

The Skill of Asking the “Next Right Question”

The “next right question” is what leads you to deeper, more intensive questions until you reach the root of a problem. Answers found at this core level will thus sustain you for longer periods of time than answers to easier, more superficial questions.

When things get tough, we are often willing to go only so far, to dig only so deep. We search for the quick fix, a resolution that may appease us for the moment but in the end does little to help with our lives or our work. In order to evolve, we need to stop letting ourselves get away with such behavior - business as usual.

Please don't interpret this as suggesting you be harder on yourself. Just be

more truthful and more challenging.

One way to do this is to ask the next right question - something we probably never learned to do. We may have learned to ask the same question, the next obvious question, or not to ask questions at all. Silence is the ultimate non- question. We play it safe and maintain the status quo.

A deeper level of questioning will uncover more purposeful work. These questions should:

- Invoke something larger about ourselves
- Challenge our perception of self and work
- Originate from a different point of view
- Surface something that may at first seem odd or unusual
- Deepen and broaden
- Be downright hard and sometimes painful!

So where do we start? With our

degree of willingness. Give yourself permission to dig deeper. Start small. Here are a few methods to help you get you started:

1. Digging three levels deep - State the question, then ask yourself ‘why’ three times based on the first, second, and third responses. By the time you come up with the third ‘why’ response, you will have surfaced a new answer.

What makes me good at this skill? Then why am I good at that? Lately, why am I good at what I just said?

2. Projecting into the future - Envision yourself 3-5 years into the future. Is this where you want to be?

In the year 2005, if I keep doing what I ‘m doing, what will my life and work look like?

In the year 2005, if I start doing something different such as _____, then what will my life and work look like?

3. Asking the opposite question - Ask a question that is directly opposite what you are thinking. “What might happen if I go in this direction? What might happen if I choose not to go in this direction?”

4. Breaking the question down into manageable parts - Ask the smallest question possible. Instead of getting overwhelmed and doing nothing, take the smallest step forward.

What one thing do I really do -well? Or What one skill do others tell me I’m good at?

5. Thinking forward - Ask a question that will move you forward. If you find yourself in “circular thinking,” which is thinking in an endless loop, then “think forward.”

What action will move me forward? Or What talents do I want to promote now and in the future?

6. Questioning from a different style - If you are a thinker, ask a feeling question. If you are visual, ask an auditory question - or the reverse. How will I feel’ if I did this more often? What does this sound like?

Asking deeper questions of yourself, your skills, and your talents can be tough because you then have to face the answer: the truth. Facing the truth usually means change. Although this is always for the better in the long run, it is not always something we want to do. Our habitual nature kicks in, fear surfaces, and we become stagnant.

The challenge is to always be asking yourself the next right question. Your life and your work then become a



reflection of that new question and, of course, the new answer. This process becomes the new, expanded frame of reference from which to navigate your life - the evolution of you!

The Evolution of You: Work as an Expression of our Humanity.

By Patricia DiVecchio

I was in the doctor's office the other day, waiting for my appointment, and I happened to glance at the magazine rack. On the top of the rack was a "Reader's Digest" not a magazine I typically pick up, but this one caught my eye because Meryl Streep was on the cover. I see her as an actress who uses her work as a way to play out the human soul.

The byline was "Streep's Secret, How the Actor Weaves Her Astonishing Spells." I couldn't resist.

The article itself was titled "The Spark She Can't Explain." It went on to say that Meryl Streep is a talent apart, but wondered how she does it? At first I was disappointed to read that she actually doesn't know how she does it. But as I read on, it detailed her years at the Yale School of Drama and quoted her Dean at the time. He had a theory: "The secret of how she does it is in herself, her great compassion," he reflected. "Her entire career, every one of her performances is animated by this inner spark, this humanity. That's how she is able to identify with her character. That's how she feels their feelings and becomes so astonishingly believable in their skins."

This hit home. You see, I believe what Meryl Streep does on film and on stage is exactly what we need to do in the workplace today. We need to tap-within ourselves-a greater level of compassion to reach a stronger source of our own humanity. This expression of humanity can then be used to touch others and create work that is more humane.

Easier said than done. Our workaholic society wraps its entire sense of self and value around being productive and making money. How do we

create more compassion for ourselves, demonstrate more self-care, to then be able to truly "touch" those we work with?

A few weeks ago I did a workshop for the University of Kentucky Family Business Institute on "Balancing Work, Family.. .Life." Family businesses are a challenge in good times and can be so out-of-balance in bad. Taking the time to focus on the "softer side" of business, on the balance so sorely needed, is often not a priority. This group was there because they valued both their family and the family business—a critical combination. I asked the participants to write their definition of balance. To their surprise, they all came up with different replies. The dominant definition focused on the more human aspects of work, such as

- 1) increased understanding among family members;
- 2) learning self-care and self-discipline;
- 3) focusing on the work at hand either in the business or at home;
- 4) respect and trust of family members; and
- 5) using my wit and my wisdom.

I don't believe a single person mentioned making better use of their time, which is the traditional outlook on balance. They went to a deeper level, a more humane level.

One of the great challenges we face in the year is to clarify how our work relates to who we are. Too often we hide out at work. We hide out in our jobs, our titles, and our positions of power. We hide from ourselves, our humanity, and our pain. If we want to create work that is purposeful and

that makes a difference, we have to be willing to touch a deeper level of our own humanity to then be more humane.

1) Old Belief- It's not work unless it's difficult, time consuming, exhausting, and makes you miserable.

New Belief- Work is something I do effortlessly, in split second shifts of imagination, with my right hand while my left hand is playing. It invigorates my work and life in general.

2) Old Belief- The reward for good work is more work.

New Belief- The reward for good work is, first of all, personal pleasure of achievement, self-esteem, and accomplishment. It is also a degree of acknowledgment and recognition from outside. Next, it is monetary compensation, which makes possible the soul's refreshment and repose before its next creative endeavor. Finally, the reward for good work is the opening of doors of opportunity in the world so that the worker's soul may perpetuate and develop its gifts.

3) Old Belief- Work is an interruption from life, fun, the profound, family and friends, intimate relationships work is a huge interruption in my day.

New Belief- Work is full of life... in fact, it is an expression and articulation of life fully lived; it is lively, fun, full of humor, and profound; it draws from and enriches experiences with family, friends, and loved ones. Work creates intimacy and community in the world.

We encourage you to take some time to come up with your own

list that can provide valuable insights into your relationship With yourself and your work.

"The Evolution of YOU!" is a vehicle for the community of like-minded, purposeful people who want to bring their sense of spirit to work. We welcome your feedback, ideas, and suggestions. After all, this is for and about YOU!

So, what is your purpose anyway?

Each day, do one thing just for you. Treat yourself with kindness and cultivate self-care. At the same time, do one thing daily for someone else. Make it an unexpected gesture. The end result is you will both feel great. Do this for at least 3 weeks or until it just becomes a habit a new life and work habit.