

A story about negative thinking and its implications on intensifying anger:

Murphy's plough

McGinty, a farmer, needed to plough his field before the dry spell set in, but his own plough had broken.

"I know, I'll ask my neighbor, farmer Murphy, to borrow his plough. He's a good man; I'm sure he'll have done his ploughing by now and he'll be glad to lend me his machine."

So McGinty began to walk the three or four fields to Murphy's farm.

After a field of walking, McGinty says to himself, "I hope that Murphy has finished all his own ploughing or he'll not be able to lend me his machine..."

Then after a few more minutes of worrying and walking, McGinty says to himself, "And what if Murphy's plough is old and on it's last legs - he'll never be wanting to lend it to me will he?.."

And after another field, McGinty says, "Murphy was never a very helpful fellow, I reckon maybe he won't be too keen to lend me his plough even if it's in perfect working order and he's finished all his own ploughing weeks ago...."

As McGinty arrives at Murphy's farm, McGinty is thinking, "That old Murphy can be a mean old fellow. I reckon even if he's got all his ploughing done, and his own machine is sitting there doing nothing, he'll not lend it to me just so watch me go to ruin..."

McGinty walks up Murphy's front path, knocks on the door, and Murphy answers.

"Well good morning Mr McGinty, what can I do for you?" says Murphy.

And McGinty says, with eyes bulging, "You can take your bloody plough, and you can stick it up your bloody arse!"

Sample 'hard questions' featured in the book of Susan Piver's 100 Hard Questions for an Authentic Life

1. What values did I gain from my family of origin? The three most helpful? The three least helpful? Where do I notice these values showing up in my current life, with my current family (if applicable) and with my friends and intimate partners?
2. What conflicts exist within my immediate family (whether of origin or marriage)? Is there any way to resolve them? Is there anyone I need to forgive? If so, for what? Whether or not the conflict involves me directly, what can I do to create healing within the family? Is there a conversation I need to have, a letter I can write, or an internal shift I can make to start the healing process?
3. Do I want to broaden my group of friends or am I happy with just those I have now? (Some people need a lot of friends, possibly to satisfy a variety of needs, while others are happy with just a few, close friendly relationships. Which group do I fall into?) If I want more friends, why is that? Am I in some way dissatisfied with those I have? Am I seeking something from my friends that they are unable to give?
4. If I am somehow dissatisfied with or disappointed by one or more of my friendships, why do I feel that way? Are my expectations perhaps unrealistic? Am I seeking something that this friend is unable or unwilling to provide? Have we outgrown one another? Have my feelings for this person changed? Have my friend's feelings about me changed? How might I develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics between us?
5. What special gifts do I have to offer as a lover or partner? Am I steadfast, giving, exciting, patient, sensitive, loyal, protective, fun? What other qualities can I identify as special in me?
6. What qualities prevent me from being a better partner? Am I jealous, clingy, selfish, too demanding, unreliable, flaky, fearful? What other negative qualities can I identify in myself? Am I willing to change?? How capable am I (and my partner) of recognizing and working with these issues in a healthy way?
7. Are there problems that seem to crop up for me in one relationship after another? Have I been able to identify them for myself? Am I experiencing any of these problems in my current relationship? Have I discussed them with my partner? Are we trying to work on them together?
8. Am I able to elucidate my professional values, goals, and aspirations? If so, what are they? Even if I can't be specific in my description, what do I know about myself in this regard?
9. Which, if any, of the aspirations I've identified am I not allowing myself to manifest? Do I have gifts or goals that I'm too afraid to pursue? Do

I have a skill that I'm not using at work? What is it? Do I use it elsewhere in my life?

10. How much (or little) does my current job reflect my values, goals, and aspirations? Is there a connection between my work and these ideals? If I want more of a connection, is there anyway I can cause my current work situation to more fully reflect my values? How? When?
 11. What purpose does money serve in my life? Do I value it for the security it brings, the options it gives me, the pleasure it provides?
 12. How much money do I have right now? How much debt? How comfortable or uncomfortable am I with the amount I have and the amount I owe? How can I increase my comfort levels? Am I on a budget? Do I need one? Do I have a plan for paying down debt as quickly as possible? Do I need one? Who or what can help me become clear and responsible about saving money and paying off debt?
 13. Do I think of myself as a creative person? Everyone has special gifts of intelligence, compassion, insight, ingenuity, style, etc: what are mine? Am I able to "own" my gifts, do I feel comfortable admitting them, even to myself?
 14. If I had to rank the areas of my life to reflect my deepest values and core inclinations, how would I order the following: Family, Friends, Intimacy, Work, Money, Creativity, and Spirituality? To which areas to I devote the most time, energy, resources, and thought? Am I content with this ranking? Would I prefer to reorder some of these priorities? If so, how might I go about doing that? Are internal and/or external shifts required? Who might be able to help me make those changes? Are there any books, groups, organizations, or friends I could call on for support? If my priorities were ordered correctly, how would my life be different from what it is now?
 15. What place do spirituality and spiritual practice play in my life? Do I have a spiritual life? Do I have spiritual beliefs? Are they the beliefs of a specific religion or are they self-created? A combination of the two? Am I able to express them clearly? To myself? To others?
 16. Do I believe in God or any form of deity? If so, what makes me feel most connected to this divinity? What is the nature of my relationship with this divinity? When do I feel it most strongly? Daily? In church? In nature? With my family? Others? What can I do to make this relationship stronger?
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Narrative on Temper

Edwin Stanton, secretary of war under Lincoln, was well known for a highly inflammable temper. The pressure of war kept his nerves frayed and his tongue sharp. Once, when he complained to Lincoln about a certain general, Lincoln told him to write the man a letter. "Tell him off," Lincoln advised.

Stanton, bolstered by the President's support, promptly wrote a scathing letter in which he tore the man to shreds. He showed the letter to the President. "Good," said Lincoln, "first rate. You certainly gave it to him."

As Stanton started to leave, Lincoln asked, "What are you going to do with it now?"

"Mail it, of course," said Stanton.

"Nonsense," snorted the President, "you don't want to send that letter. Put it in the stove! That's what I do when I have written a letter while I'm angry. You had a good time writing that letter, now forget about it."

Source: The Best of Bits & Pieces, A.F. Lenehan
