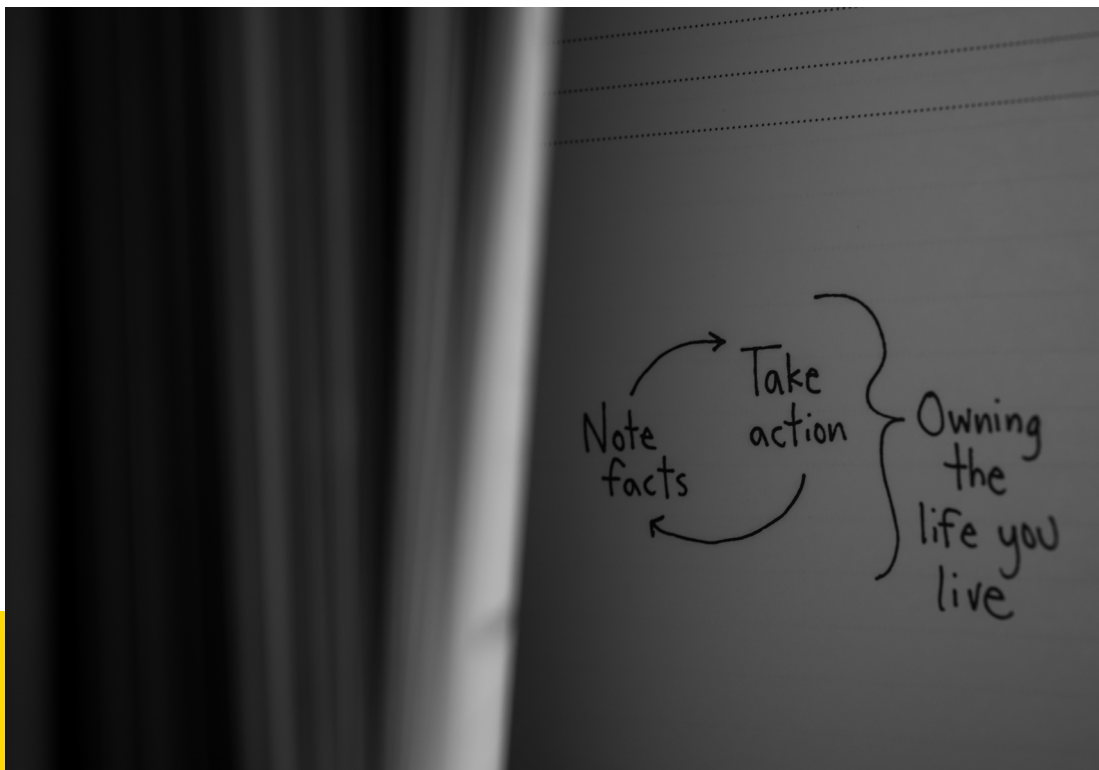
Deep down, many of us stake our feelings of self-worth on our productivity and accomplishments. That's certainly my instinctive tendency. But, the feeling that one absolutely has to keep on top of things or create impressive work to justify one's existence on the planet is counterproductive and corrosive. It turns everything into a matter of life and death, which generally only leads to anxious paralysis.

This question undermines all of that. If I don't need to do anything in particular today to be basically OK, then I can begin to ask what I'd like to do. What might make a real difference in the world? Often enough, this turns action from a chore into a pleasure.

## Why I admire Oliver

Oliver's books *Four Thousand Weeks* and *Meditations for Mortals* are like a deep plunge into a calm pool of wisdom. I love that his work is a far cry from the shallow BS contained in most of what's produced in the self-help and productivity space.

His website is: [OliverBurkeman.com](http://OliverBurkeman.com)





## What did you give your best to today? ~ Kate Lye

It's a choice to give your best to something. It's a deliberate act of effort, generosity, and even courage. It might be small and under the radar or it might be public and technicolored. It's not what others see; it's what you know to be true.

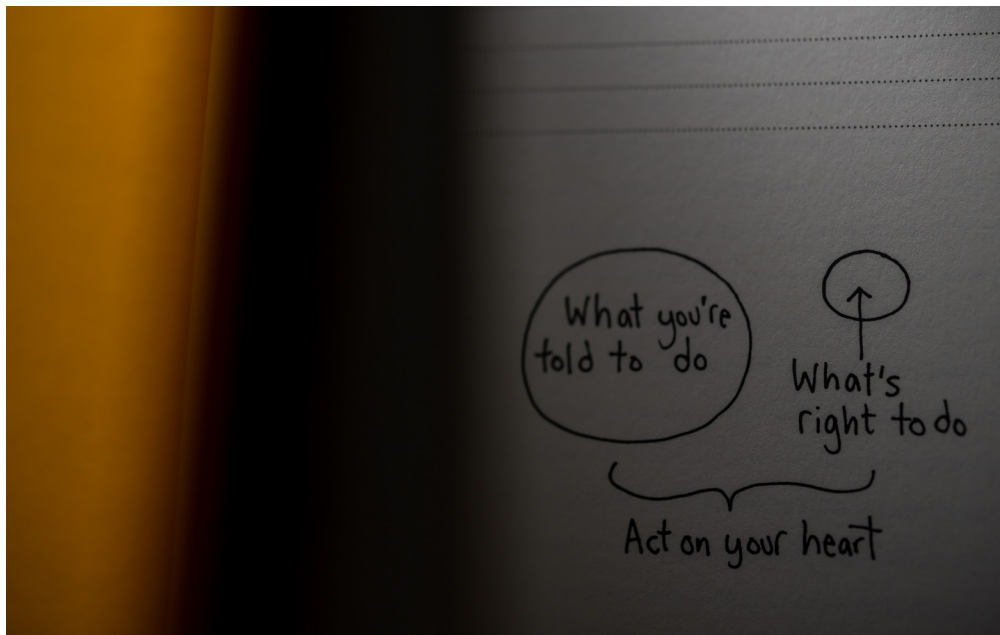
We can't be at our best 24/7, but it's worth tuning into how and when you are your best and who you give your best to. Are the people and projects that matter most getting the best of you?

And of course, the best version of you is always evolving. So, keep raising that bar.

### Why I admire Kate

Kate was my boss in the distant past. I regularly celebrate how we survived the ups and downs of that experience and now have a treasured friendship. She's simply one of the best advisors to CEOs and senior teams, especially when it comes to the complex nature of leading an organization.

Her website is [TheSavoirGroup.com](http://TheSavoirGroup.com)



Combine **Oliver's** and **Kate's** questions to decide whether you should **turn it up** or **turn it down**.

## Can you give me an example? ~ Andrea Small

My question is selfish. It might also seem like an obvious question. But, many of the people I talk to work in tech and are bound by air-tight confidentiality agreements. The way we talk in vagaries can boggle the mind.

Like many designers, I'm a visual learner. I need an example to deeply understand what someone is talking about, especially if they're talking in ambiguous terms and scenarios. Even if they have to make up all the people and the product, examples help me understand on a new level. I also find that their tone shifts from formal to playful and natural.

Examples make it real.

### Why I admire Andrea

I came to know Andrea when I read her book *Navigating Ambiguity* and then interviewed her on my podcast. Based at Stanford's famous d.school, her approach to design is both future-focused and deeply human.

Her website is: [AndreaSmall.com](http://AndreaSmall.com)

## What is your "I wish \_\_\_?" ~ Ernest Oriente

This question gets the same reaction every time. It makes or requires a person to pause and clearly and deeply consider their reply.

And, what comes next leans right into another series of questions, all of which are focused on clarity, more questions, and then agreed action steps.

### Why I admire Ernest

Ernest was my coach for fifteen years and never once waived from full-hearted support for the work I was trying to do. His gift is holding things lightly and fiercely at the same time. He never lets me get away with avoiding answering the hard questions.

His website is: [PowerHour.com](http://PowerHour.com)

Combine **Andrea's** and **Ernest's** questions to help **ground** your **thinking**.

## What do you want? ~ Tim Grahl

This is a simple, but scary, question.

Too often, we weigh the pros and cons of things in terms of logic, right versus wrong, and what others want or expect from us without first considering what we want. While we can't always act on what we want, it should still be the starting point in every decision we make.

### Why I admire Tim

As a writer and reader, I love that Tim is fired up to help people create brilliant fiction and doing so in a systematic way. He exemplifies focus, grit, and creativity.

His website is: [StoryGrid.com](http://StoryGrid.com)

## If you had a day to do anything you wanted, what would you do? ~ Chester Elton

We used this question a lot when trying to figure out how to recognize people in a meaningful way. Not everyone wants a plaque or a gold watch. Some people want time with family, time to travel, or time to just relax at the beach. Other people want to head up a team of their own, do more research, or go to a conference related to something they are interested in at work. This is a nice and easy way to find out more about a friend, co-worker, or member of your team.

### Why I admire Chester

Chester is one of the most relentlessly generous and positive people I know. He's long championed gratitude as an orientation in the world, and I deeply admire how his message and life are tightly entwined.

His website is: [TheCultureWorks.com](http://TheCultureWorks.com)

Combine **Tim's** and **Chester's** questions to get crystal clear about **what you want**, and then what you should **do about it**.



## Why do I believe this to be true? ○

~ Garry Ridge

This question is important to me because it encourages deep reflection on our assumptions, beliefs, and values. It forces us to examine the foundations of our thinking and challenges us to identify whether our beliefs are based on evidence, experience, or external influence.

By asking this question, we can gain greater clarity about what truly matters to us and align our actions with our most authentic selves. It's a powerful tool for fostering self-awareness and personal growth.

### Why I admire Garry

I met Garry when he was the CEO of WD-40—that's right, the lubricant company. He created an extraordinary culture there and is a true embodiment of what "servant leadership" at its best looks like.

His website is: [TheLearningMoment.net](http://TheLearningMoment.net)

## How would you like this story to end?

~ Ian Morgan Cron

When clients are confronted with a difficult decision or an especially messy situation, I often ask them, "How would you like this story to end?"

They can usually see the way forward when they clearly articulate their preferred future or outcome.

### Why I admire Ian

Ian has made his name as a teacher of the Enneagram, one of the few personal profile tools I have time for. But, I am most excited about his latest book—*The Fix*. It's a sorely needed text, one that makes the behavior-changing power of AA's twelve steps accessible to us all.

His website is [IanMorganCron.com](http://IanMorganCron.com)

○ Combine **Garry's** and **Ian's** questions to interrogate what's **fact** and tap into the **power of fiction**.

## Am I doing what I most need to be doing right now? Am I being who I most want to be right now? ~ Peter Bregman

Ask yourself these questions every hour on the hour. It's so easy to get distracted by what we're doing and who we are being in our work and relationships. The above two questions bring us back to our center. They help us stay focused, avoid distractions, and show up the way we most want to.

### Why I admire Peter

Peter brings a calming wisdom, a rigorous way of thinking, and a great sense of humor to the coaching he does in organizational c-suites. It's no surprise to me that he has been named one of the top executive coaches in the world.

His website is: [BregmanPartners.com](http://BregmanPartners.com)

## What do you know deep down you need to do, but, for whatever reason, are just not ready to do right now? ~ Philip McKernan

And, that's okay because this question is designed to honor a deep knowing—to name it and release it.

But, most importantly, this question is designed to be compassionate and gentle.

### Why I admire Philip

Philip is fearless about asking big, juicy, and hard questions. He is also patient enough to wait for the answer—the real answer; the most powerful answer. And, he's Irish, so he's irresistible to listen to.

His website is: [PhilipMcKernan.com](http://PhilipMcKernan.com)

Combine **Peter's** and **Philip's** questions to more acutely notice the gap between what you **want** and what you're **doing** about it.

## How do you see it differently? ~ Jennifer Riel

As humans, we are naturally wired to seek out evidence that fits what we already know and perspectives that reinforce what we already believe. It takes real effort to break out of that habit and seek contradictory evidence and opposing views. But, engaging with other ways of seeing is how we learn. It's how we grow.

This question invites others to articulate things they see that I don't—whether the difference is big or small. Even better, it demonstrates genuine curiosity about other people, which helps build stronger relationships.

### Why I admire Jennifer

The double brilliance of this question is typical of Jennifer. It reminds us that we're not omniscient: What we know is not the (whole) truth. It also balances the power dynamic between two people—an act of genuine curiosity that connects at the human level. Jennifer's book is *Creating Great Choices: A Leader's Guide to Integrative Thinking*.

You can find Jennifer on [LinkedIn](#).

## What choices would you make today if you were already the person you want to be tomorrow? ~ Simon Alexander Ong

This question is important to me because it is a powerful reminder of what can happen when we work from our future and not our past. Our tomorrow is shaped by the choices we make today.

Better choices today lead to better results tomorrow, and this gives birth to an energizing feeling of momentum in your life.

### Why I admire Simon

I admire the calm wisdom Simon brings to the world through his coaching and speaking. Even though he's the author of a book called *Energize*, he has a presence that feels grounded and encouraging.

His website is: [youtube.com/@simonalexandero](https://youtube.com/@simonalexandero)

Combine **Jennifer's** and **Simon's** questions to find **new perspectives**.

## What is my beautiful question? ~ Warren Berger

I believe that at any given time, we should be pursuing some ambitious goal or objective. And, it should be articulated in the form of an open-ended question.

So, the idea is to ask yourself the question above, think about it for as long as it takes, and try to come up with a bold “How might I?” question—a question that you can own. My beautiful question—which I’ve been working on for years—is this: “How might I encourage more questioning in business, classrooms, and the larger world?”

The reason to express your goal as a question instead of a statement or resolution is simply that questions are more engaging. You’re more likely to be intrigued by a question and therefore more likely to think about it and act on it.

### Why I admire Warren

Warren’s a question-nerd like me. Some of my favorite questions are the ones he’s introduced me to, many of which are from his book *A More Beautiful Question*.

His website is: [AMoreBeautifulQuestion.com](http://AMoreBeautifulQuestion.com)

## Who loves me? Who do I love? ~ Frankie Thorogood

Sigmund Freud wrote, “How bold one gets when one is sure of being loved.” To love and be loved is the greatest gift we have in this life. It’s probably our single greatest source of strength, and possibly our least appreciated.

My general approach is to get as small and specific as possible, but often the obvious things are the most important and the most overlooked. This prompt helps me get back in touch with the ultimate source of gratitude.

### Why I admire Frankie

I climbed a volcano mound with Frankie. That’s probably enough. But, what I really love is his deep curiosity about the world. He really sits with the hard questions and acts on the answers. His question is the perfect way to end this collection, a shout-out to the last line in the last song on the Beatles’ last album.

His website is: [Frankie.co.uk](http://Frankie.co.uk)

Combine **Warren’s** and **Frankie’s** questions to **stay curious** and remember what **matters most**.

## BONUS

### **The best thing yesterday was ... ~ Austin Kleon**

In my original plans for the Do Something That Matters Journal, I had this delightful artwork from Austin Kleon as its introduction. That didn't work out, but I couldn't let it go to waste.

Austin's the author of three fantastic books, starting with *Steal Like an Artist*. He's newsletter is one of my top three favorites.

AUGUST 1 2023

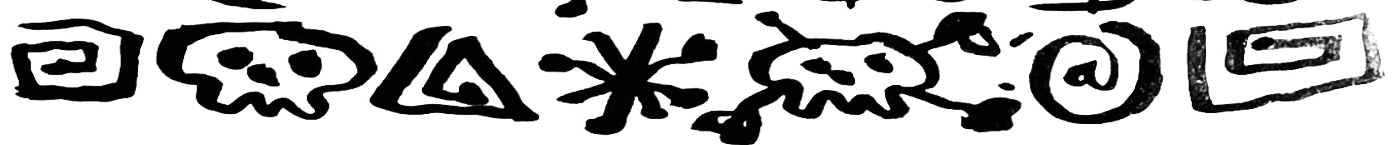
TUESDAY @ 7:49 A.M.

1ST I WRITE THE DATE  
& TIME, SLOWLY, AND IF THAT  
DOESN'T BRING SOME-  
THING TO MIND I DRAW  
A SLOW SPIRAL →

(ALL THIS WITH  
A BRUSH PEN, AS  
LYNDA BARRY TAUGHT  
ME.) IF THAT DOESN'T  
WORK, I WRITE, "THE  
BEST THING YEST-  
ERDAY WAS..." AND



(A NICHOLSON BAKER PROMPT) IF  
THAT DOESN'T WORK,  
I DRAW, OR DOODLE.





I DO THIS EVERY  
MORNING FOR  
AT LEAST 2 PAGES  
[AND HAVE SO FOR 5+ YEARS]

THE MATH IS SIMPLE:

$$2 \times 365 \times 5 = 3,650$$

THE DAYS ~ PAGES

ADD UP! AND WHAT

IT REALLY DOES IS TEACH YOU

TO "PAY ATTENTION

TO WHAT YOU PAY ATT-

ENTION TO." (-AMY KRAUSE  
ROSENTHAL)

YOU SEE ALL YOUR PATT-

ERNS + CYCLES + DISCOVER

THAT TIME IS NON-LINEAR

AND YOU ARE ALWAYS IN

ORBIT OF SOMETHING.

xoxo, AUSTIN KLEON



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