



WHY ASK WHY

An existential meme infects Silicon Valley.

Why do you do what you do? In Silicon Valley, that question has become the hottest team-building meme since *Outward Bound*—and it's spreading. WDYDWYD began at Burning Man in 2004, when artist and entrepreneur Tony Deifell took photos of strangers posing with answers to the query written on cardboard signs—TO SAVE THE WORLD, I FEEL GUILTY IF I DON'T, and so on. Deifell made the project open source and started posting pics on the Ning social network.

By 2007, the meme had left the playa for the boardroom. Deifell started leading a group version of WDYDWYD—people hash out answers in front of coworkers—at the National Holistic Institute, Google, and elsewhere. "It's a deceptively simple way to get people to connect to their core values and tell their story," says Evan Wittenberg, Google's head of global leadership development. "Those are two huge anchors for good leadership." WDYDWYD is big at Twitter, too. "I saw it in 2006, probably on Fark or Memepool," says Del Harvey, Twitter's director of trust and safety, who regularly asks members of her team. "If someone says they love communicating, maybe they should be writing instead of working in Excel."

Now Deifell's project is mutating even more. Student Joe Moloughney founded a WDYDWYD Facebook group. Photographer Bill Kennedy scribbled answers on a whiteboard (IT GETS ME LAID!) in stop-motion on YouTube. Hugh MacLeod, author of the cartoon business manual *Ignore Everybody and 39 Other Keys to Creativity* drew his answer. And French performance artist Séverine Carminati is working on a stage show. Why are they all doing what they're doing? To proliferate the meme, of course.
—Ted Greenwald