

Take 5



A five minute read that could change the way you think

Is the Question the Answer?

To be or not to be; that is the question

I've recently had the good fortune to take an extended holiday to some of the more picturesque parts of our world. A benefit of travelling is the time and space it can provide to do some quality thinking and reflecting. During my travels my mind once again turned to the vexed question of why some people succeed and some don't.

While it's pretty well accepted that we are deeply influenced by what we are thinking at any given time, it occurred to me that maybe part of the answer lies not only in what we are thinking but also the questions that we ask ourselves. After all is not a lot of our thinking stimulated by the questions we ask of ourselves?

Let me give you a real and practical example. Someone, let's call her Suzy, suddenly finds herself retrenched from a well-paying and satisfying role with a multinational finance company. The retrenchment comes as quite a shock as she had been given the expectation that an overseas opportunity within the company was a real possibility. Now, this story can play out one of two ways. She could ask questions like "why did they do this to me?" or "why did they lead me on and make me believe that I was on my way to New York when all along they were going to fire me? Pretty soon there would be feelings of resentment and frustration.

Alternately, she could ask "what am I now free to do that I couldn't do when I was tied down to my old job?" or "who do I know that can help me move forward with my career?" Suzy can control her emotional responses and actions by considering different sets of questions.

The really amazing thing about the questions that we ask ourselves is that we decide on them! So if we control the questions we ask ourselves then we control our thinking and how we interpret and respond to what is happening around us.

Let me give you another example. While driving down the road on the way to work a car cuts in front of you and brakes suddenly. You swerve to avoid a collision and feel the adrenalin rush and the rise in blood pressure that naturally follows. You could ask yourself "How do I get even with that jerk and teach him a lesson?" or "how do I avoid that situation happening to me again?" The question you chose at this point can really influence what happens next – road rage or just another commute to work. It really is your choice of question and your choice of action.



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Somewhere I have read something along the lines of your quality of questions determines your quality of life. Having had the time to think this through, I'm convinced that this is so. In simple terms, we can use questions to guide our thinking and thinking to guide our actions and actions to cause outcomes.

So, back to my original question; why are some people more successful than others. Maybe one of the reasons is the questions they ask themselves. I bet they ask themselves how something can be achieved rather than what could go wrong or why it hasn't been done before. Success in business comes from setting and achieving goals that will lead to the final predetermined outcome. These goals can be short term tactical goals or long term strategic goals. Whichever they are they each contribute to the desired result. Asking the right questions contributes to increased probability of achieving goals.

Try this; think about something you want to achieve in your business or personal life in the next two weeks. Make sure it is achievable in this time. Now ask yourself a series of questions that will help you to achieve this outcome. Better still, write them down and refer to them in the days ahead. Keep asking yourself these questions until you have the answers you need to take action to achieve the outcome. If you take the time to do this you might be amazed at the power of questions.

Next time you find yourself thinking thoughts that are unhelpful try asking yourself some success questions to get your thinking back on track. Questions like, what am I really trying to achieve here? What skills and experience do I have that can be useful? Who can help me with this issue or problem? Remember questions can direct our thinking which in turn guides our actions. I believe that ultimately our questions can significantly impact our level of success.

Well enough thinking for now, I'm off to consider my next big question. How can I get back to Santorini and enjoy another beer at that little bar looking out over the white roofs and the deep blue Mediterranean Sea?

Enjoy the ride!



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