



Investigators set up a hidden camera experiment to see how quickly people can go along with a group. A woman thought she was going for a simple eye exam, but unbeknownst to her, all of the people in the waiting room weren't other patients – they were actors. Every so often in the experiment, a bell would ring. Every time the bell rang, all the actors would stand up and then sit down. After just three times of hearing the bell, and without knowing why she was doing it, the woman stood up and sat down, conforming perfectly with the group.



Eventually, they called each of the “patients” away one by one to get their eyes examined. What would happen when the group was gone? Once everyone was out of the room, they continued ringing the bell and what do you think she did when she was all alone? She conformed to the rules of the group without them even being there.

Then, they introduced *actual* patients into the room who didn’t know the rules. When the bell went off, she stood up. A new patient asked her why she stood up. And she responded with “Everybody was doing it, so I thought I was supposed to.” What impact do you think that had on the new guy when the bell rang again? Yes ... they both stood up. As they allowed more unsuspecting patients into the room, they started to follow along and stand up every time the bell rang.

Slowly but surely, what began as a random rule for the woman had become a social rule for everyone in the waiting room. This internalized behavior is called social learning. When we see others do a task, our brains will reward us for doing the same thing. No one wants to be excluded. Conformity is comfortable.

But going along to get along can create bad habits and stunt growth. And status quo thinking can lead to the downfall of organizations. When we do things only because they were always done a certain way, we don’t progress. We don’t look for other ways to approach problems or devise solutions.

We need to go beyond – to ask why? Why are we doing it this way? Why is this important? What area we striving to accomplish?

Curiosity is responsible for the most incredible things to change our world. You can go back to the Model T or ahead to self-driving cars and the foundation behind them is a passion for innovation. We know that leaders believe that they encourage curiosity and exploration, but the reality is only half of employees feel rewarded for it when they explore their curiosity. If we want our organizations to generate innovative ideas, we must not only provide rewards, but determine how to help our employees and leaders develop the desire to explore.

My job is to be curious. I ask questions and share knowledge for a living. Whether I do it through my radio show, my research, my teaching, or my speaking, I obtain information to share, and that requires that I must first ask questions. I learn a lot from interviewing people. What I found interesting was whether they were experts from Harvard, Stanford, billionaires, top CEOs, HR leaders, when I asked them what came first ... curiosity or creativity, curiosity or motivation, etc., they all said curiosity comes first.

My goal today is to help all of you explore the value of curiosity and determine ways you can help overcome the things that hold you and your organizations back from developing it.



Curiosity is the spark that ignites the process that leads to the goal we hope to achieve. If we look at an example outside of the workplace, it might make it easier to picture. Think of a goal you might have like baking a cake. If you were to mix the ingredients of eggs, milk, flour, etc. or in my case a cake mix because it is easier, and then put it into a pan and placed it into the oven, not much would happen if you didn't turn on the oven.

In the workplace, if our end goal is being innovative and productive, we must consider what is the spark ... or the oven. It is when we ignite the spark of curiosity that we ignite motivation, drive, engagement, creativity, communication, and all the other soft skills that we hope to improve. The problem is that most companies start with mixing the ingredients when they should be starting by turning on the oven. When you start in the middle ... no one gets cake.

Let's go back to the beginning. We know kids are endlessly curious. Three-year-olds ask their parents about 100 questions a day.

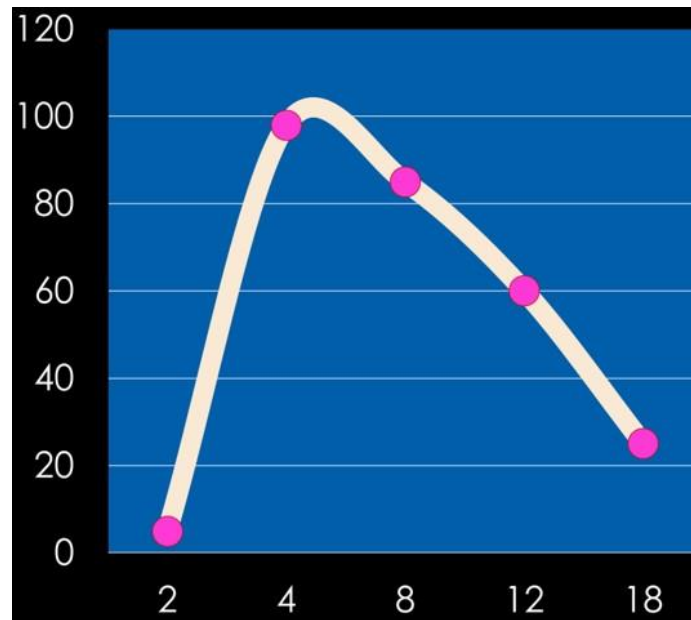


I love this photograph because it shows the wonder of the world through the eyes of a child. Here they are at this incredible museum with all the art that everyone is supposed to look at on the walls and what do the kids do? They want to see what's behind the vent. When I look at this picture, I wonder what they saw back there. Do you?

When did you stop wanting to look behind the vent? What stopped you? Did someone literally say, 'Don't do that'?

We have seen that they begin with this wonderful level of curiosity and then around the age of 5, curiosity in children begins to dwindle.

In Sir Ken Robinson's incredible TED talk about whether schools kill creativity, he acknowledged that we created an educational system that educates people out of their capacities. To meet 19th-century industrial job requirements, we created a hierarchy in education where math and science were the top priorities, and creative thinking was at the bottom. As education began to reward for more top-tiered skills like math and science, the system became about creating more academics, which led to the undergraduate degree becoming less useful, requiring more and more top-tiered skilled degrees. This system has been detrimental for curiosity and creativity, which are fundamental for innovation.



(Illustrates decline of creativity from age 5 to 18)

To understand the impact this has had, it helps to look at the effect on children. Professor George Land created an assessment as part of his work with NASA to test for creativity. In the process, he studied children to see how their levels changed throughout time. At the age of 5, 98% of children were creative geniuses, at age ten that number fell to 30%, at age 15 it dropped to 12%, and by age 31, only 2% were creative geniuses. It is critical to understand why this occurs.

If we look at two kinds of thinking that take place, it helps us see where we have created obstacles to curiosity and creativity.

Consider that we have divergent and convergent thinking. Divergent thinking is about imagination and creating possibilities, whereas convergent thinking is about testing and criticizing. Land likens divergent thinking to the accelerator and convergent thinking to the brake. The problem is that our education system encourages both to occur at the same time. The result is that they come up with new ideas only to judge and criticize them into non-existence. A perpetual monologue in our mind shuts down potentially valuable ideas. That voice can stop further exploration.