

Jack Williamson  
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## **Why I Ask Myself Why**

Curious George was a favorite childhood book of mine. From my toddler years to the present I have been insatiably curious. According to my mother, my incessant questions were of the ‘why’ variety, becoming recurring pet peeves to both my parents. Their usual answers, “Just because,” or “Because we said so,” were no satisfaction to me.

I am still curious—a good trait of life-long learners I’m told. And my curiosity is still propelled with ‘why’ questions. Comfortingly, I am not alone.

There is a trend in corporations these days to use the ‘5 Whys’ problem solving strategy—any series of ‘why’ questions seeking a best solution. Sakichi Toyoda, an industrialist, inventor and founder of Toyota, developed the technique in the 1930s that became popular in the 1970s. Toyota and other companies still use it to solve problems.

Recently, I’ve been adapting a version of this strategy for myself. Now when deciding how I will portion out my retirement time, energy and financial resources, I check in with my ‘5 Whys’. Given my bent for squirrel chasing and my attraction to shiny things, this discipline helps clear a way forward before impulsively jumping into projects, opportunities or participation requests.

Knowing my ‘why’ supports my goal of being clear about my desire for a purposeful, meaningful and balancing life. Sometimes asking ‘why’ only once is enough. Others times I bore through more repetitions of ‘whys’ to find clarity—to discover my most basic ‘why’.

My partner, Richard, and I were recently invited to a small dinner party with people with whom we had not yet met. The invitation said, “We are making this a small gathering because we want to have better and deeper conversations.” That was a satisfying enough

answer to our 'why' questions, since good conversations often lead to more authentic relationships and outcomes.

A few months ago I was asked to serve on a non-profit advisory board. This time I used a series of 'whys' to find my clear answer: "Thank you, but not at this time."

At various times during retirement, I wonder, "What do I want to do with my life now—how do I want to spend my remaining time, energy and money?" "What will align with my talents, time and desires?"

Sarah Knight more graphically addresses this issue in her popular book, *The Life Changing Magic of Not Giving a Fuck—How to stop spending time you don't have with people you don't like doing things you don't want to do*. (Her YouTube video: The Magic of Not Giving a Fuck is both entertaining and sensible.)

The use of my time, in addition to my energy and money, is mine to choose. It's' not always clear or easy to figure out the whats and hows. But when I drill down to discern my most convincing 'why', the whats and hows often come into clearer view. So, I'll keep exploring my 'whys'.

*If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully the thing I want to live for.*

—Thomas Merton

P.S. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZe5y2D60YU>