

Dishwasher-Loading Arguments are Common for a Reason

In his classic book [7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), Dr. Stephen R. Covey urged us to “begin with the end in mind.” Covey explains:

“Each part of your life— today’s behavior, tomorrow’s behavior, next week’s behavior, next month’s behavior— can be examined in the context of the whole, of what really matters most to you. By keeping that end clearly in mind, you can make certain that whatever you do on any particular day does not violate the criteria you have defined as supremely important, and that each day of your life contributes in a meaningful way to the vision you have of your life as a whole.”

If we “begin with the end in mind,” if we consider our purpose, will that not direct our efforts automatically?

Have you ever argued about how to load a dishwasher? I started sharing a loading-the-dishwasher example when dishwasher arguments were mentioned by participants in my workshops.

When I point out the hidden purpose of a dishwasher argument may be to feel like a victim of an uncaring partner, some laughed; others were initially incredulous. The incredulous would say, “Why would I start a fight on purpose? It is just that loading the dishwasher correctly is important to me.”

I’d ask them, before saying a word about the “correct” way to load, did part of you know that friction would result from your words? Sheepishly, they’d answer “yes.” They’d come to see that in the moment they declared their dishwasher rules, being right was more important than a happy, harmonious relationship.

Many times a day, we all face crossroads: we choose between being right or being happy.

[Aristotle believed](#) the purpose, what he called *telos*, of a human being was to become happy. For many, happiness seems elusive. Aristotle advised living a virtuous life as the pathway to realizing our *telos*, our purpose of becoming happy.

By reflecting on our purpose, we can live more virtuously.

Recently, after delivering a day-long workshop on happiness, I found a long queue of cars waiting to exit the self-service garage where I'd parked. At the head of each exit lane was a participant from the workshop. Their parking vouchers were not being recognized by the machine; they were trying to receive help, without success, from a remote attendant.

As I got closer, another participant further down in the queue, rolled down her car window. She smiled and good-naturedly said, "You set this up as a final exam, didn't you Dr. B?"

I had not set-up the "final exam," but life serves them up daily.

During those exams, we can focus solely on our various secondary purposes, our current tasks, and felt needs, or we can remember our primary purpose of living from our highest values.

In her new book, [Insight](#), psychologist Dr. Tasha Eurich encourages us to ask "what" questions rather than "why" questions:

When I feel anything other than peace, I say "What's going on?" "What am I feeling?" "What is the dialogue inside my head?" "What's another way to see this situation?" "What can I do to respond better?"

Asking “Why is my partner loading dishes incorrectly?” is the beginning of trouble. Instead ask, “What is the source of my inner experience in this moment?” If you think it is someone else or external circumstances, pause and ask yourself more “what” questions.

We are not responsible for what others are doing, but we are responsible for our interpretation of our experience.

Things will probably not go exactly right for any of us today. The incessant ego narrator in our head will want to categorizes every event and person as “for us” or “against us.” Our ego will likely not get everything it wants. And if our primary purpose is to get what we want, misery awaits.

Take a moment and consider a relationship at work or home in which a shift in your purpose might be in order. Nothing external needs to change for you to choose the path to happiness.

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