

# Five Questions That Will Change Your Life

My doctorate is in Cognitive Behavioral Psychology. Those are real fancy words that mean I learned how to help change the way people conduct conversations with themselves. Changing the way you talk to yourself can totally revolutionize your life, but learning to do it can take some time and guidance. I've boiled the process down to five simple, mind-changing questions you can ask yourself today.

## The Question That Changes Your Attitude

A few Saturdays ago I went to the local bank to do some routine transactions. As I walked out of the building, a young guy in a ragged, old pick-up truck turned into the parking space next to my new car, ripped off the mirror with his car as he rumbled by and kept going! I yelled at him and he just waved at me, oblivious to what he'd just done. I came home and was just a little bit irritated.

I got on my tennis shoes to take a jog to run off my frustrations when my eight-year-old daughter Claire ran into the room, yelling that something had happened to my six-year-old son Jared. Quickly I went into the room to find my son on the floor, white as rice and completely despondent. He was not moving and his eyes were rolled back in his head. I was sure I was losing him. My wife ran into the room and soon was screaming; she had come to the same conclusion. She thought maybe he was choking on something, so she reached down his throat to dislodge whatever might be there. When she did, he suddenly came out of it.

As it turned out, he had been bouncing face-down on his stomach on a large exercise ball. He'd bounced so hard that he knocked himself out cold. After a little while we realized what had happened and that he was going to be okay. Relieved (and still pretty shook up), I decided to take that jog. As I went to run, I passed by my car without the mirror, a sight that had me livid a short while ago. But things were different now. I looked at the car and said, "If my boy is okay, you can blow up that car."

When someone is emotionally healthy, their "personal truths" (how they see the world) are aligned with *facts*. You can demonstrate this for yourself by asking yourself which of these two statements is facts:

- (1) "Losing my car mirror is awful," or
- (2) "It's unfortunate that I lost my car mirror, but far from awful."

When I got a glimpse of what awful *really* is (losing my boy Jared), I got realigned FAST! Keeping a good attitude is simply telling yourself facts about your situations.

In our time there have been two great discoveries about how our minds function. First is the realization that individuals can change the way they think. It is this choice to change the way you think, more than anything else, that changes life.

The second great discovery is that we attract into our lives not only what we love but also what we fear. Thoughts that receive our attention, good or bad, fuel our unconscious engine, driving our future and the events that happen to us in the real world. There is a huge mind-matter connection, which simply means that what you think, what you say to yourself, what you believe impacts your life in powerful ways. Be careful to fuel your mind with facts.

### **THE QUESTION: Am I telling myself facts?**

#### The Question That Builds Responsibility

When I went to work with the University of Miami football program many years ago, they had just experienced their first losing season ever. *Sports Illustrated* actually ran a cover story that the University should get rid of football altogether. If that wasn't bad enough, they were in the middle of a losing streak to Florida State!

We started at a very simple place: I told the coaches and players to get a clear picture of what they wanted the program to look like, and then to work every day on moving closer to that picture. The process I used with them is one I use often: eliminate everything that is not that picture and work *on* the program, not *in* the program.

Next, we made a choice that we had no opponents; *just energy that demanded us to be accountable*. I told the players that sometimes the energy was greater than at other times, and that sometimes it just happened to be dressed in shoulder pads and a helmet. What we had to do was to be the best we could be every day and respond with the very best we had on every play. Our approach had nothing to do with the losing streak, *Sports Illustrated*, Florida State or anything else. In fact, we conducted our day-to-day business as if all that did not exist. The result was a thirty-five game win streak and a National Championship.

Let's apply that same approach to what's going on today in the world. I personally do not think, for example, that the economy is bad: I just think there is energy that says the opportunity has changed and we have to look for it. You will never find the opportunities in life by just sitting around labeling the energy you encounter as bad. There is no bad energy. As Pascal said, "Man's difficulties come from an unquiet mind." If your mind is busy judging everything as "bad," you will miss new opportunities and your life will suffer accordingly.

Looking at the present economic situation, I think what is really happening is that, because of an expanding area from which to choose the talent you are seeking, there is an

elimination of mediocrity taking place in the world. I think there are messages being sent out there for you to move toward excellence, because a person offering the excellent service, somewhere in the world other than right where you are experiencing the elimination of mediocrity, will be found. And with there being a global market now, people can “shop around” for, or move toward excellence. That is not exactly hard times, just a new world order.

How about as this “new world order” relates to kids? If you have a teenager who is a challenge, it means that you are getting energy sent your way that you have to be a great parent. If you judge your kid to be a lost cause, you surrender your ability to respond successfully.

*Responsibility* means “responding with ability.” In their fabulous book *Success Built to Last*, Jerry Porras, Stewart Emery and Mark Thompson say that those who are real life winners have a “thought style” that goes quickly to action as soon as they understand the challenge. There is no “hard opponent,” or any “opponent,” for that matter. There are just messages reminding you to respond with action and become better at whatever you’ve decided to be.

### **THE QUESTION: How and where can I respond better?**

#### The Question That Changes Your Locus of Control

My father passed away this year on his birthday. There were two different feelings in the air that day: one was of sorrow and the other was of celebration. The group of people who felt sorrow was looking at my father’s body and thinking, “This is the end.” The other group of people was uplifted and thinking, “This is the beginning!” The people in that room that hard day meant the world to me and taught me a valuable lesson: *What you do not see is often more real than what you do see!*

Damian Rotter is a psychological researcher who discovered that 78% of all people allow something outside of themselves to decide what they feel inside. It could be something they see, something they hear from another, from someone’s casual opinion, etc. He went on to say that nearly anything could control the emotions of someone *externally* focused. If you think this through rationally, it’s in essence saying, “Your opinion of me is more important than my own opinion of me.”

To do something amazing with our life, we cannot afford to be dominated by outside factors. The World Health Organization stated that by 2020 the second most debilitating disease will be depression. Why? It is because more and more people are focusing on something outside of themselves to determine their internal environment. They are living in the world and being *of it*, rather than being above it.

We cannot afford to have our emotions calibrated to what we see outside ourselves. There is a second set of eyes, internal eyes, called your mind's eyes, which must govern us.

**THE QUESTION: What am I allowing outside of me (approval, popularity, etc.) to drive my emotions?**

### The Question That Builds Intrinsic Motivation

A reporter was once watching Mother Theresa change the dressing of a man who had a terrible infection in his leg. The reporter said to her, "I would not do what you do for all the money in the world."

Mother Theresa's response was classic. "Neither would I," she said. How does someone become enlightened in that kind of way?

There are three groups of success seekers. The first group is the people that live lives of mediocrity. Their days are filled with boring inertia and dullness, or at worst, a lack of caring about anything important. They either work for someone else, counting on them to be their financial caretakers, or they do not work at all. They spend most of their days quietly (and maybe subconsciously) angry because others have not taken care of them. There is no growth in their life or any shred of real motivation.

Some political leaders believe that these people deserve free sums of money because life has been unfair to them. In some cases members of these groups have had legitimately challenging circumstances, but more times than not it is their approach to life that has stymied them.

Hypothetically, if you could take all the money in the world and divide it evenly among everyone, in a few short years the money would be redistributed just as it is right now. That is because the way people think affects how much money they make, not their circumstances. Success operates by laws, not by confusion, and those who habitually "lose out" in life are looking outside themselves for their motivation, thus violating a powerful thought process that brings fullness in life.

The second group is those that live driven lives. They experience lives full of action, energy, endless business, too many fingers in too many pies, and a certain kind of destructive lust for business and achievement. Their focus becomes an obsession, and totally realigns itself along another higher plane in life. It is definitely a higher plane than mediocrity but something is still not right. For these people, life will eventually manifest itself as sickness, heart disease, ulcers or some other anxiety disorder. You can eventually find this group tired and angry. Because they have been successful, they will never be punished *for* their anger, they will be punished *by* it.

The last group is the enlightened group. They live in what I call “the light.” How do you know you are in this group? It is when your intentions are noble and you feel peace in your actions. In these lives, peace is the umpire. While the two former lifestyles are based on reward, you would do an enlightened life even if there were no rewards at all. You are willing to surrender the fruit of the action. You do not become ill because you have freedom from fear and the anxious worry over results. In a sense you care less about the success and more about the fulfillment it brings.

This “care-less” is powerful. Have you ever golfed when, for some reason, you did not care about your results? How did not caring about the outcome affect your enjoyment? Your score? Did you not shoot your best score? The detachment from results makes a kind of radical effectiveness you cannot reach if you are driven from need and pressure.

There are two “knowings” placed in you: (1) what your gift is and (2) what you are to do with it. First of all, everybody has a gift. Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking they have many gifts and trying to develop all of them. Or they try to develop one that they *wished* they had. Joining the last group of successful artists is about getting honest with what your best gift is, developing it and letting it shine.

Listen to this excerpt from Nelson Mandela’s inauguration speech as the first Black President of South Africa:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us.  
Our playing small does not serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so  
other people do not feel insecure around us.  
We were all made to shine as children do.  
It is not just in some of us.  
It is in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine  
we unconsciously give others permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear  
our presence automatically liberates others...*

You are called to do the work that is rightfully yours – just do that work. Do not desire to be anybody else – all the mystery and power you need is in that rightful work. We are to love nothing other than that which comes to us, woven in the pattern of our destiny. What could better fit our needs?

My neighbor’s name is Ron. He has a local radio show here in Pittsburgh called *The American Entrepreneur*. He is a professor in a business school, has been a millionaire three or four times over, has lost it all and gained it back, and has a beautiful

family. Five years ago he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer which spread throughout his body. He eventually had over *three hundred tumors* in his lungs. Five years ago in April he was given less than a week to live. Last week he was given a clean bill of health. He escaped death and now has life, at least for the present.

What if you were like him? What if you had suddenly realized that you had escaped death for now? This is actually our situation; we just do not realize it. Getting into this third group of successful people is learning to live like we just beat death. How would you live if you were in Ron's shoes?

**THE QUESTION: How would you now live if you were living your last day?**

The Question That Adds Positive Value to Life

The only way to consistently do anything is to be *mindful* of it. *Mindful* means to be conscious, to think about, to set out early in your day and intend to do something. Be mindful to be an adder to life, not a subtracter. It means to start each day saying to yourself, "I am going to be of value to this person and this group in this specific way." And at the end of the day to meditate on exactly what you have done.

We were made to serve. And our bodies rejoice in every way when we do. Our health is better along with our mood. What else is there? Something larger than us rewards us when we do the right action.

I talk a lot about adding positive value to life. "Positive value" is a verb; it is an action I do to intentionally add to someone else's day. And here comes the miracle – *that value will come back to you*. In fact, it is not true that you reap what you sow – you reap more than what you sow – it will come back to you in multiple blessings.

The value you add could be as simple as being a good listener, or just saying something very kind, complimenting someone on their contribution, and so on. Simple, kind acts surely add up.

**THE QUESTION: Whom am I going to take my gifts to today and add to their day?**

Asking yourself these five simple questions can have mind-changing, life-changing benefits. No need to wait: ask yourself these questions now and get a new mind and a new life today!