

Reflection: How to Make Life Worth Living

Over a decade ago, I treated my family to a holiday meal at Ruth's Chris Steakhouse. I remember wanting the dinner to be special and memorable. I desired to reflect on the past year with them and learn how to be a better husband and dad. My goal was to hear what was on their hearts and minds. I'd been inspired by Patrick Morley's book, *Man in the Mirror*, and was exposed to Socrates' philosophy, "the life which is unexamined is not worth living." In other words, human life is deprived of the meaning and purpose of existence without reflection.

Taking a cue from Socrates, I moved our normal dinner conversation to a deeper level. I began asking them what they remembered about the past year. What were their successes and challenges? What did they learn, and how will they change? What did they want to accomplish in the next year?

It was quiet at first... I got blank stares. I couldn't imagine what was going through the minds of my wife, Carla, 16-year-old daughter, Caroline, and 14-year-old son, Benton. But, my family soon caught on and engaged in the discussion. We all found it enlightening to hear each other's thoughts, successes, failures, learnings, and dreams. So much so that we've made the dinner and discussion an annual event called *Ruth's Christmas*; it's become our favorite family tradition.

Before our annual holiday dinners, I make it a practice to send everyone a list of questions to prime the discussion pump. The topics and questions varied slightly over the years but, in essence, remained the same. Here's an example of some questions we've used in years past:

Current Year

- **Review.** What were your three goals last year?
- **Accomplishments.** Did you meet your goals? Why or why not? Are there other achievements outside of the original goals you'd like to recognize? What made you the proudest?
- **Learnings.** What challenges, adversity, or failure did you encounter? What did you learn? How will you apply the learning? How will it change you and how you approach the future?
- **Well-being.** On a scale of 1 to 10, how's your well-being (mental, physical, emotional)? Did your well-being improve or decline this year? Why? What would you like your score to be in the future? How will you get there?
- **Joy.** What brought you the most joy or happiness this year. (Could be an activity, new project, person, place, etc.) What will you do to replicate and increase that in the future?

Next Year

- **Goals.** What are three objectives you'd like to achieve? Why will it be important to you to achieve the goals? What does success look like? When will you start? What barriers do you anticipate, and how will you overcome them? Who will hold you accountable?
- **Bonus Questions.** Do you have a personal vision, the mental picture of your preferred future? If so, what is it, and how will you work toward it? Do you have a dream? What would you do if you knew you could not fail? What will you do to make your dream come true?

Over the years, we've laughed and cried during our time of reflection. We understand that insight comes from reflecting on experiences, and the ideas help us change and grow. And, we've learned that examined experience is indeed the best teacher and that the examined life is worth living. Lastly, we invest time looking back to look forward. We envision the future. We share our hopes and dreams.

How about you? Have you taken a moment to slow down and inventory all that you experienced this year? Do you have someone to share your thoughts and dreams with? I recommend that you call a timeout, reflect and use the above questions to shape your thoughts and learn about others. If you do, you'll grow and live a life worth living, full of meaning and purpose.

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Cheers,

Preston