

Stepping beyond shallow questions

When writing a profile for the newspaper, I interview the subject from a long list of prepared questions—basic questions, unexpected questions, questions intended to guide our conversation—so I'll have as much information as I could possibly need when I begin writing. Yet some of the most interesting information often arises from questions that aren't actually on my list of introductory questions, ones that naturally lead from our dialogue, that take a path far from shallow conversation.

You can get to know a lot about a person when you stop asking shallow, rote questions in an interview.

Yet so often we just stick to the shallow, easy questions in real life. How often do we move from a quick "Hey, how are you?" to the deeper "What are you dealing with?" or even "Do you want to talk about it?" How often do we ask about pains and passions, struggles and personal triumphs?

Some of you are good at this – and you're welcome to stop reading now. But I'm terrible at asking the right questions: knowing what to ask, how much to ask, when to ask. I tend to feel like I don't have the right to snoop into someone's life, because after all, why would you want to tell *me*?

There are an awful lot of us who avoid asking these heavier questions, and there's danger in this, especially when we avoid asking about pain. I tend to think people don't want to talk about – or even think about – the pain in their lives, the struggles, the fears. And if they don't want to think or talk about it, why would I bring it up by asking? Why would I remind someone of something that hurts?

But that's not actually how it works for the majority of people, is it? Yes, there will be times that we're not ready to speak of certain things. We have the right to decline to answer. And we can

respect that in others, certainly.

But this year, my last year here at Moody, I want to personally explore the idea that there is no harm in asking. Which is worse, after all? Caring enough to ask and being quietly denied, or never asking at all in a situation where discourse is sorely needed?

As humans, we need each other as we go through the things in life that don't come up in small talk, topics we avoid in shallow conversation. We need to talk to each other. We need to vent our frustrations, share our pains, console and comfort, and receive strength and prayer. We need to be able to rejoice in battles won, lessons learned, and emotional gains. We all need it to different degrees, but we need it.

So what happens when we don't ask? Some people will share anyways. I'm like that. Sometimes I'll share my hurts with friends even without their asking, because I know I need it, because I'm willing to request that listening ear.

And not everyone will do so.

There are many secret pains here at Moody. Some people put on a happy face because they'd rather you thought they had it together. Some hide what ails them because their reputation is precious, and no one seems to care enough to ask, to promise a safe place from judgment. Others don't think you'll believe them.

But if we don't ask, it often just looks like we don't care.

So let's get past the blocks in our minds that stop us from broaching the questions that matter. Let's stop giving those in pain the biggest reason to keep it locked inside – that no one asked. The facades we use to blanket our struggles and fears and hurts can engulf our relationships, and I suggest we help one another set them aside.

It's time to walk past "What's up?" and step into each other's lives. 