



Book Review

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The power of the second question: Finding the simple truths in complex lives

Reviewed by:

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This book is about asking an initial question, listening to the response, and then devising a second question that endeavours to elicit reflective responses that make us look at the “bigger picture.” The author invites the reader to think about who they are, what they have learned from life experiences, and where they are going in the future.

By the third page, the challenges begin. The first challenge is to use the book as a workbook. Take it with you, write your thoughts in the margins, and recognise opportunities each day for in-depth, follow-up questions that help us to better understand ourselves, and the core values that help shape our thoughts and actions. The second challenge is to buy an exercise book to record insights, truths, and wisdom that inspire us on a daily basis. It reminds me of the reflective journal I completed each night during my undergraduate degree, but with a framework around it. The third challenge and perhaps the most ambitious, is that what you write in your exercise book will represent who you truly are.

We are then introduced to Dr Foster an old family friend of the author who inspired this book. Dr Foster asks the author what he has learned in his 25 years as a clinical psychologist. This is the ultimate second question—the question that stops you in your tracks and makes you think. This question became the exemplar of how the author sought to provide opportunities for clients to find their own truths by learning to ask the right “second question.” Dr Foster pops up throughout the book with examples of “good questions” that aid reflective communications.

Chapter one is about insights and light bulb moments that change us forever through deeper understanding of ourselves and the experiences associated with the “aha” moments in our lives. The chapter finishes with the first of many exercises

the reader is asked to engage in so that effective reflection becomes a way of life. Chapters 2–8 talk about wisdom, self discovery, structuring the second question, metaphors of life, building relationships, learning from others, being tactful, and listening to others.

The remainder of the book explored how the experiences in all facets of our lives mould our values and personal vision (including our wishes and dreams). It concludes by inviting us to learn from the wisdom and leadership of others and ultimately gain wisdom ourselves by asking those second questions that make us stop, think, and consider the bigger picture.

This book is not designed to be read in a weekend (although this can be easily done). It is intended to be read over a period of time, with readers completing the exercises therein. This is a book that may be of interest to newly graduated health and medical professionals to help them develop skills to gain greater insights from patient/practitioner interactions.

About the book:

Skellett C. The power of the second question: Finding the simple truths for complex lives. Exisle Publishing Pty Ltd 2014 ISBN 978 1 921966 42 2
