Inquisitive

Inquiring, by definition, means to investigate, to question. It implies that there is some unknown waiting to be discovered, explored, and defined. Some new information, new knowledge that, once understood, will satisfy the curiosity of the seeker. But curiosity in someone who is highly inquisitive is never really satisfied. Being inquisitive means you’re constantly hunting for answers to questions: What’s this? How does that work? Why did that happen? What can be learned from this? Tough problems become intriguing puzzles to be solved. Learning about something new increases the chance of making novel connections when the same old solutions are falling flat. It can be tempting to default to habitual ways of thinking and acting, but sameness in this context is not your friend. If you rely solely on the familiar, your solution and idea bank will likely keep shrinking as the environment around you gets more and more complex. With a steady infusion of the fresh and new, that bank will become filled with scores of options and approaches for you to choose from.

*We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we’re curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.*

Walt Disney
American film producer, director, screenwriter, and animator
**SKILLED**
Searches for the new
Is curious
Approaches the unknown as an adventure to be explored
Seeks new approaches to solve problems
Views mistakes as opportunities to learn

**LESS SKILLED**
Likes the familiar
Goes to comfortable sources
Prefers not to challenge present conceptions
Is less at ease when things are uncertain
Favors well-established solutions

**OVERUSE OF SKILL**
Focuses on unvetted ideas simply because they are new
Dismisses the familiar and established without due cause
Explores without purpose; curiosity becomes an end unto itself, rather than a means to an end
Can’t distinguish between the important and the trivial when exploring the new

**SOME POSSIBLE CAUSES OF LOWER SKILL**
Causes help explain “why” a person may have trouble in this dimension. When seeking to increase skill, it’s helpful to consider how these might play out in certain situations. And remember that all of these can be addressed if you are motivated to do so.

- Comfortable with what is
- Impatient
- Easily frustrated
- Not curious
- Intimidated by things and people who are different
- Values convention
- Confident in his/her knowledge
- Narrow background
- Arrogant

**DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFICULTY**
When compared with other dimensions of Learning Agility, this dimension is *easier* to develop.
Does It Best

Among renowned physicist Albert Einstein’s abundance of mental attributes, one that stands apart was his unceasing quest for new knowledge about the world around him. Einstein described it this way: “I am not more gifted than anybody else. I am just more curious than the average person, and I will not give up on a problem until I have found the proper solution.” Einstein’s curiosity took shape well beyond the boundaries of science with philosophy, religion, politics, and music being just some of the areas he explored in his lifetime.

TIPS TO INCREASE SKILL IN BEING INQUISITIVE

Comfortable with current boundaries?
Push the limits of your comfort zone.

MAKE THE UNFAMILIAR FAMILIAR
Stimulate your brain by doing things, going places, and talking to people outside of your routine. Take a course in an area you know nothing about. Or take a course in an area only sort of related to what you do. Go to the theater, concerts, and other cultures’ festivals. Vacation at places you’ve never been before and without doing a lot of pre-trip research. Go to restaurants you know nothing about. Attend perspective-broadening lectures and workshops on topics that you normally don’t attend. Talk to more strangers in line at the grocery store and on airplanes. Change up day-to-day things—drive to work a different way, use the computer mouse with your opposite hand, rearrange your furniture. Constantly ask yourself is there anything new to learn here? Anything that may surprise me?

EXPAND YOUR TASK REPERTOIRE
Doing the same things in the same ways makes for easy thinking. But if you gravitate toward the same tasks and ways of doing things again and again, you’re not leaving much room to try anything new. So if most of the tasks you do each day feel as comfortable as an old shirt, it’s probably time to expand and diversify your task wardrobe. Start by making a list of what you like to do or is familiar, and what you don’t like to do or is new. Do at least a couple of your liked activities each day, but not until you’ve tackled the don’t likes
or unfamiliar activities first. By pushing through and doing the tasks that are harder, require more focus, or force you to face your own ignorance on a topic, you’re more likely to learn something new.

Expanding the range of what you do is not the same as abandoning established ways of doing things without due cause. Established methods are established for a reason—they’ve been tested and proven over time. Find the rightful place for your tried-and-true tasks and methods.

**EXTEND THE BOUNDARIES FOR “WHAT IS”**

Much research from anthropology has shown that our brains are trapped inside our belief framework, which dictates how we interpret and interact with the world around us. The Hopi Indians in the southwestern United States have one word for snow. The Inuit of Alaska, on the other hand, have many different words for snow which reflect the many different ways their lives are impacted by snow and snow conditions. A Hopi could not survive in Alaska with just one snow concept. Our own experience unknowingly creates boundaries for our thinking. Try to think outside your belief boundaries. You don’t have to give them up; just turn them off when you are thinking about a problem or challenge. Or, better yet, when exploring something new, compare and contrast your current framework related to that new something with the new data that you uncover.

**RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE**


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**Think you have to know it all?**

**Make uncertainty work for you.**

**EMBRACE AMBIGUITY**

Do you feel best when you know everything that’s going on around you and you are in control? Most do. Few are motivated by uncertainty and chaos. Humans are hardwired to crave certainty. Brain research shows that we are more averse to ambiguity than risk. Why? In risk situations, the brain can weigh the pros and cons, it has something constructive to do. When things are uncertain, there is nothing to calculate, so the brain works overtime to try and decrease the uncertainty. Inquisitive people have figured out that the reward for exploring the new is worth the ambiguity that comes with it. Envision the payoff of the unknown and you’ll become more comfortable being a pioneer—solving problems no one has solved before and cutting paths where no one has been before.
BE A QUESTIONER
Questions are a powerful tool—both for exploring the new and reducing uncertainty when solving problems. But as powerful as questions can be, they are often underused. In one study of problem solving, 7% of comments were questions and about half were solutions. Focusing on solutions may be efficient in the short-term but could leave you optionless if you don’t deposit fresh ideas and approaches into the mix. Questions are the fuel for new ideas and new ways for solving problems. So start and keep asking why. For problems needing to be solved, asking why helps you see what the causes are so you can start to put them into organizing buckets. This increases the chance of a better solution because you can see more connections. For new ideas or ambiguous situations, asking why and how helps you uncover new insights and information for your idea engine.

GO OUT ON A LIMB
The path to learn, to explore something unknown, often involves taking a risk. The greater the unknown, the greater the risk. You can’t learn anything if you’re not trying anything new. The Wright brothers were determined to satisfy their curiosity about the feasibility of human flight, despite the fact that all previous attempts to fly had been failures. Research indicates that more successful people have made more mistakes than the less successful. When you’re seeking to find answers to something, go for small wins so you can recover quickly if you miss, and more importantly, learn from the results. Don’t try to satisfy your curiosity and expect to get it right the first time. Many problem-solving studies show that the second or third try is when we really understand the underlying dynamics of problems. Think of exploring as a series of try-learn-try again-learn some more.

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

Need some techniques to get started?
Put inquisitiveness to work.

PRIME THE CURIOSITY PUMP
To fuel curiosity, it helps to think creatively. Creative thought processes do not follow the formal rules of logic—where one uses cause and effect to prove or solve something. Being creative means looking everywhere and every which way. Some rules of creative thought are:
Factor II: Mental Agility

Inquisitive

· Move from one concept or way of looking at things to another, such as from economic to political.
· Generate ideas without judging them initially.
· Use information to restructure and come up with new patterns.
· Jump from one idea to another without justifying the jump.
· Look for parallels far from the problem, such as how is an organization like a big oak tree?
· Look for the least likely and odd.
· Ask what’s missing or what’s not here.

Stay grounded and purposeful. You don’t want to cultivate a reputation of being a scatterbrain. Applied curiosity may involve being impractical at first, but always to achieve very practical and useful ends.

Find the Exceptions and the Outliers

Getting fresh ideas doesn’t happen through quick scanning; it requires looking deeply. Carve out dedicated time—study it deeply, look for parallels in other organizations and in remote areas totally outside your field. Practice picking out anomalies—unusual facts that don’t quite fit, like sales going down when they should have gone up. What do these odd things imply for strategy? Or look for distant parallels. Don’t fall into the mental trap of searching only in parallel organizations to your own because “only they would know.” Back up and ask a broader question to aid in the search for solutions. When Motorola wanted to find out how to process orders more quickly, they went not to other electronics firms, but to Domino’s Pizza and FedEx. If your response to this is that you don’t have the time, that also usually explains why you’re not having any fresh ideas.

Freshen Traditional Problem Solving

When confronted with a new, fresh problem, it’s helpful to take a fresh approach to solving it. So turn the problem upside down: ask what is the least likely thing it could be, what the problem is not, what’s missing from the problem, or what the mirror image of the problem is. Sometimes going to extremes helps. Exploring every condition, every worst case you can think of sometimes will suggest a different solution. Taking the present state of affairs and projecting into the future may indicate how and where the system will break down. It also helps to think out loud. Many people don’t know what they know until they talk it out. Find a good sounding board and talk to him/her to increase your understanding of a problem or a technical area. Talk to an expert in an unrelated field. Talk to the most irreverent person you know. Your
goal is not to get their input but, rather, help in figuring out what you know (and don’t know).

**RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE**

**ASSIGNMENTS TO PRACTICE SKILL**
Start something from scratch that will require doing a lot of first-time things and meeting new challenges that might need fixing in a short period of time.

Take on a role much bigger than the one you have now. The larger scope and complexity will mean managing a high variety of activities at different levels of complexity and certainty.

Go global with an international assignment that will involve thinking through tough problems from a novel position and for this new setting, which will likely be different from your own background.
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT…
Here are some questions to reflect on as you focus on being Inquisitive. Think about how you might answer these today and how, through using the tips in this chapter, you might achieve a better result in the future.

Remember back to your childhood and that wonderful feeling of uncovering the secret to something you didn’t know before. How can you capture that sense of discovery, of newness, in the world around you? How can you think like a child today?

Capture three things you would like to explore in more detail—additional questions to pose, research to gather, etc. When will you start pursuing these efforts? What will your plan be?

Identify one current situation that would benefit from additional questions or inquiry. What information is needed? What answers would prove valuable to shaping the situation or outcome? Where can you flex your inquisitive muscle?

Count how many times you’ve returned to the same restaurant, vacation spot, leisure activity. How much does it take for you to try something new, something that is truly foreign or unfamiliar to you? What do you have to lose?

People say: idle curiosity.
The one thing that curiosity cannot be is idle.

Leo Rosten
Polish-American author and humorist