

Empowering-Questions.com
Report

New Mid-Year, New You

**How To Use Empowering Questions To
Give Yourself A New Year Boost – Even If
It's The Middle Of July**

By
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<http://www.empowering-questions.com>

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Foreword

Welcome to the New Mid-Year, New You report. Here, you'll find a process I go through which I call my "New Year Review" – even though I do it at different times each year, but NEVER during the actual New Year holidays (you'll learn why later).

As you are reading this, you might already be aware of the power of questions to help you achieve more in life.

If not, please subscribe to the free email course available at <http://www.empowering-questions.com> - there you'll learn about the idea of empowering questions, and then you can come back here to learn about the specific questions that I recommend for your annual review.

Some Background

Traditionally, I have set aside a week for myself once per year, when I take myself away from the hustle and bustle of every day life. I take myself somewhere isolated, and forego the use of a car, a phone, a TV, a PC, the internet, and most of the other items that can lead me so easily into the 'real world'.

I do sometimes take some favourite books, and music, and some "feel good" DVDs (I watch these, but not normal TV programs), and mementos of good times. But I use these rarely. Sometimes I find that I've spent so long asking and answering questions, that I need a break. And so I pull out a book, CD, or DVD, and relax, letting my brain work away in the background. Then I come back to the questions

These questions help to take stock of where I've come from, and where I'm headed. As mentioned in lesson 1a, I might not necessarily do this at the start of a new calendar year, but nevertheless this process does start a new personal year - a period of renewed energy and enthusiasm for my dreams and desires.

In fact, I normally avoid doing this at New Year. Why? Well, think about the typical New Year celebration. We run around frantically trying to think of something to do for a New Year's Resolution, and normally pluck one out of thin air.

- We don't often think about whether we actually want to do it, instead picking an easy option - to lose weight, to save more, to stop smoking, to be a better person.
- We don't think about the long-term impact or it's impact on other aspects of our life. So we decide to make this year the year we focus on our career, and three months later our home life is falling apart.
- We don't pick resolutions from our core values, priorities, and principles. We decide that we're going to go work in the capital, despite the fact that one of the most important things in our life is to be able to for frequent long walks in the country.

- We pick resolutions that are not well defined. So we decide to be a better person, with no real idea of the behaviours we'll be doing differently, and **how** they'll be different, and so we fail three minutes later because we have no specific objectives.
- We pick goals without thinking about our capabilities. For example, we might decide we're going to run three marathons this year, without thinking about how long it (in general) takes to train and how much we actually have to train in each evening.

On top of that, what do other people expect when you make grand statements about your New Year resolutions? Well, they expect you to fail fantastically, a whole week later.

It doesn't even help if you don't call them New Year Resolutions. If you make sudden changes around New Year, everyone will consider it a resolution, and wait for the reversal of direction.

So we end up doing the wrong thing, for the wrong reasons, and with no support from friends and family.

Now do you understand why I don't do the review at New Year?

Another key point: You might not have time to spend a few days doing this. Heck, you might not even want to spend that much time. But certainly set aside a few hours to be by yourself, and just ask questions, on a regular basis, every year or thereabouts.

You might be surprised at the answers...

So, let's move on to the questions themselves. The report is split into two sections: questions to review last year, and questions to preview next year.

Hint: **keep a pen and paper handy**. Often, whilst answering a question about last year, I often think of things I want to put into my plan for next year, even though the question

is not mentioning next year. If you find the same, make a note and come back to it later, then carry immediately on with the question you're answering, to get the most from it.

"May the best of last year be the worst of next."
- Paul Dickson

Questions About The Past Year

One caveat: Although these questions are aimed at discovering or looking into things about last year, they might also reference next year. So make a note of things where you're asked to think about next year, so that when you answer the questions that are specifically about next year, you can still remember the impact of the "previous year" questions.

What goals did I have this year? Which ones have I achieved? What do I think and how do I feel about that? What can I learn from this?

What is important here is not what you have actually achieved, completed, or otherwise done. After all, from year to year, we all have different levels of success. Sometimes we try hard and achieve lots. Other times we try hard and create or deliver very little. Other times we just want to sit back and coast for a while, enjoying some quiet time. We all have different goals, abilities, desires, and resources, both compared to other people as well as compared to ourselves at other points in our lives.

So what **is** important here is the difference between **what you wanted to do this year** and **what you have actually achieved**. It's not about what you've done that's important. It's how well you met your plans. And equally as important is how you feel about that, and what you can learn from it.

Did you set goals that were too high and you felt they were impossible to achieve? Did you set them too low and hence lose interest? Did you try to do too much, without giving yourself some slack time to deal with unforeseen problems and opportunities?

If you feel as though you honestly could have done more, then bear this in mind when you plan next year. I don't mean that you should fill every waking moment with "things do be done". On the contrary, I

think it's extremely important that we take time out to just enjoy what we've got, and to see what life brings us if we just take our foot off the gas for a while. But if you look back and wish that maybe you had tried to accomplish a little more, then that's an important lesson to bear in mind when you plan the next year.

Alternatively, if you've not done what you *set out to do*, but honestly feel as though you've done well nevertheless, then give yourself a pat on the back for your efforts, instead of automatically beating yourself up because you've "failed" to achieve all your goals.

Perhaps you did a lot more things last year that were not in your plan for the year. Maybe some disasters happened that you had to handle, and this had a knock-on effect on your plans. The point here is to objectively assess the year, rather than simply comparing your year's plan and the actual results.

What goals haven't I achieved? What prevented me from achieving them? What do I think and how do I feel about that? What can I learn from this?

Now, obviously it's important to think about what you have achieved, as we did in the last question, but many people don't look at the opposite: at what they have **not** achieved. Many people avoid this because they think it is focusing on the negative and on failure, and "that is a bad thing".

I would disagree – it's not a bad thing **as long as it's done wisely**.

And the way to add wisdom to something is to learn something positive from it.

Before we continue, remember that some people **only** look at the things they failed to do, ignoring what they have done. Which is why I asked what you have achieved first – to get yourself into a positive mood to begin with!

Let me give you an example: let's say Sarah has been reviewing her year, and realizes that, yes, another year has gone by when she has not run that marathon race. Every year, she sets a goal to run the

race, and every year in January she starts running every day. But then things get in the way, and by the end of February she's just about given up on the plan.

When she realises this, she feels bad, feels like a failure, feels like she's let herself down again. And then, when New Year comes around again, there is that marathon again, staring her in the face. So she feels guilty about not sticking to her plans from last year, and sticks it back on the list for next year.

This is not useful, not productive, and not pleasant.

But this year, it's different. A couple of days later, Sarah goes out for a run, stops suddenly, and asks herself: "Why the hell am I doing this **again?**"

And that's where the wisdom comes in...

Well, maybe. We know by now that Sarah could be asking better questions, more empowering questions - but at least it's a start!

You do know that, right? :-)

And that's where this trio of questions comes in. They focus on what you have **not** achieved, and what that means, and helping you to learn from it. If you can learn something new from it, then you will be more likely to do something different next year.

Now, you might learn something that helps you to make this year the year that you **finally** accomplish this goal!

Or you might learn that the goal is not right for you at the moment. Maybe you set it for one of the following reasons:

- To keep up with your friends' achievements
- To impress your friends
- Because you'll consider yourself a quitter if you just cross it off the list.
- Because everyone else is doing it
- To bring something into your life that was missing originally, but is present now (eg, to attract a partner, but then you met someone through another means)

- To meet your parents' desires for you

Whatever the reason, if you feel that it's right to drop this goal, then ***do it!*** You will free up a lot of energy for the goals that you wholeheartedly **want** to achieve.

And if you decide to keep this goal, you need to learn something from last year, something that stopped you or preventing you from achieving it. Then tackle that hindrance and you will find it easier to accomplish the goal this year. Finally :-)

And that's the aim of some of the questions in this report, and in the goal-setting lesson which is available through Empowering-Questions.com membership.

What goals have I consciously de-prioritised over the year? How did they come to be less important? What can I learn there?

Sometimes, during the course of a year, things can occur which make a goal less important than it was at the start of the year. Again, similar to "not achieving your goals by the end of the year" which we looked at in the last question, this can be approached in two ways:

- The first type of question: ***I'm so useless! How comes I never complete anything?***
or
- The second type: ***What changed? What can I learn? Did I de-prioritise because something more important came up, or because something urgent came up?***

As this is a report about empowering questions, let's go with the second type. ☺

Remember, changing the importance of a goal is not a weakness or failure – unless you do it without a reason. Or for the wrong reason -

which means for a reason that does not meet with your personal values, priorities, and principles.

Personally, as long as the change is in accordance with your most deeply held values, beliefs, and principles, I personally don't see an issue with changing the priorities of your goals. After all, life is anything but predictable :-)

Let's suppose at the start of the year you set out to buy your dream sports car at last, but mid-way through you found you were working too hard and your health, family, social life, and personal interests were suffering. So you decide to drop the dream car plan for this year. That's OK - you've learned that your health is more important than your car, and that can help to make health-related goals more important next year.

Plus of course, you can take the extra income you've earned this year and put it to one side. Then next year, you can work a bit harder than usual - but not enough to impact your health or family - and get that car next year or the year after.

However, if you couldn't think of a reason why you stopped going for that car (ie, there was no impact on health, family, etc), then maybe you should take a look at what happened, and try to learn something. ***Something*** must have changed mid-way through the year. It's just a question of paying enough attention so that you can notice it and learn from it.

What goals have I consciously made more important over the year? How did they come to be more important? What can I learn there?

And following on from the last question, goals can also become **more** important during the year. Again, it doesn't matter in the long term that the priority changed - what matters is what caused it to change, and what you can learn from it.

But – if you have changed the priority in such a way that it conflicts with your most deeply held values (for example, making it more of a priority to get that sports car, despite the impact on your health, which is normally very important to you), then it would be worth spending some time thinking about the impact of this. Will you be able to maintain focus on this newly-prioritized goal if it conflicts with your values? Is there a way you can change the goal, keeping its key elements, but making it more inline with your values?

Hint: Notice that last question. "Is there a way to X but still keeping it Y?" That type of question is great when you have two priorities or options that are mutually exclusive, and want to keep the benefit of both of them.

What have I learned this year?

One of the key things you can do to develop yourself is to learn from things that have happened, good and bad. Not everything you've learned over the year stems from a goal that you did or didn't achieve, or which you re-prioritised. Sometimes, stuff just happens. You deal with it. You move on. Give yourself this opportunity to review the whole year and learn from your successes, your mistakes, and your experiences.

Some of the things you learn will be practical ("Don't spend what you haven't earned yet"). Some will be more spiritual or psychological ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"). Some will be about your career ("Always remember to do a project review after the project is complete"). Some will be about family ("Keep in touch with your loved ones on a regular basis"). And so on.

Sometimes you'll find that one year seems to result in a lot of learning about one topic, and yet that topic never arises again. I remember one year when I learned a lot about managing my finances on day-to-day basis, as a result of a whole year of bad planning, over-spending, financial problems, unexpected bills

to pay, sudden drops of income etc. As a result, I learned a lot about my attitude to money, about my financial habits, about my priorities in life, etc.

This resulted in a lot of changes in my attitude and behaviours (eg, paying all my regular bills out of one account that has the same money going into it and out of it each month, and all my unpredictable spending out of a totally different account that I monitor on a daily basis).

And as a result, the next time I did a yearly review, I did not have the same sorts of problems. Instead I learned things in other areas of my life, areas I'd not paid attention to whilst I was sorting out my financial status.

And I'm sure that I'll forget some of those financial lessons in a few years time, and I'll have another year where I'm painfully reminded of them :-)

But that's the nature of life. We can't be perfect in all areas of our life all the time. It's just not possible. But what we can hope to do is to get some sense of order and balance in most areas, so that when everything hits the fan, we've got enough time and enough energy to deal with problems as they occur, or to take advantage of new opportunities

How have I changed for the better this year? How has my life improved?

Obviously, throughout the year, things happen that we didn't plan for. Sometimes they are good, sometimes they are bad. Whichever they are, we change over the course of the year, and we also change as a result of conscious, planned improvement (taking classes in something, applying ourselves to going to the gym, etc)

Taking stock of how you've changed for the better can help you to look at the last year in a positive light, even if bits of it have been worse than you planned or wanted. Yes, that big old problem that surfaced in March might be the very thing that makes you glad to see the end of last year, but if you changed for the better – and for the long-term – as a result of it, then it's good to take this opportunity to step back and appreciate the change.

Plus, by thinking about this year in a more positive manner, you'll begin to feel better about yourself and about life, and that is surely a good thing.

Even if last year was fantastic in terms of what you achieved, with no major problems, still ask this question – it'll add an extra layer of positive thinking about the last year to your review!

What am I happy / sad / excited / pleased / grateful / proud about from last year?

This is not a multiple choice question. It's an "all of the above" question. Ask yourself the same question, adding each of these emotions in turn. "What am I happy about? ... *(Pause for some answers)* ... What am I sad about? ... *(Pause for some answers)*..." and so on.

Again, this is another question that can help put you in a positive mood. In fact, several different moods, perhaps ones that you don't feel very often (when was the last time you were truly grateful for something?)

Even the "what am I sad about?" can help, even though it might put you in a bit of a negative mood (which is why excited, pleased, grateful, and proud come later). If you're sad about something, it typically means things like:

- o You lost someone or something valuable to you
- o You let down yourself or someone important to you

- o Something didn't turn out how you wanted, expected, or hope it to

Each of those situations gives you something to learn from, even if it's just to treasure the people around you now, whilst you're still together. But in many cases, feeling sad about something will give you an indication of something that you can change later.

This is quite a wide open question, but it's specifically designed that way. By asking yourself this range of questions, you'll remember different events, memories, lessons learned, and decisions made throughout the year. Some of them you'll have forgotten as time went by, and questions like these can help to bring them back to your attention. Then, you can use the other New Year questions to get the most from those once-forgotten situations.

I mentioned in Lesson 1a that one of the ways questions work is by helping you pay attention to things that you were ignoring before. This set of questions is specifically intended to achieve this end result. By bringing your attention to those events and situations that you'd forgotten as the year progressed, you bring those events to the front of your mind. Then they are suitable fodder for the questions that are coming up.

Oh, and by the way, feel free to insert your own emotion names in here. Perhaps you like feeling emotions and using words like *jubilant*, *passionate*, *delighted*, *thrilled*. Use them as well, as they are more personal to you.

***If I could have this year over again, what would I do differently?
What would I do exactly the same?***

I call this "**The Groundhog Question**".

In case you've not seen the classic film "Groundhog Day", it's about a man who finds himself living the same day over and over again, and how he tries different things to achieve his aim, learning from the previous day each time.

OK, so you can't literally live last year over and over, but at least you could think about what you could have done differently, and how you might use that to influence your plans for the next year.

Obviously, you can't possibly know what's going to happen next year, so sometimes the best answer to this type of question is something that can be applied fairly generically. Examples might include trying to stick more to a certain principle, to cut back on the number of cakes you eat on a daily basis, to pay attention to a certain matter more actively.

What were the highlights of this year? What made them the highlights?

This lesson helps to highlight some of the things that are important to you. Once you know what they are, work out what MADE them highlights. Then, once you know that, you might want to take some steps to create more events for the next year that have the same qualities.

For example, last year, one of my highlights was a moment when I was showing my young son how to clip two clothes pegs together. He tried to copy me, and found it hard. But with some encouragement, he eventually got it, and he threw himself at me in excitement, giving me a big hug. I felt so proud of him, and so pleased for him.

And when I asked myself this question, I realised I wanted more of this, because it made me realise just how important it was to me that my son attempt (and re-attempt, and re-attempt...) new things, and builds his self-confidence. I wasn't self-confident as a child, so it's doubly important to me that my son is.

So when it came to thinking through the "next year" questions, I kept coming back to this event, and committed to doing similar things in future.

By asking, "What made them highlights?" you are making a point of paying attention to the core components of that event that made it stand out, rather than the detail. And that makes it easier to replicate similar events in future.

For example, I resolved to specifically take one thing my son couldn't do, and do my best to teach him how to do it, each weekend. I didn't get lost in the detail of "playing with clothes pegs" or even "playing with physical things". Instead, I took the larger idea of "teaching my son new things that he can't quite do at the moment", and ran with that. That gave me plenty of opportunities to teach him some letters he doesn't know yet, another number to count up to, the names of new objects, a physical skill, how to pronounce a word more accurately, how to recognize a new colour, how to say a brand new word, and so on.

What did I learn from the low points of this year? How did I recover from them / how can I recover from them?

Some people try to forget the low points of their lives. But personally speaking, those are the points that teach me so much about:

- Who I am
- What's important to me
- What I'm capable of (both in a bad way and a good way)
- What I'm willing to stand for

In other words, they make me who I am. And I know I'm not alone in this: many people say the same. The key point is to learn from those events, and not dwell too much on any disempowering emotions. Some of those emotions are useful. For example, anger can often give you the drive to see something through to completion. But if you are consumed by anger, to the point where you obsess about some past event and never actually learn from it and move on... Well, I think that's a bad place to be in.

So take care to learn only what's useful, and start to let go of the components of that event that are no longer useful. And remember to re-visit events later, and do what you need to let go of things about it that have lost their usefulness in the meantime.

What did I do last year that I had not planned for?

I'm sure we've all had times when we've had some social event planned to the nth degree, and it's been... mediocre. And other times, we've met up with friends on a spur-of-the-moment basis, and had a night out that stays with us for years to come.

Sometimes, things we plan just don't work out. And things we don't plan, work out just fine. Take a few moments now to think about things that you had not planned for, and which you did. That's a deliberately vague question, but I think it's a useful one, since like other questions it's wide open for you to think of things that are unique to your life.

What new relationships have I made? How have I strengthened existing relationships?

It's said that the people we let into our lives have a much greater impact than most people give credit for. For example, in most of the "abundance mentality" books, they advise you not to associate too much with people who have a very negative approach to life, as their attitude can rub off on you.

I think this is true, but it's not limited to abundance mentality or other personal development ideas.

The people I mix with define:

- The type of food I eat when I eat out (and my health in general)
 - Where I go to socialise
 - Where I go for days out (and my family life in general)
 - How often we visit each other and what we do when we visit
 - How much I enjoy my work (and my career in general)
-

- What new ideas, interests, and activities I'm exposed to - or not exposed to

So by being careful about the people I let into my life and those I don't, I can have a dramatic influence on virtually every aspect of my life.

Also, notice this is a two-part question: the first is about new relationships; the other is about existing relationships.

Over the past few years, most of my social life has revolved around either my family or three close friends. Unfortunately, when I became a dad, my time for mixing with my friends was dramatically curtailed, and I started to miss out on a lot of the things that we'd traditionally done together, with some impact on the closeness of the friendships. Then one of them emigrated. And another one was planning on going for some serious traveling for (I thought at the time) 6 months, and I suspected he either might not come back, or might only come back to set things up to emigrate also. Then the third one was reviewing his life/career, and looking at moving either to a different part of the country, or also emigrating. When I realised this, I started to actively seek out opportunities to strengthen the relationship with the two that were still in the country, as I would soon have no friends left!

And I'm glad I did. The third one decided to stay in the area (at least for now!). And the second is travelling as I write this, but only for 3 months, and has no real intention of emigrating. But I'm now seeing more of them than I had been for some time, and feel like the old friendships are back on track.

So, pay attention to your relationships - romantic, familial, friendships, and work-based - to make sure they are heading in the direction you want them to.

What new beliefs have I developed? What old beliefs have I discarded? What beliefs have I strengthened or weakened?

"Belief" is a funny word to be using here, and one that doesn't mean "religion". Think of it as more to do with assumptions about how the world works, or what people are like, or our capabilities, and similar somewhat-vague, non-concrete "operating principles" that we run our life on. For example, I believe that people are generally trustworthy, unless proven otherwise. What differences do you think that creates in the way I treat people, compared to one of my friends, who believes that people are not trustworthy, unless proven otherwise?

Of course, there are always people whom I assume are trustworthy, but they aren't. The same applied to my friend, but in reverse. What we believe or don't believe in this situation has no impact on the actual truth. But it has a **massive** impact on what we think, feel, and do.

Also, our beliefs change over time:

- I used to believe in fairies, Father Christmas, and vampires - now I don't.
- Over time, I've established a solid belief that I do well in interviews, since any job I've applied for where I've actually got the interview, I've been offered - even when I wasn't obviously a suitable candidate. Of course, there have been jobs I've applied for where I have not got the interview in the first place, but they are not a factor on my belief about my interview performance.

So it's important to think about how your beliefs have changed over time - and how they'll impact your life in the future.

What bodies of knowledge have I encountered or discovered last year? How did this affect my life?

Some people thrive in an environment where they are continually learning new things. Some people like to learn something new and then have time to put it into practice or have some stability before they learn the next thing. Other people hate being in situations where they don't already know everything there is to know about it. We all have different levels of tolerance for learning new things. But I think it's important to sit back on a regular basis and review what you've learned, and how it impacted your life. Or even to think about bodies of knowledge, disciplines, skills, or other ways of grouping knowledge that you encountered, but haven't actually learned.

For example, in my new day job, I've come across structured methods of doing a type of work that I've previously done in an unstructured (although experienced) manner. I've not yet taught myself those methods, but at least I know they exist, what they're called, and where to start looking if I want to learn them.

I've also taught myself some technical aspects of working with Microsoft Word, which I've dabbled in before, but never really fully utilised. As a result, I've been able to automate a process at work that used to take 1-2 hours, and now takes about 3 minutes. OK, it took me a good 2 days to write the code, but if every time we do this piece of work it saves 2 hours, it will only take 8 lots of that work before we're even, and after that we're saving a huge chunk of time every time.

And next time I run through my annual review, these two bodies of knowledge will come to mind. Maybe I'll decide to formally learn the structured method, and to use the Word automation in other pieces of work. Who knows? The important point is that I won't just forget the skills. I'll be in a position to build on them even more next year. And that - I believe - is what personal development is about: taking the past, building on it, and creating a better future.

What have I achieved this year towards my mission?

"Mission" or "mission statement" is one of those things that either get people excited or make them groan in dismay.

I can't work out where I stand on this one. Usually (particularly at work) I groan. But personally, I like the idea of a personal mission. The only caveat I add is that it might change over time, whereas most personal development writers seem to imply that you have one and only one mission, and it lasts your whole life. The way I think about a mission is that it's the one thing that drives virtually every aspect of your life, for a given period of time (and a long period, at that).

In my case, it's raising my son to be a healthy, mature, stable young man. He's the reason I'm doing the work that I do. He's the

reason we live where we live (to increase our chances of getting him into a good school). He's the reason I wake up earlier in the morning than I'd like to. He's the reason I run my own business outside of my day job. And so on. Eventually, he'll leave home - or maybe be at home but mature enough to fend for himself - and my mission will change. He'll still be around, and still be extremely important, but he won't be the primary motivator in my life.

What will I do then? First, I'll have to decide a new mission. And one way to get started on that is to take every opportunity I can to lay in bed for longer in the mornings :-)

So if you have a sense of your personal mission, have a think during your annual review about how well you're doing towards living that mission. Maybe you've done nothing towards it. Maybe you've done nothing BUT work towards it. Either way, this question gently reminds you that you have a mission, and that maybe over the next year, you should think about specifying certain things that you actively want to do towards your mission. Of course, that's assuming that you're aware of having one.

What sentence, phrase, or motto could I use to sum up last year? How does that compare to the one I started out with? (if applicable)

So, what single sentence could sum up last year? By summarizing the year in this way, it can help you to get a good idea of how you found last year, and how that makes you feel. That single sentence could be inspiring ... or damning! But be careful not to let one recent event - good or bad - overshadow the rest of the year. If over the last two months you've done awful at something important to you, but the prior 10 months you'd been doing really well, don't forget those 10 months.

This is one of those wide-open questions. It has no real purpose other than to make you think about last year in a slightly different way to what you're used to. By thinking differently in this way, you can end up with a much more useful response when you think about the last year. It's kind of like the Re-meaning

Process: you end up with so many different ways of thinking about last year, that you get to pick the ones that help you most in living your life over the next year.

If you hadn't guessed, there is a question in the "next year" section about living by a sentence, motto, or phrase next year. So the second question here refers to your last annual review, if you did it.

What did last year mean to the people I share my life with?

As well as reviewing your own experiences of last year, think about what last year meant to your family, close friends, and so on. Perhaps they had a bad year and you'd like to consider that in your plans for next year, by working with them on some project to help them move on. Perhaps they had a great year, and you'd like to do something to celebrate that with them.

Although it might seem odd to review someone else's year when reviewing your own, we don't live in isolation, so the views of other people on the last year do have an impact on us, and vice versa. So, it's important to think about that interaction whilst doing your annual review.

What choice points did I encounter last year? What values/criteria made me choose the way I did? What more useful choice could I have made? What might have happened if I had chosen another way?

"Choice point" is simply a way of saying that you found yourself having to make a decision about a path to follow. Do you take a new job or stay with the old one? Do you make a commitment with that new partner, keep on "seeing how it goes", or call it off? And so on.

If you review the last year, have a think about the choice points you encountered, and what you chose to do. (By the way "doing nothing" is also a choice that you might have made). What made you choose what you chose rather than one of the other options? By examining

what you choose, you can clarify what your values are, and which values are more important than others.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can often see things that we could have done at each choice point, but didn't. Don't beat yourself up about that - you made the best choice that you could at that time. But by looking at each choice point, and whether you could have made a more useful choice, you will make it more likely that you'll make a useful choice should a similar situation rise in future.

What opportunities did I miss out on last year? What prevented me from taking them?

When you look back over the last year and see some opportunities that you might have taken, but didn't, you can learn an awful lot about yourself: Did you avoid asking that person out on a date because you were afraid that might laugh at you? Did you miss out on a career progression because you decided the amount of time away from your family was too much? Did you start gain weight more because you felt you were working too hard and started comfort-eating?

Notice, what you learn about yourself is neither good nor bad. If you were afraid of something, that's not necessarily bad. If you rejected an opportunity because you realised something else was more important, that's not necessarily good.

What's important here is what you learn, and then how you respond to that. Pay attention to the principle that lead you to make that decision. There will be times in the future where that principle will come in useful again, either as a guideline on what to do, or on what NOT to do.

In what direction is my life taking me, judging by last year? Where will that direction take me in 5, 10, 20 years time? Is that where I want to be?

Sometimes it is not the sudden changes that most impact our lives, but the things that change gradually, under our nose, without us

noticing. Have you ever said to a parent "My, hasn't little Johnny grown up!", and they said they hadn't noticed? That's because the constant exposure they have to their child makes them not notice the overall trend.

"It's not where you are that counts, it's the direction you're heading in."

- Andrew Peacock

Kaizen is a Japanese concept meaning consistent improvement, things getting a little better each day, week or month. It's similar to the idea of compound interest in financial terms - by adding to something, and adding to that, and adding to that, it begins to build up at an exponential rate. The question is: ***is the trend in your life positive, or negative?***

What goals did I achieve last year that I had not set out to do? What can I learn from them? How did they differ from the goals that I planned to achieve and yet didn't (if any)?

Similar to the question above about missed opportunities, you can learn an awful lot about yourself, your values, your principles, your priorities, and your deep-seated desires and fears, just by thinking about the goals that you set out to achieve, and didn't achieve, versus those that you didn't set out to do but did achieve. Now, I know they can't really be called "goals" if you didn't set out to achieve them, but I'm sure there are times when you achieved something significant by just getting on with things, without setting a goal.

For example, I've dramatically improved my ability to speak French (well, dramatic enough to manage simple conversations when I go on holiday there later in the day) just by getting some language lesson DVDs to play in the car whilst I commute to and from work. I didn't set out with a goal to improve my

French - I just bought the pack, almost on a whim.

By knowing what you do (even when you don't plan to) and what you don't do (even when you plan to) you can get a VERY clear idea of where your natural motivation lies. Then, when you decide to do set goals in future, you can either:

1. Find ways to make all your goals fit your natural motivation method, or
2. Find ways to make distractions fit your natural un-motivation method - and so make it easier to accomplish your goals

What have I started but not finished last year? What lead to me not finishing?

Think for a moment about some of the things you started last year but didn't finish, and the reasons you didn't finish. There are a few broad categories that these reasons fall into:

1. Change of priorities

This is where you consciously decided the project you started last year became less important at some point. For example, when I became a dad, lots of things became de-prioritised to allow time for spending time with my son, catching up on sleep, etc.

2. Distractions

This is where you did not consciously change priorities, but just "got caught up in things". Something came along that seemed more exciting, important, or otherwise captured your attention and your energy, and you let other things drop. All without making a deliberate choice.

3. Not enough time

Another excuse is that you just plain ran out of time. You might have underestimated how long the project would take, or overestimated how much time you could spare each week to work on it. Either way, you worked hard at it, but ran out of time.

By looking at the project you didn't finish, and what lead to you not finishing, you'll learn something useful for the future:

- If they tended to fall within the distractions category, you'll need to find some way to catch yourself either just before you get distracted, or on a regular basis just in case you've already gotten distracted and hadn't noticed.

One good tool for doing this is a weekly review, where you sit down for a while and review what your long term plans are, what happened last week, and what's planned for next week. This review doesn't need to be long - it can be a few minutes, or a couple of hours, depending on what suits your time-allowance and your preferred way of working.

Of course, we'll cover a full set of questions to use during a weekly review in the Empowering-Questions.com lessons, to help on on your way. Plus, lesson number 2 is a sample of questions on all the topics covered in the full set of Empowering-Questions.com lessons, so you'll get a quick taster of the types of questions I provide for your weekly reviews.

- If most of your reasons fall within the "not enough time", then next year, you'll know to allow more time next year.
 - If most of them fall within the "change of priorities" category, that probably means you had something major happen last year that impacted your whole life. However, it could also mean that you kept changing your mind about what your priorities are. If that's the case, try to keep your most important goals, values, and principles in mind any time you find yourself changing your priorities, and ask yourself whether your priorities really have changed.
-

Wrapping Up Last Year's Questions

And that's it for last year. Phew!

That's a lot of questions. And like I mentioned earlier, you don't need to ask all of them every time you do a review. But at first, spend a little time on each of them and notice:

- A. Which ones immediately fire a set of answers for you.
- B. Which ones come up with an immediate blank.

Both of these are useful.

The first set mean that the question is worded in a manner that's easy for you to work with, and the fires your creative juices. OK, so the question might be one which you can improve further, using the advice on getting the most out of a question, which we cover in the full set of lessons. However, for now, you're getting a good enough response that you should stick with the question, and run with it till you run out of responses.

The second set of questions is an odd one. How can a question be useful if you can't come up with immediate answers? Well, it might be that it's not a type of question that you're used to answering, and so if you give it some time to "stew", your brain might come up with some interesting responses. And those responses will most likely be ones that you won't come up with when using questions from group A.

Or, if you come up with nothing at first, maybe it's something that you're uncomfortable with. For example, in the past, I had difficulty coming up with answers about financial topics. Why? Because I was worried about my financial status, and I didn't want to open that can of worms. And yet that was the one area that – when I focused on it – made a dramatic impact on my life – my financial life obviously, but also my relationships, my hobbies, and my overall satisfaction with the way my life was living. It just took some courage, and some help, to address the issues.

Also, if you're coming up with a complete blank on something, also ask yourself questions like: What am I avoiding here? If I had to guess at what I'd come up with, how would I answer this? If I answer this

truthfully, what does that say about myself and my life – what does it mean?

“What does it mean?” Does that question remind you of anything? It should do, if you’ve read Lesson 1 in the Empowering-Questions.com course. It’s one of the Re-meaning Process questions, and by asking it, you’re automatically starting to move yourself into a better emotional state, ready to address the underlying issues surrounding this topic which you’re avoiding.

So – don’t just avoid questions that don’t come up with some useful responses

Questions About The Next Year

How can I improve my relationships, finances, health, self-development, career, and education over this year?

A nice open question, and a good one to start brainstorming what you intend to do over the coming year. By splitting the areas of your life in this way, you're more likely to think of goals that will greatly impact all areas of your life, as opposed to being so focussed on one aspect that you neglect the others. Of course, feel free to split your life into other areas: perhaps you might want to add categories like "community", "religion", "volunteering", if you get involved in that sort of activity.

What goals have I already set myself for this year? How am I doing already towards them?

Obviously a new year (whether you follow the New Year process around January 1st or at some other time of the year), is a good time to set new goals for the coming year. But you might have set some goals last year, or a few years ago, which were more than one year in duration, and it's important to remember these as you set new goals for the New Year. Also, as well as simply remembering them, assess how well you are doing towards achieving them - if you have not progressed as planned, maybe this year you need to bump up your action plan to account for the lag. Or maybe you did better than you expected last year, and want to kick back a bit. Or maybe you did better than expected, and that's giving you the motivation to finish the goal ahead of time? Whichever, remember the goals you've set in the past, and account for them in the year ahead.

How can the momentum from last year be carried over to this year?

I love this question. If you made some important improvements last year, why not use the energy (in the form of happiness, pride, encouragement, or another

positive emotion) to let next year be even better? Build on what you accomplished last year, to take yourself even further next year.

There are two important point in his question:

1. The "How" - not "Can I...?", but "How can I...?" This implies that you already CAN carry the momentum forward, and it's just a case of finding a method (or multiple methods) to do so.
2. The "I". You need to build on the momentum. Don't wait for life to do it for you, as it might not happen. Take action yourself to build on last year's successes, as quickly as possible before other things get in the way.

How can last year's learning that I made be put into operation this year to make it even better than last?

Not only is it important to learn from the successes and failures of the last year; it's also important to make sure you carry those lessons on into the new one. But don't just assume that you'll carry them forward without thinking about them - write down the things you have learned, and make a point of thinking about what you can do next year to build upon those lessons.

Then make a plan – no matter how simple or complex – that is built on what you've learned. That way, you can't forget your lessons from last year.

What plans does this year already hold for me?

This is related to the earlier question, "What goals have I already set myself for this year?", but it takes a slightly different slant. There might be things that this year holds for you that are not formal goals - perhaps you're due to become a parent; perhaps you finish at university; perhaps your employer has asked you to move location. This type of event are not directly within your control (well, not now - they might have been once, such as when you decided to go to university or become a parent), but are nevertheless going to significantly impact your life.

Again, this question simply seeds the ground for some of the questions we'll cover later, by giving you a broad range of ideas about next year before you focus on a few specific goals or plans.

What limiting habits could I drop this year? What empowering habits could I create or strengthen instead?

One key element that determines the quality of your life is your habits. It is not (usually) the sudden, overnight changes that make the difference; it is the little things that you do every day, or every week.

- Treating your loved ones to a special treat once a year might make them feel loved once a year, but do something little for them every day, and they will feel loved every day.
- Place a little money in the bank every day, and at the end of the year you have more money than you started with, and probably more than you would have had, had you just waited till you had a big pile of cash to put in there.
- Take a little action to promoting your business every day, and you will reap more success than once-off marketing.

Begin to think about what your habits are, and what they need to be to create your desires.

What new skill or body of knowledge can I set about discovering for myself this year? How will I benefit by doing so?

In my view, too many people stop learning when they are at school, and that's a shame. It's a big world out there, with a lot to learn about. And I find that the more I learn, the more fascinating the world becomes. Plus I now have the added bonus of teaching my son a little bit about what I know.

But even before he arrived, I still took time out to learn new skills or knowledge. Over the

years, I've learned some languages, learned to sail, learned alot of IT-related skills, studied psychology, read about architecture, brought myself up to speed on modern European history, and much more. Only the IT-related skills were for career enhancement - the others I did just because I wanted to learn more.

And by doing so I enjoy my travel a bit more by chatting to the locals. I've sailed with friends for two weeks at a time on a holiday that will always be a highlight of my life. I've enjoyed walking round my home city with a fresh eye, admiring the local buildings. I've enjoyed talking to my European work colleagues about how they see the history of their country, and about their languages.

Now, you don't necessarily have to go to classes. Just get some books from the store, or even your local lending library, and start reading when you have some spare time. Or start doing a new skill when you have an hour or two spare, to give yourself time to get into it. Or buy some audiobooks and listen to them whilst commuting to work.

Give yourself enough time to get a feel for the topic or skill, and then re-decide whether you want to carry on or not. Also, if you're reading up about a subject, try a few books, in case one is written in a style that you don't like; don't let one badly-written book put you off a subject for life. Similarly, don't let one dry lecturer, or one annoyingly-accented audio book put you off either.

How can I make this year even more enjoyable, fun, and empowering than last year?

Another wide-open question to get your creative juices flowing. And I'll leave it at that. Just ask the question, and see what comes up.

What will my role models be doing this year? How can I model them in this, but in my own unique way?

By looking at your role models (or, dare I say it, your heroes / heroines), you are presenting to yourself an idea of what you hold important or desirable. Then, by looking at what they are doing, it can help to give you some ideas about the way that you could be improving your own life. All you then have to do is take the essence of that idea, and consider how you could strive for something similar in your own life. But don't just slavishly copy them - use your heroes for inspiration, not replication!

How will this year take me towards my mission? How could I take it even further?

Obviously, this is related to the "last year" question, "What have I achieved this year towards my mission?" If you have a mission (which as I mentioned in that earlier question, I think of as being something that drives most areas of your life, for a long time), then think about specific things you can do over the next year towards that mission. If you don't have one, try to spend some time thinking about what you'd like your mission to be - and then, again, think about specific things you can do over the next year towards that mission.

What improvement could I make this year that will dramatically improve the quality of my life and the lives of the people around me?

When you are setting your goals for next year, remember that you could also set some specifically to help the people you love and share your life with. By helping them, you will also be helping yourself - there's no better gift you can give to them or yourself.

About what do I think "If only..." from last year, and how can I bring those events or opportunities into being this year?

To help bridge the gap between last year and next year, think about what you wished you'd done last year, and how you can make sure you do it next year. After all, when it comes to the end of NEXT year,

you won't want to be thinking "If only ..." about the same things. However, there are bound to be new "if only" things for next year, and they'll give you motivation for the following year.

What does this year mean to others? What plans do the people who share my life have for next year? How can I help them to achieve it? How could our plans and goals be dovetailed so that each of us helps the other?

Whilst thinking about next year, also bear in mind that it's not just YOUR next year. It's also the next year for your family, friends, work colleagues, and so on. And obviously they have ideas about what they want to happen in the next year - even if they've not done a formal annual review. So when you are planning your next year, take some time to think about THEIR next year, and how your plans and their plans either align together or conflict with each other.

I'm not saying you should drop something from your plans, but you might be able to change it slightly - or ask the other person to change theirs - so that the two of you can achieve your goals in harmony, without negatively impacting each other.

This might also be the time to right down what you're going to tell other people about your plans, in case they are impacted by it.

What do I want to be writing about as I answer these questions next year? How do I feel about that?

This is probably my favourite question in the New Year question set. Why? Well, I find myself skipping forward a year, feeling what it would be like to be writing the same answers as this year, and regretting the wasted time. And yet the beautiful thing is that the time is not yet wasted - I get to plan the next year based on the feelings I want to feel at the end of the year.

I've taught this basic technique (imagining what it will be like at the end of an event) to a few people over the years, and it's a very powerful way of negating any forward-focussed negative emotions (fear of the coming event, worry, etc), and skipping straight to the backward-looking positive emotions

(happiness at achieving a result, exultation at having conquered your fears, even relief that it's all over). It's great for times when you want to achieve a certain result, but are dreading the time when you have to actually do things to achieve it. For example, if you're afraid of public speaking, then imagining that you've finished the speaking, and feeling pleased/proud/relieved, can give you the boost you need to fight your way through the "butterflies in your stomach" period.

It also adds a "one-level removed" feeling to your planning, making you think about the overall end result, rather than the in-the-moment highs and lows. This can add a dash of what I call wisdom to your planning - so you'll end up picking goals with more alignment to each other, less conflict, less negative repercussions on other areas of your life, and so on.

It's your chance to look back on your future, and plan things with the benefit of hindsight, before they actually happen!

About what do I think "if only..." from last year, and how can I bring those events or opportunities into being this year?

This is kind of the flip-side of the previous question. After all, when it comes to the end of NEXT year, you won't want to be thinking "If only ..." about the same things. So, think for a moment about last year again, and list all the "if only..." moments you had. Then plan to bring those things about in the next year.

"The saddest words of mouth and pen are these - it might have been. "
- Harriet Beecher Stowe

Note: this won't get rid of any "if only..." moments from the coming year. They'll still happen, but at least they'll give you

motivation to do them again in the following year. And you might also find yourself making the decision to NOT do the thing you want to, and you'll suddenly decide to go for it instead, and make the event into an "Aren't I glad I ..." rather than an "if only..."

What would be fun to do this year?

Another very important question. In the midst of planning career goals, health goals, financial goals, and so on, it's important to plan things that are just plain fun. So ... go do it!

How am I going to live this year so bring about the tomorrow that I am committed to?

Are you committed to any future plan? I don't mean external commitment, where you are tied to delivering a result because of a signed contract or obligation to another person/party. I mean internal commitment, where you have no reason other than your own drive and desire to bring that result about. This type of commitment is, I find, often harder to stick to than commitments to others. And yet ironically, it's often the most important for our long-term happiness and satisfaction with life.

If you find internal commitment difficult to stick with, then it's time to start exercising those commitment muscles. Pick something small, that you're sure will be relatively easy to achieve. Not a walk in the park - something you will need to work at, but not something that's insurmountable. Pick something, work at it, achieve it, then move onto something a little bit more demanding, and so on. Gradually increase your commitment-ability. You'll soon reach a point where you are committing to - and achieving - significant changes in your life.

What actions can I take this year that will surely change my destiny?

It's important to think about the leverage points - the small things that can produce a dramatic impact on your life. Sometimes, it's worth focussing all your attention and efforts on that one simple thing, rather than spreading your efforts across multiple goals, simply because the benefits you'll get will be greater. I'm not talking about external success here - it's the internal things that can make the biggest difference.

What am I going to stand for, and take a stand against, this year?

Sometimes, the ongoing rules or standards that we live our lives by are as important as the goals we aim for. They affect every decision we make, every decision we don't make, who we let into our lives, what we aim for out of life, where we live, what our career is, and so on. Sometimes we are aware of them, and sometimes we don't notice them until someone else points them out to us. Sometimes they are things we agree to, encourage, and reinforce; other times we strive to overcome them in ourselves and others. Either way, they affect our lives dramatically because we live by them every day. Begin to think about what your standards or principles are, and how you can abide by them this coming year. Also, if there are things that you won't accept in your life, how can you abide by those principles as well?

What sentence or motto can I use to summarize my plans for next year?

This is obviously the flip-side of the "last year" question, "What sentence, phrase, or motto could I use to sum up last year?" Sometimes, having a motto, a quote, or a catch-phrase by which you live life is a neat way of summarizing your approach to life. For example, one year, this year I'm living by the motto "Get more sleep"... No, only joking...

A catch-phrase - which could be a proverb, quote, line from a song, part of a poem, a catchphrase from a show, or just a made-up motto - is a great way to

remind yourself of your goals and current life mission, or even just the way you want to approach life. They are normally short, often pithy, and very personal. Just be sure that when you pick one for the year, you feel an emotional (empowering!) response when you say it to yourself (either out loud or in your head). By keeping this phrase in mind throughout your day, you'll find that your basic response to situations improves, and you'll find it easier to achieve your goals, or improve your attitude, or handle problems.

How will the lessons I learned last year help me to make next year even better?

And finally, a general catch-all question: How can lessons learned in the past help to make your future better? That's one of the two key questions that drives all personal development I think. (The other is "How can I do better?" - without any specific reference to the past). If you can keep on asking this question, you'll do and be a better person (by your own standards). And this nice, wide-open question gives you the opportunity to think about things you've learned in the last year, that weren't raised in response to the other questions.

Summary

And that's it for this report. Well over thirty pages of power-packed questions, ready to help you start an annual review.

I hope you find it useful.

Important note: if you have not yet subscribed to the Empowering-Questions.com email course, and have not become a full member of Empowering-Questions.com, then I have no way of knowing your email address, and cannot send you the update.

So, please take a moment to visit Empowering-Questions.com and either subscribe to the free email course, or take a step towards a better future and become a full member.

Regards,
Andy Peacock