

Jill Baughan

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 95-ASK QUESTIONS

I'm Jill Baughan, and you're listening to the podcast called Find Joy...No Matter What.

This is Episode 95.

If you're in a tough place right now, your joy may seem like it's hiding--or gone.

I understand. But it's still there, I promise, just waiting to be resurrected. And this podcast is designed to help you do just that...no matter what else is going on in your life.

For just a few minutes each week, I'll tell you a story--one that just might inspire a way to uncover a piece of joy you might be looking for. Then, we'll consider how it might speak to your life, because even though you'll hear quite a few of my stories during our time together, I believe you'll find your own in every one of mine.

Finally, I'll offer a benediction to send you into your day--or into your night.

So. If you're up for doing joy shots with a friend today...have a listen.

Young children are relentless questioners.

Just ask any parent of a kid whose mouth can fire "Why?" and "What's that?" faster than speeding bullets, into the air and the ears of a sometimes exasperated audience.

Once my daughter, who just couldn't believe one kid could ask so much and so fast, decided to count her son's questions on a 30-minute car ride.

The total, when she pulled into the driveway at home? 97.

Not at all unusual for children that age, and often irritating and exhausting for grownups.

But, says journalist Diane Stopyra, for adults who've lost that inquisitive nature--which is, ahem, most of us--it should also be aspirational.

Asking questions isn't just a useful mechanism for getting the salt passed to you at the dinner table. It's also an undervalued skill set. And while it may sound strange to describe such a simple rhetorical device this way, that's exactly how psychologists think of it: as a remarkably powerful strategy for improving one's life.

The problem is most adults treat asking questions like we treat touching the door handle of a public restroom: sometimes necessary, but also unpleasant and best avoided whenever possible. On survey revealed that four-year-old girls are the most prolific askers, averaging one question every minute and 56 seconds--but it's not uncommon for that same girl to ask zero questions per day by the time she hits junior high.

The reasons for this decline are varied. Some of us, experts say, become too egocentric to invite viewpoints outside our own. Others are terrified of being seen as a nuisance (a particularly common fear among women, studies show). And still others are afraid of seeming ignorant (like asking for directions?) or incompetent in front of peer, a worry that kicks into overdrive in adolescence and never really goes away.

Asking questions really can feel like a dangerous thing.

The good news is that these fears are wildly misplaced, says Stopyra. In fact your most successful and respected peers are likely serial question askers. If you can get past the insecurities and learn to harness the simple power of asking more questions, you find your life improving in a few critical--not to mention joyful--ways.

Here are just a few:

1. You'll acquire information you need. Or want, anyway.

Like the child's relentless asking "Why?" or "What's that?"

Or, even more important, like the note you wrote in grade school to your crush: "Do you like me? Yes or No, Circle one." Very important info. there.

Or, later on in life, who hasn't started one bazillion Google searches with a question about something you need to know, from how to carve a turkey to how to remodel a bathroom.

And possibly even more compelling, says Stopyra,

2. Asking questions enables you to be a more creative thinker

Consider the story of Joy Mangano (portrayed by Jennifer Lawrence in the film Joy), who questioned how mops were made and wound up inventing the self-wringing Miracle Mop. Or the creation of the Polaroid Instant Camera, which came about because the Polaroid founder's young daughter asked, "Why do we have to wait for a picture?" Innovation is all about challenging the existing way of doing things, and asking questions allows you to poke holes in assumptions in order to disrupt the status quo.

To have this type of breakthrough, forget the well-trodden cliché we first heard from our elementary school teachers: "There's no such thing as a stupid question." There are plenty of stupid questions—and we should ask them anyway. "Brilliant questions are often labeled as

stupid because they are so foundational,” [author Warren] Berger says. “When they’re asked, your first reaction might be, ‘That’s so obvious. Why are you asking something so basic?’ But, he says, I’ve found that most innovations can be traced back to a question that would have seemed very naive to people within an industry. It often begins with why: ‘Why are we doing things this way?’”

3. Asking questions helps you get to know someone.

Of course, this needs to be tempered with some discretion. Nobody likes to be machine-gunned by an uber-personal inquisition, but I will say that one of the best leading questions to ask a new acquaintance I learned from a lady with a bit of dementia who ate dinner with my mom in her assisted living residence. I sat at the dinner table, my mom introduced me to the ladies, and one of them looked me straight in the eye, practically boring a hole into my soul, and said, “So. What do you do for fun?”

It was brilliant, and started a lively conversation--and I adopted that strategy to get to know other people...before I learn what they do for a living, what their family is like, even where they live. I mean, who cares about that stuff when you could learn more about who they really are by knowing how they like to have fun?

It’s also an interesting way to interview surgeons. We’ll talk about that another day.

4. And speaking of fun, asking questions is a great way to have it.

In Episode 10, I give instructions for having a Tacky Party, and also one of my all-time favorite games: 100 Questions. To play this, everyone sits in chairs that form a circle. The leader asks a question that requires a yes or no answer. If you, as a player, must answer yes, you move one chair to the right. If you must answer no, you stay in your seat. That way, if you must answer no to a question (and stay put), and the person to your left must answer yes to the same question (and move to the right), that person ends up in your lap.

Sometimes, after a number of questions, many people end up in your lap. It is great, rollicking fun for people with hardy laps.

And just a little advice: Start off with boring questions, such as, "Are you female?" and "Is your toothpaste green?" This will dupe reluctant participants into thinking that the game is relatively nonthreatening. Once they are relaxed and enjoying themselves, you can throw in more interesting questions, such as, "Do your measurements total over 100?" and "Have you ever been in handcuffs?"

5. Finally, and most probably the best reason to ask questions: One good question can change your life.

In Episode 24, I told you a story--but I left out a crucial part about a trajectory-changing

question I once asked.

When I was in college, I had a crush on a boy who was my friend. I really wanted to go out with him, but he wasn't taking any of the hints I was dropping like bombs. I did, however, sense an opportunity that might never come again when my dorm of 800 women was sponsoring a dance. And when a dorm of 800 women sponsors a dance, the women have to do the asking.

This, I reasoned, would be a great chance to throw one last grenade.

It took me a month to work up the nerve to approach him, but one evening we were both on our way to a meeting, so I said to him, "Don't go away after this is over. I need to talk to you."

There. No escaping then.

When the meeting finally ended, we went back to his room in the grad house. By this time he could tell I was nervous and, being a rather cocky boy, he was actually enjoying it. He took the only chair in the room (leaving me no place to sit except the edge of the bed), put his feet up on the desk, folded his arms across his chest and said, "Now...what was it you wanted to ask me?"

This irritating display of bravado at first left me a little bumfuzzled, then it made me a little mad, but I quickly collected my courage and told myself, "Play it off, girl, just play it off."

So I said, "Buddy, I'm about to give you the opportunity of a lifetime."

"And this is?"

"To take me to a dance."

He actually had the nerve to laugh. And then to say, "Um. I'll have to think about it."

I am not even joking.

Two days later, he called and wanted to talk. "Oh brother," I thought. Why doesn't Mr. Overconfident just tell me "No" and get it over with? But I was curious, so I consented.

He picked me up, and we made a bunch of small talk, and finally, after about 30 minutes he got around to telling me he'd go to the dance with me--as if to say, "You poor thing. Every girl should have the chance to go to a dance in her life, so I will take pity on you."

"Oh brother," I thought. (I thought this a lot in my dealings with this guy.)

So it was set. We were going to this little gala together. But in order to maximize the evening's entertainment value, I needed to know one more crucial piece of information.

So I asked the question I'd been warned that women were NEVER supposed to ask:

"So how do you feel about me, anyway?"

I know. I can't believe I was that brave either.

But I was NOT into wasting time playing games. And I just wanted to know the ground rules so I could proceed from there with the most fun and joy. If he had said, "I think you have a nice personality, buddy," well, all righty. We're friends. We will go to this dance as friends, and have fun as friends. Period. FINE. Nothing lost. A fun evening. Yay.

But the truth is, that's not what he said. He sort of looked at the ground, in an "aw shucks" kind of way, and lowered his voice and all of a sudden, all that cocky disappeared and he got kind of sheepish, like Beaver Cleaver in the principal's office, and said, "Well, I don't think a guy could ask for more in a girl."

NOW we're cookin'!! NOW we go to the dance and know we can slow-dance un-awkwardly.

And eight weeks later he proposed.

So, of course, my question changed the trajectory of both our lives.

The right question could do the same for you.

For all these reasons and more, next month, January, will be all about questions here in this space--just one a week, but it'll be a great one that can lead you to joy, adventure, and God only knows what else.

And so, my friend

May you be unafraid of seeming ignorant,

May you be undaunted in your search for knowledge and creativity,

And may you be uninhibited in asking a brave, brazen, socially unacceptable question that just might change your life.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who might need a little more inquisition in their lives, I invite you to share this podcast with them, and subscribe yourself on iTunes, or wherever you listen to podcasts. Or you can go to my website at jillbaughan.com, click on a podcast episode and

sign up to receive episodes in your inbox. Just don't miss a single one, because I so look forward to being with you again soon.

Ask questions--a lot of them-- my friend. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTE:

Stopyra, Diane. "9 Reasons to Ask More Questions." *Forge*, November 2, 2018.
<https://forge.medium.com/9-reasons-to-ask-more-questions-43fb61dbf73f>