

31 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Setting Next Year's Goals

(You can find more purpose and happiness at work and in life by asking yourself better questions.)

Have you ever done a copy-and-paste [of your goals](#) from the previous year because you didn't accomplish any of them? I have. I've also fallen into the lazy trap of making my goals in line with everyone else's -- to weigh less, [spend less](#), earn more.

The new year [is an opportunity](#). Many of us use the turning of the year to think about where we are and where we want to go. We set goals and make resolutions for how the coming year will be different. Better.

When we set goals by just going through the motions, we have little chance of success. At best, we might luck into a little progress, but it's never very satisfying. Instead, taking time in advance to reflect leads to knowing ourselves better. And when we know ourselves, setting the goals for what's next becomes much easier.

If life is a journey, the questions we ask ourselves are the fuel that gets us from here to there.

Without this intentional reflection, we react impulsively and with limited information. We're vulnerable to getting pushed around by the forces of those more proactive than us.

Here are 31 questions to reflect on in December--one for each day--before you set your New Year's resolutions. They're intended to get you thinking about what you have to be grateful for, what you want to change, and what effort is needed to propel you forward.

1. What are the first thoughts that come to mind about the past year? Mostly positive, negative, or neutral?
2. What was one of the most interesting things I learned this year?
3. Who was one person I met that I'd like to get to know better? Why?
4. What was one of my most challenging moments? Why?
5. What was one of my favorite accomplishments?
6. What was one personal strength I used this year? How did it benefit my work or life?
7. What hurdle came up more than once? (time, money, attitude, location, knowledge, etc.)
8. How well did I communicate with the people who matter most to me?
9. What three events or accomplishments were made possible by the help of others?
10. What advice would I offer someone else on the basis of a lesson I learned this year?
11. What are three problems that came up at work? How did I approach solving those problems? Are there any trends in those problems or solutions?

12. Who needed my encouragement this year? What did I say or do to help them along?
13. If I were writing a memoir, what would I highlight in the chapter about this year?
14. What was I doing when I forgot about time and was able to be "in the moment"?
15. What frustration seemed to come up again and again?
16. What did I start and not finish?
17. What did I try and fail?
18. What three things am I curious to know more about?
19. If I could wave a magic wand and master one skill, what would it be? Why?
20. Who is one person I could help right now? How? What would it "cost" me? What would I gain?
21. When did I slow someone else's progress? Why? What was I worried about?
22. What's one thing I made or created from scratch? How did that feel?
23. What's one thing I did that left me exhausted at the end? How did that feel?
24. What's one thing I was a part of this year that I'll remember for the rest of my life? Why?
25. What was the nicest thing someone did for me this year?
26. What was the nicest thing I did for someone else this year?
27. If I could change one thing that happened this year, what would it be?
28. What felt difficult one year ago that now feels easy (or easier)?
29. Of the books I read this year, which was my favorite?
30. How did I capture my thoughts and feelings? (journaling, writing, social media sharing, talking one-on-one with friends or family, etc.) Was that method helpful?
31. What are six adjectives that best describe this year? What would I like those adjectives to be next year?

Asking ourselves reflective questions can jump-start our learning. When we're more aware of our interests and desires, we can create goals that align with what we want -- not what we think we're supposed to want. Some of these questions are bigger than others and will be more difficult to answer. They're intended to be asked one at a time each day for a month. Taking these questions day by day allows your thinking to change over the course of the day. Keeping a journal of these questions and your answers helps you keep track of what you notice through this process. At the end of the month, use these answers to help you create goals aimed at making the coming year your best year yet.