



There has never been a more critical time to cultivate a culture fueled by curiosity to ensure the survival of organizations. With groundbreaking technologies such as CRISPR DNA sequencing, 3D printing, robotics, and AI, organizations must operate at warp speed. They must adapt quickly to thrive.

Leaders at Google have long-viewed learning agility and curiosity as a leading predictor of success. They place it above intelligence and education. However, we only see about 15% of employees who have a strongly developed sense of curiosity.

While it might seem intuitive to hire for experience, Harvard Business Review published research that showed experience is not trivial, but it can be perpetually overrated. It can be more important to focus on resiliency, adaptability, and those who embrace curiosity to learn when circumstances can fluctuate.

In one study of global pharmaceutical leaders, those who had high levels of curiosity received twice as many promotions as those with low levels. The desire to learn accounts for 18% of why a person is promoted.

If we can develop curiosity, we can improve information seeking, enhanced learning, unprompted questions - and that can help individuals perceive change as less stressful and therefore adapt more easily. For organizations, improving curiosity translates into improved innovation, engagement, and just about every other factor that ties into productivity.

How does curiosity translate into business results? Smart, successful CEO's get it. For the ones who don't, what are companies losing for not investing in creating a culture of curiosity?

Let's explore some of the costs involved with lost curiosity.

We know we are losing billions of dollars each year due to low levels of emotional intelligence. Two of the most important elements of emotional intelligence are interpersonal skills and empathy.



If we have good interpersonal skills, we get along with other people. These are critical skills because if they are developed, we experienced less conflict, less cost involved with conflict, and more productivity.

If we have empathy, we are able to put ourselves in someone else's shoes to see things from their perspective. That can help develop those key interpersonal and soft skills and again, that leads to less conflict and more productivity.

Employees give a lot of weight to empathy - 96% of employees believe showing empathy is an important way to advance employee retention.

You might be the mediator between employees and leaders. You are the heart of your organization and the people who can help create a more curious culture. A huge challenge for HR is overcoming and breaking through the lack of emotional intelligence at the top – the lowest levels of emotional intelligence are found in CEOs. We promote the people who are good with people to supervisory positions, but as they continue up the ladder, past the middle management level, they enter an environment that can chip away at their level of EQ. They spend less time in meaningful interactions and get out of touch. CareerBuilder.com shows that a whopping 58 percent of managers said they didn't receive any management training. Developing empathy would drastically improve their ability to communicate.

How do we develop empathy? We ask questions...which requires curiosity.

The golden rule of treating others as we would like to be treated is no longer the best practice. It can be more important to follow the platinum rule which means we should treat others how they would like to be treated. To understand how they want to be treated, we must do some

exploration. As we incorporate what we know about how to interact with others, we improve our emotional intelligence and that leads to all kinds of better outcomes from improved leadership skills, promotability, likeability, and more. It's intuitive. It all begins with discovery and questioning to broaden our perception.

I have worked with companies where they saw the value of improving our ability to interact well and have empathy. One company for which I worked gave us the Management By Strengths MBS color test. Some of you might have used that one or something similar. What that company required was for everyone to take the test and then post their results on their cubicle.

At that time, that assessment assigned you to categories like Red, Green, Yellow and Blue. The Red people were what we might call direct. They liked you to get to the point without a lot of fluff. Sometimes they might even hurt your feelings because they might cut you off. How many of you can relate with being a Red? The Green people were the extraverts. Now keep in mind we all have a little bit of each color but if you ended up as a Red or a Green, etc. that was your primary type. So the Green people talked a lot and they got their feelings hurt if others like the Reds cut them off. How many of you here can relate to being a Green? The Yellow people were the ones who liked to read the manuals and did well with numbers and quantitative things. Sometimes they applied to be in sales, but they weren't as fond of it as the Reds and the Greens. How many of you can relate to being a Yellow? The last group were the Blues. They were the calm people who didn't like to be rushed. They were usually nice, I should say, but if you pushed a Blue too far, they might lose it. But it wasn't common for them to lose it. Unless of course, you slammed your hand on their desk with a pile of folders and yelled I need these yesterday. How many of you can relate to being a Blue?

Having advanced knowledge of everyone's type helped us learn empathy and develop more harmonious relationships. By understanding why people preferred certain behaviors, or responded better to a particular approach, it was easier for us to adjust to the way of interacting that would be most effective and well-received.

Communication issues are one of the most often cited reasons for problems at work. When people can't communicate well, there are disagreements, misunderstandings, conflict and a host of other issues that lead to problems with productivity. If you are arguing with your coworker, take all of the time you are wasting and the time he or she is wasting and then add in the time your boss who has to deal with all of this wastes and a lot of time is money down the drain.

You might say that asking questions can help and you'd be right. But it is not just about asking the questions, it is also about listening to the answers. Sometimes we think we know answers and don't even ask the questions. The inability to truly listen well is a huge problem in the workplace. We teach this out of people at times.



I have been guilty of this. Let me explain. When I was a pharmaceutical representative I went through intensive training. My onboarding took like two years...At least it felt like it. They drilled into my head that I had to do these sales presentations that they called details. When we detailed a doctor, we were supposed to tell him or her about three products. We were told this is nearly impossible to do because they are so unbelievably busy, that we knew we might only get time for one product detail, if that. Having heard how challenging this was, put me a bit on edge.

I can remember one of my first times calling on a doctor by myself. I sat in the waiting room for what felt like forever and finally when I was honored with the invitation to his office, I can remember getting through all three products. I was so proud of myself. I walked out of his office and headed to my car to get him some samples. I basically patted myself on the back the whole way because of how triumphant I was. I got in the elevator to head down to my car and just before the door closed a man walked in with me. Because I am an extravert, I cannot go two floors without talking, so I said, “so, do you work in the building?” He looked at me with a horrified look and said, “you just detailed me.” This was that same doctor.

I was mortified. What I thought was great communication because I had told him about all three products, was not good at all. It was just about speaking at him. I didn’t ask him any questions. I didn’t involve his input. I didn’t find out his pain points. What I thought was the best thing turned out to be one of the worst things I could have done. It taught me the value of asking questions and listening to answers. I often wonder how long it would have taken me to realize that if he had not gotten on that elevator.

Engagement is a huge issue for all organizations right now. Developing engagement is not just about being more profitable, even though we know engaged teams show 21% greater profitability. We know employees who feel their voice is heard feel more empowered and are more likely to recommend their workplace as somewhere others might want to work. We hear so much about it because it is costing companies so much money. If we are losing \$500 billion a year, it is important to explore what others have done to improve engagement. Again, we can gain a lot of ground by being curious and asking questions.



Consider how Disney overcame their problem with low engagement in their laundry division. Not all that you see at Disneyland is glamorous. Just ask the people who work in the laundry. Cleaning linens and ironing is not as exciting as it sounds. They found that they were losing a lot of people. In fact, the turnover was so high that they decided to send out a questionnaire to determine what kinds of things they could do to improve the job for their workers.

They expected to receive comments that were above and beyond what they had the desire and finances to accommodate, but in fact, they learned some small things were all that employees needed to become more engaged. They asked them “what can we do to make your job better” and they received practical answers like ‘put an air vent over my workspace’ and ‘make my folding table adjustable for my height.’ They thought, yeah ... we can do that. So, they did and it dramatically improved engagement and turnover. Just asking a simple question opened up a very important dialogue and led to effective solutions.

We know organizations strive to be more innovative. We know half of the jobs that exist today won’t exist in 20 years and we know that the majority of Fortune 500 firms that existed in 1995 are gone. We don’t want to become obsolete because we overlooked opportunities that were right under our nose.

Consider some organizations that clung to “tried and true” ways of doing things. In the 1980s, Kodak dominated the photography market worldwide. As the age of technology emerged, the company owned the patents to an obscure phenomenon called digital photography. The leaders feared that if they productized and sold the new technology, it would cause a decline in their film sales. Using the classic decision-making process, they decided to forgo the new technology to protect their dominance in film-based photography. Of course, digital photography took over the industry, and if the company had focused more on digitization, chances are it would be thriving today. They failed because they held onto status quo thinking.

In 2000, an obscure video company called Netflix pitched an offer to Blockbuster, the most dominant player in the video rentals market, to become a partner for online rentals. After analyzing the offer using this standard model, Blockbuster's leaders concluded that there was little or no market for online video rentals. They decided to pass on the offer. What happened? Blockbuster went out of business, and in 2018, Netflix had 124 million paying subscribers in over 190 countries and \$7.6 billion in revenue. Again, status quo thinking killed them.

If we want to be truly innovative, we must open ourselves to new ideas and that happens through exploration.

Innovation usually comes from ideas from people in the field, on the ground, behind the scenes, and from those pulling the strings. But we need to put them in a position, give them permission, and encourage them to explore ideas, test new directions, and imagine the future. As artificial intelligence and technology threaten existing jobs, talent needs to be brought along as well to help the company evolve and drive that change.

With the advent of new technology, we will have a lot of people who are going to need to move into new areas of employment. But where do we put them? Where will they fit? Wouldn't it be great to put them someplace where they felt more engaged? Wouldn't we be able to find out what they could be best at if we asked them questions and allowed them to pursue areas of interest?



Leadership and management need curiosity to ask questions to develop the curiosity and creativity that can lead to innovation.

Sometimes the best solutions come from the most unexpected places. England's Great Ormond Street Hospital, which treats heart patients, was experiencing an inordinate number of casualties when patients were being transferred from one unit to another. One of the physicians was watching a Formula One race and was particularly impressed by how quickly and efficiently the pit crews serviced everything, mistake-free, in seven seconds or less. So, he invited Formula One racing teams to come in and view the hospital's transfer procedures, and then make observations based on their own procedures. The three-step process recommended by the racing teams, once implemented, reduced the hospital's errors by more than 50 percent. Thinking in a

unique outside the box way can be what it takes to thrive in today's environment. That is why it is so critical to understand the importance of curiosity.