

Do you have anything better to do?

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I have tried a few different taglines for my emails over the years. For a while I had “If not you, who? If not now, when?” That was commonly attributed to Hillel, a Hebrew ‘sage and scholar’ from about 100 BCE (however, I could never find the actual citation from his works). I had heard those questions from my father when I was very young, and they have occasionally guided my choices on my various journeys. They seem to strike to a core of transforming hesitation into confidence, at least for me.

On a similar note, I more recently came up with my current tagline “Do you have anything better to do?” While some people said they liked the question, a couple others—my son and a good friend—thought it aggressive. My friend said he thought it played into a pervasive nihilism, the idea that there *is nothing better to do, nothing ‘good’ to do*. This response was unimagined by me, although once he pointed it out I could see how that could be an interpretation. It is hard to convey what we really mean when we write things down in words. I am generally careful about how I compose with the written word, like this article or emails, since it is hard to convey thoughts clearly without dialog, hence without knowing the emotional state of the person with whom we communicate. Yet, I sometimes get it wrong. Hence, we should err on the side of caution, with as much clarity and kindness we can muster, in emails as well as in person.

What I mean by this tagline is that whatever we are doing with our life should be the actual best that we can possibly be doing. ‘Best’ is self-described: only you can know what the best thing is for you. Each person should be living their life to the fullest, in the best possible way for themselves to fulfill their own lives, and to fill them with love and kindness for self and others. It is always possible to do this, even though sometimes we lose faith in that simple idea. As the Sakyong has pointed out, sometimes we get caught up in gadgets and entertainment, yet we need not. We could be contributing to our lives and those of others in a positive way—our own unique way.

Clearly, my question is a challenge. I designed it to provoke. If you have nothing better to do, then you must be doing the best you can, which is great. If you think there cannot be anything great to do, then think again—there always is. When you have something better to do, then please do it.

Whatever we do, when we do it with kindness, that is better. Erring on the side of kindness cannot be wrong, and it seems always better to be kind. The Sakyong has repeatedly told us to be kind. Kindness—he told us—is an innate characteristic that simply needs to shine through our habitual crap. His kindness to us can radiate throughout our world with our kindness to others.

Do you have anything better to do?