

Top Tips for Curiosity to Fuel Forward Movement

There is a significant payoff in making curiosity a way of life. Being deliberately curious builds the ability to solve problems, by encouraging diligent work on challenges, rather than their avoidance. Developing characteristics to open our imagination can get us unstuck. Here is how to be deliberate about it:

- Challenge yourself to see differences through a curiosity lens
- Embrace uncertainty as a place of opportunity (a step forward in problem solving)
- Be deliberately playful to open your imagination
- Allow challenges to become opportunities to explore

When was the last time you had child-like curiosity about anything? You know, the kind that seeks to answer random questions, is full of innocence, and is open to everything and anything. If you are having a difficult time remembering, you must read on.

Curiosity is a mixed bag. There are different types of curiosity from the healthy having a sense of wonder about the world to the not-so-healthy including addictions. I am exploring the healthy version here.

When it comes to wonder and curiosity, my nine-year-old is a master. His curiosity is evident in the many questions that come to me every day. Why is the sky up there? Why do we die? Do fish sleep? I do my best to answer his inquisitive questions with an explanation. Not going to lie, even genuine curiosity can be annoying when the questions seem endless. More often than not, I find myself replying, “you should Google that!”

Curiosity is kin to play, openness to exploring, and using the imagination. Children have a natural tendency to stretch these muscles daily. While conducting a creativity training session with several 3rd-grade classes, I asked them “where are you when you get your best ideas?” Most

answers focused on play (i.e., video games, Legos, playground, etc.). Unsurprising, play comes naturally to children. I asked the teachers the same question. The answers from the teachers focused on being in a relaxed state (i.e., routine activities, exercise, reading, etc.). No answers from the teachers included play.

One teacher was a curiosity dream. She ushered her kids into the class like a mother hen looking after her chicks—giving them freedom while lovingly guiding their behavior. This teacher found the improv techniques used to encourage imaginative play fantastic, claiming she would certainly use the exercise with the class. Adults accept that play, curiosity, even using their imagination can help kids learn. Recess becomes a charging of the batteries to open up their imagination and encourage exploring.

At some point, play stops being something we do naturally and gets relegated to something only kids *should* do. Adults who “play” become goof offs and trouble makers. Play becomes a risky business in a society that seems to reward following the rules. Curiosity suffers from this same disease that has spread rampantly over time.

According to *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, strong uncertainty avoidance can lead to seeing differences as *dangerous* versus seeing differences through a *curiosity* lens, as with weak uncertainty avoidance. In other words, the approach to ambiguity impacts the approach to the problem. As children, we tend to see differences through a curiosity lens. As adults, we think we know better and can start to see differences as dangerous.

How does uncertainty impact problems? Uncertainty implies you don't know everything about a situation or problem. What a great place to be! It suggests the opportunity for learning, exploring and growth. That would be one way to look at it. Another way—the more common way—would be to see this situation as something to avoid, hide, or get through quickly. If curiosity can aid problem solving, why do we cringe at the thought of jumping into uncertainty?

Our daily lives pose various problems. Some like deciding between milk and juice in the morning are pretty straightforward. Other problems like chasing your next big thing may require some imagination. Problems that benefit from using the imagination are all around us. Do you want to move your organization forward? Are you seeking to make a mark in the world? Being deliberately curious about problems can turn open the imagination to create forward movement. Walt Disney said it best: *We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.*