

The Right Questions

By
Debbie Ford

Debbie Ford is the founder of the Ford Institute for Integrative Coaching and says her mission is to “inspire humanity to lead fully integrated lives.” Her books¹ have been translated into 22 languages. She has an active website² and a tape series plus a biweekly coaching newsletter called The Right Questions in Action. The institute certifies Integrative Coaches™.

Ford begins by examining the numerous choices we make in our lives. Large and small, short-term and long-term, our choices dictate the quality of our lives. Our reality is based on thousands of decisions we have made. She says “the bad news is that we are solely responsible for the condition of our lives. The very good news is that we and we alone have the power to change our lives, and we can choose to do so at any moment.”

The Right Questions are offered as a guide to lead to new choices and new actions in order to create the life you desire. She describes them as deceptively simple, but incredibly powerful. They are

1. *Will this choice propel me toward an inspiring future or will it keep me stuck in the past?*
2. *Will this choice bring me long-term fulfillment or will it bring me short-term gratification?*
3. *Am I standing in my power or am I trying to please another?*
4. *Am I looking for what's right or am I looking for what's wrong?*
5. *Will this choice add to my life force or will it rob me of my energy?*
6. *Will I use this situation as a catalyst to grow and evolve or will I use it to beat myself up?*
7. *Does this choice empower me or does it disempower me?*
8. *Is this an act of self-love or is it an act of self-sabotage?*
9. *Is this an act of faith or is it an act of fear?*

¹ The Dark Side of the Light Chasers, The Spiritual Divorce, and The Secret of the Shadow

² www.debbieford.com

10. Am I choosing from my divinity or am I choosing from my humanity?

Ford explains her experience at a retreat led by Ammachi, an Indian woman, where she learned that we each have “an internal flame that is the keeper of our life force.” Our choices either feed the flame or dampen it. She has long lists of things that dim your light and things that make your flame roar. Here are a few:

Choices That Dim Your Light

Being around people who criticize you and can't see your magnificence
“Should”s
“Have to”s
Trying to be nice
Judging yourself and others
Looking to others to make you happy
Ignoring your deepest desires
Overspending, overeating, overindulging
Trying to be someone you are not
Not having enough alone time

Choices That Make Your Fire Roar

Noticing what you have done well
Honoring your word
Telling others how much they mean to you
Taking responsibility
Looking for what's good
Listening to others from your heart
Forgiving
Empowering those around you
Creating a powerful support system
Allowing others to contribute to you
Going after your dreams

Ford says that most of us are on “auto pilot” as we fall into automatic, repetitive cycles, doing whatever seems easiest at the time. Fully conscious choices may be few and far between. But that must be our goal if we are to achieve the future we desire. First we need to create a vision or road map that will lead us, and then, we need to consult it everyday. She suggests a daily silent meditation telling yourself that you can achieve your dreams and thinking about the opportunities to make choices that will fulfill them.

As choices come up, we need to ask The Right Questions. Ford says new choices can be uncomfortable and recommends “by-passing our intellect”

because we are tempted to rationalize everything. We should also by-pass our emotions because they fluctuate too much. The Right Questions look at facts. You don't have to "feel good enough, smart enough, or deserving enough" to get the right answer.

We would not be human if we did not make some wrong turns on our journey. Ford advises to "pullover, look at your map and get back on track." She says not to "spend five years beating yourself up."

Our lives are always aligned with our deepest commitments, many times unconscious. "Our underlying commitments are responsible for the discrepancy between what we say we want and what we're actually experiencing."

Ford offers a personal dilemma that will sound familiar. She loves a coffee drink, with some added protein powder that contains sugar. She is trying to avoid caffeine and sugar but her intellect says "its only one coffee drink" and her emotions say "it makes me feel so cared for." But one of The Right Questions is, "Is this a choice of self-love or self-sabotage?" The underlying commitment here is the "quick fix" comfort that certain foods give. This underlying commitment must be exposed. Left unexamined, it will keep us stuck in the past. Asking The Right Questions helps you regain power over your life. They wake you up and inspire you.

1. Will this choice propel me toward an inspiring future or will it keep me stuck in the past?

The need for safety, security, and predictability keeps us tied to the past. Ford gives us two examples of how people deal with this issue. Marcus is a physical trainer who wants to be an actor. While he dabbles in theater, he continues to add clients and can't seem to break away from the financial comfort of being a trainer. On the other hand, Bill is a corporate executive who wants to contribute more to the community. He picks a nonprofit organization whose "sole mission was to transform people's lives" and begins volunteering for them. He gradually puts more and more of his time into the organization and eventually proposes a full-time position for himself and is able to make the switch.

2. Will this choice bring me long-term fulfillment or short-term gratification?

Choices can sneak up on us (impulses, cravings) and can rob us of long-term fulfillment. An obvious example is the craving for a hot fudge sundae right after you have decided to diet. Another is wanting to reward yourself with a shopping spree when you've just paid off your credit card debt. "What looks like comfort in the moment is in reality a form of self-punishment." Indulging occasionally is normal. It is not always a bad decision, but using the questions "allows you to give up something you want for something you want more."

3. Am I standing in my power or am I trying to please another?

We often find it uncomfortable to “stand in our power” because it means confrontation. Ford gives a personal example of hiring a friend as an architect and failing to check references, failing to have an attorney look at the contract, etc. Then she did not know how to handle her gradual loss of confidence in him. There are always appropriate times to defer to another’s wishes, but “obligations,” “should”s, and guilt can become dictators of our actions. “We can’t really take care of another if we do not first care for ourselves.”

4. Am I looking at what’s right or am I looking at what’s wrong?

Switching perspectives is a typical coaching strategy. Whether your focus is on what’s right is one of the most important questions we ask ourselves. Even Abraham Lincoln said, “we are only as happy as we make up our minds to be.”

5. Will this choice add to my life force or will it rob me of my energy?

Smoking, taking drugs, and drinking, are obvious ways to rob you of your energy, but there are many others, such as not keeping personal commitments, constantly reprimanding yourself, dwelling on events or circumstances that you cannot change, etc. “Forgiveness [of yourself and others] is the key to reclaiming a life force locked in past hurt.”

6. Will I use this situation as a catalyst to grow and evolve or will I use it to beat myself up?

There is an old saying that “life is a teacher to the wise man and an enemy to the fool.” “Most of us don’t need anyone to punish us because we are constantly punishing ourselves.” If we decide to use difficulties to better understand ourselves, “we make the jump from helplessness to power.”

7. Does this Choice empower me or does it disempower me?

Another way to ask this question is “Does this choice leave me feeling strong or weak?” There is a sign on Ford’s desk “Are You Over Your Skis?” Although I’ve only been on skis a few times, I understand that your weight must be over the skis, leaning forward, against the natural inclination to lean backwards. One of the best ways to shift our destinies is to shift our thoughts. For most of us, an overwhelming number of our thoughts are negative. A negative internal dialogue can totally disempower you. As Ford says “Stop listening.” “Empowerment is free, it costs nothing. It’s a choice that only you can make.”

8. Is this an act of self-love or is it an act of self-sabotage?

“When we love ourselves, we accept ourselves as a brilliant piece of architecture.” We should not be scared to death that others don’t like us. We should not compare ourselves with others. We should not listen to negative inner dialogue or beat ourselves up or think of “should”s all the time. Self-esteem comes from “little loving choices we make every day,” plus telling ourselves how important we are, what a good person we are, and that we deserve to take care of ourselves.

9. Is this an act of faith or is this an act of fear?

Fears, such as fear of the unknown, not having enough, abandonment, rejection, etc. keep us rooted in the past. On the other hand, faith offers us hope and opportunity. “Fear shuts us down, while faith opens us up.”

10. Am I choosing from my divinity or am I choosing from my humanity?

Ford is quick to say that humanity is not necessarily wrong, but consideration for the greater good gives us much broader choices. Divinity may mean God to some, and to others, the universe, love, or the highest aspect of yourself. Choosing your divinity means holding yourself to higher standards and being willing to give up your position.

Living with the answers

“An extraordinary person is an ordinary person who makes extraordinary choices.” Ford encourages everyone to get a coach or a support group to be your cheering squad. She says she heard someone say, “No one gets to the Olympics without a coach, so why would you try to win your best life without one?”

Conclusion

The fact that this report is so long is a testament to my opinion of the tremendous value of the book. I feel inspired and challenged by asking The Right Questions.

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