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The Importance Of Being Curious



by Dalia Molokhia | May 24, 2018

More from Dalia Molokhia

“Why do I feel cold and shiver when I have a fever?”

I knew the day would come when my little girl would learn to talk and inevitably start asking those much-anticipated questions. The questions themselves weren’t worrying me. I was actually looking forward to seeing where her curiosity would lie.

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What was bothering me was whether or not I would know the answers.

In the age of the smartphone, this may seem like a silly worry. Surely, the answers to almost everything would be just one Google away.

Still, I struggled with how I was going to prepare to become an all-knowing mother. Then one day it struck me: I didn't need to have all the answers. What a great example I could set if I let my daughter know that I, too, am still learning. And I realized how much more I could learn if I took another look at things I thought I already knew the answer to with the curiosity of a child. My little girl's mind is a beginner's mind – curious, open to new ideas, eager to learn, and not based on preconceived notions or prior knowledge. I decided that I would approach her questions with a beginner's mind, too.

Once I decided to become more curious, I started noticing that curiosity was becoming more prominent in the workplace, too. Leaders, it seems, don't need to have all the answers, either. But they do need to be curious.

Curious about curiosity, I searched for answers, and found frequent references to Albert Einstein's famous words, "I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious." We might well quibble with the notion that Einstein had no "special talent," but he wouldn't have solved the riddles of the universe if not for his passionate curiosity. Then I came across another Einstein quote: "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence."

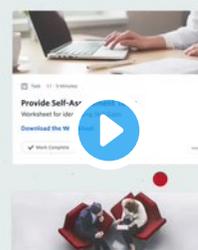
Curiosity's reason for existence in the workplace

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Decades ago, management thinker Peter Drucker placed knowing the right questions to ask at the core of his philosophy on strategic thinking. Many of today's leaders have adopted Drucker's "be (intelligently) curious" philosophy, an approach that is becoming more salient as the world increases in complexity.

Warren Berger, in "[Why Curious People Are Destined for the C-Suite](https://hbr.org/2015/09/why-curious-people-are-destined-for-the-c-suite), [https://hbr.org/2015/09/why-curious-people-are-destined-for-the-c-suite]" cited Dell CEO Michael Dell's response to a PwC survey that asked leaders to name a trait that would most help CEOs succeed. Dell's answer? "I would place my bet on curiosity." Dell was not alone. Alan D. Wilson, then CEO of McCormick & Company, responded that those who "are always expanding their perspective and what they know – and have that natural curiosity – are the people that are going to be successful."

Leaders don't need to know everything. In fact, it's an impossibility. Things change too rapidly for that. What worked yesterday can't be guaranteed to work tomorrow. Disrupters are just around the corner. If you're not one of them, you may well end up a disruptee. Today's leaders need to be curious, and know how to ask the questions that lead them to consider new ideas.

How we can all develop curiosity

Becoming a mum has taught me how to handle my little girl's curiosity. It strikes me that leaders in new roles also have to learn what to do and how to act in ways that are new and different. What I find works best is approaching your new role with a curiosity mindset, completely open to new ideas and

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suggestions. Here are some ways to develop your curiosity:

- **Apply a beginner's mind:** Be open to and look for new and novel ways of doing things.
- **Ask questions, listen and observe:** Seek first to understand, not to explain.
- **Try something new:** Take a different route to work, read a book in a genre you usually avoid, go to an art gallery you wouldn't normally go to. Each of these activities opens your mind to new points of view.
- **Be inquisitive:** Ask others their opinions, perspectives, and their approaches to certain things. Everyone does things a bit differently, and there are potential new answers and solutions to problems hidden in other people's thinking.

These are a few of my ideas. I'd be interested in hearing yours. How do you stay curious?

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