

## Great Questions

**The more you work at ignoring a weakness, the more your mind will focus on that weakness. We'll prove it to you: RIGHT NOW.**

### **An Experiment:**

**Don't think about the color red for the next 10 seconds. You can keep your eyes shut, if you wish.**



Hmm ... for some people, red did enter their mind. Yet many were able to block out the color/concept of red by using a great deal of energy focusing on some other color, object, or thought. Yet **red** did **not** disappear from their mind. The color red was in effect controlling your mind regarding what it could, or should not think of! Working ever so hard on not thinking red (ignoring a weakness that impacts your job) helps divert one's mind to ignore the arduous hard work involved in fixing an area of shortfall. Quite often it is more difficult to avoid thinking about what to do about a weakness (i.e., controlling one's anger) than to take a positive action to correct it.

### **Choosing BETTER questions to FOCUS ON to have BETTER solutions to choose from:**

The most important way to *change* what we are focusing on is to understand that the questions we ask determine how we see a problem and possible solutions. Great questions are much more likely to produce great solutions than simply good ones. Let's say you ask yourself the question, "Why am I such a failure?" We are sure your mind will focus on at least twenty answers in less than two minutes. On the other hand, if you asked the question, "What are the things I'm blessed with?" your mind will start coming up with many reasons, things, and people you are blessed with.

### **For Example:**

- A few years back, Toyota asked employees for ideas on how they could be more productive. They received only a few suggestions. When they reworded the question to read, "How can you make your job *easier*?" -- they were inundated with ideas.
- If a manager wants to improve the quantity of staff work, the question might be, "How many more projects can you complete in one day?" If accuracy needs improving, the manager might ask, "How can we improve the rate of correct data entry into the customer database?"

**Documented Case Study of a man who was highly unpleasant at work**, but asked himself a great question and turned things around, as you will see.

Marlin is an outstanding programmer who simply yells a lot at his coworkers, regardless of their position. Marlin's yelling appears to be his way of coping at work without going postal, since he gets along well with people outside of an office environment.

Everybody has his or her own defense mechanism for getting through the stress of a workday. Marlin wants to change his yelling ways, mainly because it hurts his opportunity for a promotion. He decides to ask himself some idea-generating questions that could help him move up the professional ladder. The first question he comes up with is: *How can I motivate myself to be more pleasant at work?* Marlin believes he has come up with a good question, but he feels it won't work based on his past experience. He has tried all sorts of things to tone down his yelling, such as exercise, meditation, prescribed drugs, hypnosis, a portable punching bag, and scores of other behavior modification techniques.

So he tried a different question: *How can I improve my people skills with just a few people who have a significant impact on my performance rating?* He felt this new question had a good chance of working. Now that he just received his 360° Feedback Report, Marlin has a reason to request a meeting with his supervisor. Marlin plans to apologize for his past behavior and promise he will not raise his voice to her again. At this meeting, Marlin will ask for ideas from his supervisor that would improve their working relationship now tainted by his yelling and loud voice. Marlin then puts into his computerized pop-up calendar a weekly listing of the five key people who have the most influence in determining his performance appraisal. He knows it's time to practice damage control.

(This is a documented account from a thank you email from Marlin, sent in June of 2007. He wrote to tell us that the strategy he worked out using the Action Planning Guide led to a promotion, and now two new people pop up on his calendar every Monday at 9:00.)