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What do you like to do?

By Casey Lartigue Jr.

When I was working as a policy analyst and radio talk show host in Washington, D.C., I had the honor of meeting U.S. Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas on several occasions.

The first time, at a dinner party, I listened as others asked him serious questions about recent court cases. When it was my turn I started to introduce myself, but he interrupted me to say, "Casey, I know who you are. You are that young man at the Cato Institute causing so much trouble about school choice."



What a surprise! Justice Thomas knew who I was! Instead of choosing one of the difficult policy work questions swimming around in my head, I asked him: What do you like to do?

It is a question that we don't ask others often enough. Justice Thomas burst out laughing with the deep powerful laugh he is known for. It turned out, among many things, that he loves bodybuilding. Whereas he was careful with his responses about court cases, he gave a hilarious and animated impromptu lecture on the history of bodybuilding.

I was reminded of that conversation with Justice Thomas as I recently prepared to be the MC for a networking event in Seoul hosted by the Korea Foreign Company Employees Human Network (KOFEN at www.kofen.org) on June 18. I usually revise my prepared remarks for speeches after I meet with audience members so I chatted with Korean staff members and guests who arrived early. They gave serious, almost apologetic, responses about their jobs. But when I asked them "What do you like to do?" I got the same types of responses I got from Justice Thomas: Laughter and joyful discussion!

I scrapped my original remarks, encouraging everyone at the event 1) not to be shy 2) not to sit or talk with friends/colleagues and, most importantly 3) to ask each other, "What do you like to do?" I stressed: Many people dislike their jobs or do them to get paid until they can find something else better. So why spend this wonderful evening discussing something you don't really like? "What do you like to do" became the evening's theme, as people gleefully discovered similar interests.

At work, we must report to and work with superiors, clients, coworkers, customers. But our free time is our time to do what we like so it should be fun. And talking about it should be fun. Eventually the "what do you do" questions were asked, but they were by people who felt they already had a connection.

Very often when I ask Koreans what they like to do, I get two responses. One, "sleeping." Two, they don't have (or lack time for) a favorite activity. I'm surprised when people must "think" about what it is that they like to do. I rattle off mine without thinking: Sing, dance, read, write, talk. You could wake me up at 1 a.m. from a deep sleep and I could answer the question (and would be ready after a quick shower to go out after I figured who you are and where you were!).

I'm also surprised when Koreans who have "known" each other for years know very

little about each other. I recently started meeting with two Korean linguistic professors who have known each other for a number of years. We discuss politics, life, education, Korea, history. At our first meeting I asked both ``What do you like to do?" They were looking at each other, shocked at what they learned about each other. The second time we met, we celebrated by doing things they both loved to do.

The writer, a former policy analyst with the Cato Institute and formerly host of the Casey Lartigue Show on XM 169 in Lanham, Md., is now a freelance education consultant based in South Korea. He welcomes feedback at caseyradio@hanmail.net.