

What Do You Love about What You Do?

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We all have the experience through our work of meeting new people. What's the first or second question you ask someone when you meet him or her? For many of us, it's "What do you do?"

Your career, and specifically the work you do every day, largely defines the majority of your time on this earth. Therefore, it's no surprise that to understand this new person you've just met, you'd want to know what he or she does on a daily basis. Also, knowing the answer to that question helps you to quickly determine the degree to which you might want to develop a deeper relationship with the person.

However, there's a downside to asking, "What do you do?" The question itself is almost a cliché. We all have asked it and answered it dozens of times. We offer a brief description that rarely feels adequate, and often, the other person isn't very interested anyway.

I have a suggestion for a different question that will definitely not be a cliché. Ask instead, "What do you love about what you do?" Frequently, the other person will pause and look a bit puzzled. This question certainly takes more thought than the cliché question!

After a moment of pondering, the person will probably smile and start to offer an answer. However, it's likely not to be brief. As information begins to flow, the person will think of more that he or she wants to share. Further, the conversation may go in a variety of directions, depending on the creativity and energy of the person. You will definitely learn a lot more about the person than with "What do you do?"

The "What do you do?" question is typically answered in two or three sentences, and sometimes in just two or three words! "What do you love about what you do?" usually requires at least a two or three minute dissertation! The answer will identify first what the person does, then move into what the person loves about that work. What may follow is why the person loves doing it, what the person doesn't like about the work, and what the person is doing to change what he or she doesn't like about the work.

You'll learn a lot about the person, and the person will enjoy the experience of sharing.

Can you ask this question of a direct report? Of course, but because you already know a lot about that person, the person may be suspicious about why you are asking.

For better and more meaningful results with your direct report, I suggest you precede the question with having the individual take the "StrengthsFinder Profile." You can access this on-line assessment tool by purchasing a copy of the book *Strengths Finder 2.0* by Tom Rath. (Each book contains a unique alphanumeric code giving one access to the assessment.)

The Profile measures 34 talent themes that the Gallup organization delineated during their long study of excellence. The output of the assessment is the person's five most dominant talent themes, those that describe his or her frequently recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior. Most individuals I know who have taken the Profile are favorably surprised with the accuracy of the information.

The output report describes the individual's natural and most comfortable responses to whatever work is set before him or her. Armed with the information from this assessment, most individuals are far more prepared to answer the question, "What do you love about what you do?"

Once you and your direct report understand his or her natural tendencies, the two of you can collaborate on a personalized instruction manual for how to obtain extremely satisfying and productive output. When people are able to work at what innately "turns them on," they do amazing things.

Expect loyalty and deep commitment from an employee who can enthusiastically answer the question, "What do you love about what you do?" If your hiring systems allow you to fill your job responsibilities with folks who naturally love doing the work you have available, look out! Your organization will quickly develop a healthy culture filled with processes that deliver superior products and services.