

FROM THE HUMBLE KURDISH FIELDS OF TURKEY TO YOGHURT MAGNATE THE STORY OF HAMDİ ULUKAYA OF CHOBANI YOGHURT LLC By Leandri Lotz

This article is about how passion, diversity, community, creativity and organisational climate can defy all odds and can lead to a flourishing business during a time of global economic meltdown, but it also touches on how businesses must **embrace change** and when it comes to who should lead such change, even the best founders must sometimes be replaced.

This is the journey of Hamdi Ulukaya and it commenced in 1994. As a Kurdish-Turkish immigrant from a family of shepherds, he arrived in America, speaking nearly no English. This was a period of worldwide economic and political turmoil; however, his country was so severely impacted by the instability that most young people sought refugee status in other countries, leaving what was familiar and loved by them, in pursuit of survival elsewhere. With his passion and courage, he started Chobani LLC and led the acclaimed yoghurt company to a net worth of \$1.7 billion as estimated in 2018. This makes Mr Ulukaya one of the wealthiest people in the world, and his experience stands as an example for entrepreneurs that aspire to build successful companies.

Yes, I know this sounds like one of those too-good-to-be true stories that we easily brush aside; however, Hamdi Ulukaya's journey was not as smooth as the finest Greek yoghurt that he produces. Many lumps and hiccups on the way required the young entrepreneur to persevere and hold his vision, even when he knew that he had no plan, no collateral and no knowledge of business, marketing and even yoghurt, apart from the homemade cheese recipe of his beloved mother.

This extraordinary story starts in 2005 with an advertisement for the sale of an 84-year-old decommissioned yoghurt factory owned by the well-known Kraft Foods Company. They had given up on the factory and decided to sell it lock, stock and barrel at a bargain price to get rid of those parts of their business that were no longer competitive and profitable in the bad economic meltdown.

Hamdi inspected the factory, which was in less than ideal condition, but he could for some reason not let go of the idea of buying this factory. On the day of his visit, he found the last 55 dedicated employees busy preparing the building for closedown. For him, the building represented a last testimony of a company that gave up on their workers. Still struggling with his own displacement, he could sense the pain of the place. It was as if these lonely figures were let down by Kraft. They quietly went about their responsibilities as if preparing for a funeral.

Eventually, this man in his early 20's, with absolutely no business experience, decided that he was going to buy the factory and get it up and running again.

After the purchase, he could only afford to hire a hand full of the 55 remaining employees, and because he had no plan for the business, their first assignment was to paint the factory walls. Confused by the strange task, one of the employees remarked that he hopes that Hamdi had more ideas than just painting the walls red, white and blue. Nevertheless, this is where his core team was solidified. Side by side, they painted the entire building and gave the old lady a satisfying facelift.

Two years and many, many hours of sleeping on the factory floor later, Hamdi and his team were happy that they have perfected the recipe of their product and they launched Chobani yoghurt.

By that time, he was able to hire back most of the 55 original employees and he further expanded the workforce bit by bit.

He made the community the centre of his company and did not stray away from hiring refugees and immigrants. In the end he built a yoghurt empire that competes with the likes of Danone and Yoplait. “The Shepard’s way” focussed on health and wellness, giving back to the community and something Hamdi calls the Chobani Incubator – a platform where he assists small food start up’s to get business experience before they start their own businesses.

But let us see how he did this:

The four responsibilities of a good CEO through Hamdi’s eyes:

He was the most unlikely person to create a hugely successful brand, but he is also not the normal run of the mill example of a CEO. He refers to himself as an “anti-CEO”, because his main goal is not making money, but rather developing the community in order to ensure that everyone prosper from the business.

When thinking of yoghurt, innovation, opportunity and entrepreneurship are not the first things that come to mind, but this man has innovation in his blood. His business philosophy has a lot in common with “Ubuntu” and he aspires to uphold the following four key principles which he left as legacy during his CEO-ship:

- The expression of gratitude to all your Employees
- Involvement in the community through various projects that would benefit all
- Acting responsibly in his personal life as well as in his business decisions
- Always be accountable to the right people

1. Gratitude toward your Employees:

He observed that the way that customers treat waiters in restaurants, tell much about the customers’ personality. If a person treats those who perform stereotypical “menial jobs” with respect and dignity, that would be the kind of person you would want to associate your business with, he said.

A business is essentially selling the product of the employees’ labour to the consumer, and nobody’s labour is less important than that of another, irrespective of your position in the hierarchy of the organisation. Therefore, Hamdi believes that his employees deserve his gratitude, not only occasionally, not only through a performance bonus, but also on a day-to-day basis. He knows how to value his workforce, and saying “thank you”, comes naturally for him.

He acknowledges his employees, know them by the name and treat them as equals. He values their views, and suggestions, and he shows interest in their families.

2. Community involvement and collaboration:

Chobani does not believe in cheap labour or outsourcing. It is the community who contributes to the success of a company and it is therefore not unreasonable to plough back into the same community that supports you financially through their purchase of your products. Cultivating a sense of belonging, ownership and purpose in your employees is a sure way of strengthening the corporate culture and building winning teams.

He is of the view that community involvement should not be driven by the goals of compliance, tax deductions and equity incentives, but rather by a passion for giving back to those whose existence provides you with a niche for your business.

One of the many business lessons that he learnt through experience was to keep in touch with the customers and not to rely on “customer research” as it can be misleading. Keeping a direct link between the company and the customers gave him a true reflection of the company’s performance and the quality of the product. For many years the customer care line was Hamdi’s direct cell phone number, so he could get first-hand information from the client and not a watered down, sugar coated version from a customer service consultant.

He also teaches us how to craft purpose-driven teams that will improve efficiency, reduce employee turnover and increase profitability. Chobani has become the leading Greek yoghurt company in America through investment in purposeful corporate culture. Not alone are employees shareholders in the company, but they are working for a fair salary. Employees are proud of their ownership of the brand and their work when they have an equitable stake in a business. These kind of corporate structures fosters internal motivation and yields top quality performance. In addition, profit sharing is not where it stops for Ulukaya. He made social impact a part of all his business ventures and promoted the future of healthy food in every possible way. From there his involvement with the Incubator system.

3. Responsible practices:

There are times when a company has to take a stand and not just “go with the flow” when it comes to the big issues of the day. The organisational climate can make or break a company. A team is just as strong as the weakest link and when leaders act in irresponsible ways, it reflects negatively on the team spirit, commitment, creativity and unity of an organisation.

When management notice that the external environment has become unjust and hostile towards the people, it should take steps to avoid perpetuating the injustice further through their own actions.

Companies that are leveraging their business for social good are rewarded with motivated teams and improved performance. For Hamdi this does not mean handouts. He fosters a sense of ownership by including employees in key decision-making, creating space for creativity and freedom to learn and encouraging employees to drive social impact initiatives. He has proven that the combination of financial support and creative equity is a powerful way of building motivated and dedicated teams that can overcome any obstacle.

As Hamdi learnt from his father: “Your reputation is your biggest asset.” He also asks himself the question: “Would Mom be ok with this?” This shows that his “built in” moral compass is solidly earthed in the things that makes us human, and not in the things that makes us rich.

4. Accountability to the RIGHT people:

According to his philosophy, the main goal should be a return on kindness and not a return on investment only. Even though it might sound counter-intuitive to investors and shareholders to focus on customers, communities and employees, those are exactly the groups a business should be accountable to.

Clients, communities and employees who feel that they are not heard and do not matter can cause the downfall of from the most well-known and successful seeming enterprises through

sending their business and skills elsewhere, leaving work for better treatment and disinterest in supporting the business.

For that reason, the investors should not take the focus of the organisation, because without the “real” groups of interest there would be no return on investment for the investors at all.

His philosophy about life and management:

Quoted from an interview with Ron Thomas in August 2019

Let your employees make mistakes.

“The work that I did on diversity, I never looked at it as work on diversity,” Ulukaya said. “People show up and whoever you are, that’s OK. If you let people truly be themselves, then they just don’t have to pretend. One of the first things I said when I started the company are the words ‘I don’t know.’ People were asking questions, and I said, ‘I don’t know,’ and I made it OK to say that.”

Don’t pretend.

“If you are trying to be someone you’re not that people are expecting you to be, then you’re pretending. If you erase that, you save 50% to 70% of your time.”

Build a human workforce that feels natural.

“Having your place [feel like] a representation of human life is extremely important.”

Value diversity in opinions.

“Having different opinions but finding how to work together and contribute to common goals is the simplest thing, but is extremely massive in the life of a company.”

Recognize your business’ potential for social impact.

“Business is an extremely powerful platform if it acts like it cares, not just checks the box of corporate social responsibility.”

Stay mindful of what matters to this generation of employees.

“Income inequality between the working class and the rich has never been this big. The new generations coming up are saying this is not a just world.”

Be aware of the environmental impact of your business.

“You can say your tomatoes are organic, but the people picking them—how much are they paid, what conditions? Getting organic tomatoes do not mean the people who touch them are being treated humanely. We need to push everyone to pay attention to these conditions.”

Being profitable does not mean being selfish.

“If you truly mean it, if you’re truly for your community and employees and do right by the environment, it doesn’t go against the fundamentals of business. It makes you more profitable.”

Don’t be so quick to shy away from politics.

“We need to have conversations about businesses and their roles in society; the political landscape is failing everywhere, and for that reason, I can’t see any other platforms other than businesses to step up.”

Remember to have some fun.

“Yogurt is magic...You get a lot of cultures in yogurt!”

What caused Hamdi to step down as CEO of Chobani?

He learned to delegate.

The extraordinary growth of the company was unanticipated, and Hamdi did not have sufficient skills for such an expansion of risk. Furthermore, the company started to be challenged by its own philosophy of the community-based business model when the local supply chain was no longer effective enough to meet the demand of the rapid increase in orders. Despite opening new factories and building new infrastructure, the demand was just too high too quick. This caused delays, and the delays were putting the company at risk.

Then in 2013 Whole Foods announced that it will no longer carry Chobani as its leading brand after Chobani had a recall of products that resulted in the deregistration from the American food and drug database. Quick and decisive action was required and Hamdi employed a Food and Customer Company professional and specialists to run finance, safety, quality control, supply chain and operations to manage the business.

By that time, he has undoubtedly built a cohesive workforce that were in unison, all focussing in the same direction. His employees were his biggest asset and the one that made the difference and with the new specialists and leadership on board, it was no longer required from him to run the company like a start-up. He could now do what he does best, and that is focussing on product development.

Application of these principles to South African business leadership and development:

So how do these four principles apply to us here in sunny South Africa, many thousands of miles away?

Through the simple idea a business, which was failing under the management of a very well-established company, a person with a vision and commitment to people, took 5 employees and some seemingly crazy ideas and built an empire with the interests of the community at its core. Up to today they are supporting the economy of America, however agriculture is at the centre of their focus by utilising the resources provided by the local dairy farmers in partnership with the American farmlands trust. In this way, they are ploughing back into the community. This strikes a chord with our own food insecurity and the uncertain conditions of agriculture in the South Africa of the future. This model serves as inspiration to boost the local economy.

In closing:

His largest success came from taking risks. One does not have to be first on Forbes' list with millions in the bank to build a responsibly lead business where the workers are just as integral as the CEO.

It only took a Shepard with a little family learnt knowledge of cheese-making and a great spirit to turn an old factory into an empire for the community and it all started by painting a few walls.

Whenever you are stuck in searching for answers, I would strongly advise: go grab a can of paint and paint a wall to clear your thoughts. You can thank Hamdi later.

And remember: People make the difference.

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AGAINST ALL ODDS

Author ANONMOUS

A short story on how PREDATORS are dealt with by NATURE!

In a forest, a pregnant deer is about to give birth. She finds a remote grass field near a strong-flowing river.

This seems to be a safe place.

Suddenly her labour pains begin.

At the same moment, dark clouds gather above her and lightning starts a forest fire.

She looks to her left and sees a hunter with his bow extended pointing directly at her.

To her right, she spots a hungry lion fast approaching her.

What can the pregnant deer do when she is in labour and so vulnerable!! She does not have too many choices nor are there any escape routes!

- What will happen?
- Will the deer survive these competing risks from all sides?
- Will she safely give birth to a fawn?
- Will the fawn survive?
- Or will everything be burnt by the forest fire, eaten by the lion or shot by the hunter or will she drown in the river?
- Will she perish to the hunters' arrow?
- Will she die a horrible death at the hands of the hungry lion approaching her?
- Will she jump into the river to escape and drown?

She is constrained by the fire on the one side and the flowing river on the other and boxed in by her two natural competing predators.

What can and does she do?

She chooses the natural route and to focus on her main purpose of giving birth to a new life.

Then the following amazing sequence of events unfolds:

- Blinding lightning strikes and blinds the hunter for life;
- The hunter involuntarily releases his arrow which flies past the deer and strikes the hungry lion in its heart and it perishes;

- It starts to rain heavily and in the storm the forest fire is doused by the rain;
- The deer gives birth to a new healthy beautiful fawn.

Did the deer have any influence on the circumstances leading to the chain of events that caused the demise of her PREDATORS, which happened right in front of her very eyes?

LIFE's LESSONS:

There are times when we are confronted at the same time from all sides with negative situations, not of our own doing, but created by others greed and maliciousness. What we must not do is take our eyes off the ball. We must remain focused on the issue at hand to bring about rebirth and new purpose.

Some people think that they are so powerful that they can stun and overwhelm us by their own narrow agendas driven by their immoral conduct.

Maybe we can learn something from the focused deer who had purpose.

The priority of the deer, in that given moment, was only to simply give birth to a baby. The rest was not in her hands to control and any action or reaction would have changed her focus and likely resulted in her death and demise of her offspring.

Where is your focus?

Where is your purpose?

In the midst of any storm not created by you, always keep your eye on the ball. You will then produce creative and innovative work that no one can take away from you.

The strong person knows how to keep their life in order during turmoil.

Even with tears in their eyes, they still manage to say: "I'm ok", as this too shall come to pass when all the dust settles.

CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT – BUT WHY?

By Leandri Lotz

“Creativity is intelligence having fun” – Albert Einstein

In this article, we explore along with Harvard Business School's Francesca Gino who elaborates on the benefits of and common barriers to curiosity in the workplace and offers five strategies for bolstering it. Leaders should hire for curiosity, model inquisitiveness, emphasize learning goals, let workers explore and broaden their interests, and have “Why?” “What if...?” and “How might we...?” days. Doing so will help their organizations adapt to uncertain market conditions and external pressures and boost the business's success

Why is curiosity not always appreciated in the workplace?

When you page through history books, curiosity is blamed for all good and bad things that happened since creation. Everything; from the discovery of fire, to the invention of nuclear energy was and will forever remain linked to the curious nature of humankind.

In light of such a reality, you would expect that curiosity would be the number one quality that all employers would nurture and would regard as a good quality to have, yes? Sadly, not really. Experience has shown that some organisations pay lip service when it comes to their tolerance and support of curiosity in the workplace. Publicly they would affirm how much they value

originality and creativity as employee traits, yet, when it comes to the day to day operations, managers or leaders tend to err on the cautious side by suppressing creativity of staff out of fear that it will “increase risk and undermine efficiency” (September-October 2018 issue of Harvard Business Review). Like all good things, risk management has its place and time, but when it stands in the way of a thriving business, one should rather redefine the risk appetite of the organisation than to stifle curiosity. When we are making broad judgements from a place of fear, bias, and control, we are in trouble.

When you think of curiosity, one might imagine exploring new places or tasting strange cuisine. The question is: how does it fit into in the workplace? How does it influence productivity? In business, commerce, and trade?

The best workers are learners, those who are eager to propose new and improved ways of doing things. Those who are not scared of change. The best leaders are students and adapters, maybe, even disrupters. We must be able to think on our feet and thrive in a variety of environments. The only businesses that survive in our rapidly changing world are those that can adapt quickly to the changing environment. Moreover, these things can only happen in an environment that caters for the curious, because they ask questions, they are not scared to differ from popular opinions and they are willing to test the boundaries. Curious employees ask questions like how can we do this better? What challenges will we face? Who might be able to help us with this? How can our work support other people’s work? What next? Why? Why not?

Francesca Gino, behavioural scientist and the Tendon Family Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School has identified two barriers to curiosity in the workplace. She states that; “despite the well-established benefits of curiosity, organisations often discourage it. This is not because leaders do not see its value. On the contrary, both leaders and employees understand that curiosity creates positive outcomes for their companies.” She uses the example of 3M and Facebook where employees are given free time to pursue their personal interests, but the down side of such privileges is that the pressure to meet quarterly sales targets for launching new products by a certain date can become overwhelming. The barriers, she says, are the following:

- Management having the wrong mind-set; and
- Seeking efficiency to the detriment of exploration

There is a general perception in business that it is harder to manage staff that are allowed too much freedom to explore their own interests. Having to manage free spirits might result in challenges with discipline, or disagreements about plans, slow execution of plans and increasing cost of doing business with the company. It may also lead to high turnover of staff. She states: “Exploration often involves questioning the status quo and doesn’t always produce useful information. But it also means not settling for the first possible solution – and so it often yields better remedies”.

Curiosity is incorrectly seen as the opposite of productivity. Once an organisation has overcome its fear of disruption, there are many reasons to adopt an organisational culture and leadership style to grow the curiosity in staff.

What are the benefits of the growth mind-set (curiosity)?

Guess in which area of life are humans still ahead of computers? You are right: computers cannot ask why? And this is what will keep humans relevant in all aspects of life in the future. This is the strength that humans hold over artificial intelligence. In addition, this is why curiosity have to be part of every organisation. Just consider the following:

- **Fewer decision-making errors.** When curiosity exists, individuals are less likely to fall victim to confirmation bias. In other words, they are less likely to look for information that supports their beliefs, rather than information that proves them wrong. With curiosity, individuals are less likely to make broad judgements and stereotype people and this will create the kind of environment in which creative people thrive.
- **More innovation and positive changes in both creative and nonrelative jobs.** Encouraging people to be curious often improves work life. Those who are curious view difficult work situations more creatively. Curiosity is associated with less defensive reactions to stress and less aggressive reactions to provocation. Employees also perform better when they are curious.
- **Reduced group conflict.** Curiosity encourages employees in a group to understand others' perspectives. They tend to take interest in others' ideas rather than just focusing on their own. This creates a group that works better together and ultimately achieves better results. There is also a decrease in conflict.
- **More open communication and better team performance.** Employees with higher levels of curiosity share information more openly and listen more carefully.

How does one foster curiosity in the workplace?

1. Hire for curiosity:

When Einstein was asked about his recipe for success, he responded: "Never lose a holy curiosity. I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious."

The same goes for Adam Steltzner, the NASA engineer who worked on several flight projects including the Mars Exploration Rover. In the engineering fraternity he is known as the "rock-and-roll-engineer" because of his Elvis haircut, pierced ears and snake skin boots. His work earned him such titles as explorer of the solar system, student of human nature, and general loose cannon. He is the author of "The right kind of crazy" that deals with teamwork and leadership in the workplace, on which Tom Sachs commented as follows: "This book shares Adam's journey from juvenile delinquent to landing on Mars. In its pages you will enter the mind of a fearless genius rocket scientist and discover the power of intuition, and how creativity and courage are as important as math."

"Why do we explore? you may ask. It's our nature," he says. "Human curiosity is why you and I can talk across the country by phone. It's why I'm sitting 60 feet above the ground in a building made of alloys and other high-tech composite materials. We dominate this planet because we wonder what's around the next corner."

As humans, we are wired to seek new experiences. As children, we explored fearlessly. That is why babies can learn to manipulate their parents moments after birth. They have their parents at remote control the moment they utter the first cry. This confirms that exploration is a basic human instinct. Unfortunately, at some point most humans learn that curiosity is something that must be contained and that life is just easier as an average Joe. They then keep their special interests separate as a hobby or forget about it entirely, while the employer misses all the benefits of such unbridled curiosity.

The good news is that curiosity can be rekindled, it can be fostered and it can be grown again. The well-known billboard puzzle that appeared on Highway 101 in 2004 in Silicon Valley, had a handful of CVs' dropped in the Googles inbox, but they were the perfect match. There were no requirements for the position, just curiosity. Google knew very well that only the curious would be able to figure out the answer to the "first 10-digit prime found in consecutive digits of e.com" clue on the billboard. There was no need for a competency test, or a qualification because those who could figure out the answer, had what it takes to do the job. This is a perfect example of how to hire for success.

2. Model inquisitiveness:

Leaders can facilitate curiosity in their companies by modelling inquisitiveness themselves. Leaders can demonstrate curiosity about others by asking questions. Asking questions promotes meaningful connections and more creative outcomes. Leaders can also model curiosity by acknowledging that they do not always know the all answers. This shows employees that it is acceptable to be guided by curiosity. Finally, leaders can model curiosity by approaching the unknown with inquisitiveness rather than judgment.

Ask questions, and listen to the responses. Show staff that you are genuinely interested in what they are saying and they will soon reciprocate with contributions that will improve the business. A workplace is not a "mime theatre". It is a place for continuous dialogue. A place for debates and actions.

Have you ever listened to the conversation amongst staff after a meeting is over? There is usually a reflection on what was said during the meeting, because everyone has his or her own understanding of the information. One would wonder why no one has asked for clarification during the meeting. However, in hindsight, the fact is that we refrain from asking questions because we fear judgement. We are afraid that someone would think we are incompetent, or unintelligent. The truth is actually that by asking questions, we make meaningful connections and it contributes to creative outcomes. When we accept our own humility, we are ready to embrace curiosity.

3. Emphasize learning goals:

As John Maxwell said: Many leaders stop in their growth because they lose their curiosity. The temptation, when things are going well in the workplace, is to keep repeating that, which worked before. The problem is, while this will provide good results for a while, it never looks ahead at what is coming next. Curiosity does. It wonders how might things change and how we can prepare for what may come to us. This is not change for change sake but rather a necessary adaptation based on discovery.

Research has demonstrated that framing work around learning goals (i.e. developing competence, acquiring skills, mastering new situations, etc.) rather than performance goals (i.e.

impressing others, hitting targets, etc.) boosts the motivation of staff. When motivated by learning goals, individuals gain more diverse skills, do better work, engage in better problem-solving, and receive higher ratings during training. Leaders can emphasize learning goals by communicating the importance of learning and rewarding people for learning, rather than just performance. Leaders can also stress the value of learning by reacting positively to under-developed ideas that could lead to better ones. This idea encourages individuals to be more curious, to engage in active listening and to respect others' ideas. Every successful entrepreneur has been curious. What if we try this? What if we create that? What are people's needs or desires that we can meet? Questions lead to results.

It was curiosity that drove Steve Jobs to success. Why did the design of Apple's products stand out from every other design? You guessed it, curiosity. How did the iPod become the device for "carrying a thousand songs in your pocket"? Curiosity about customers and marketing – the same thing that turned the iPhone into the standard for smart phones. These types of stretch assignments and building on ideas called "plussing" are the building blocks needed to transform curiosity into excellence.

4. Allow employees to explore:

Let employees explore and broaden their interests. Leaders can also facilitate curiosity by providing time and resources for employees to explore their interests. They could provide opportunities for employees to travel to new locations. When individuals get an opportunity to expand their interests, they not only remain curious but also become more confident about their accomplishments and ultimately, they perform better at work. These experiences can help them to gain newer perspectives. Leaders can also facilitate curiosity by encouraging employees to connect to other departments and teams. Doing so can help employees be more curious about their colleagues' work. Leaders can also carefully design their teams and workspaces to encourage collaboration and broaden networks.

When employees are allowed to explore, a single invention can grow into the world's biggest invention. Take the example of IBM that grew out of an earlier company selling intricate mechanical census-counting machines developed by Herman Hollerith into a massive world-wide corporation.

When you think of Olivetti, one thinks of the old-school typewriters of the past. However, Adriano Olivetti had the foresight to allow the curiosity of one of his employees to flourish during working hours and the result was the Divisumma, the first electronic calculator.

Today's reality unfortunately dictates that a modern company cannot survive and thrive on one great idea alone. That is why so many companies have huge research and development laboratories where inspired scientists and engineers are constantly trying to come up with better ideas than the ones on which their original success was founded. As marketing genius Theodore Levitt pointed out in the 1960's, the visionary companies need the courage to try to put themselves out of business by coming up with new products that make their existing one obsolete. Companies that rest on their laurels will be put out of business by their inventive competitors.

5. Have regular brainstorming sessions or "Why" days at work:

Questions are wonderful things that can divide some people and unite others to grow wild ideas and plans to the benefit of the organisation. Do you still remember playing twenty questions as a child?

“Plussing” is one such method where ideas can be grown from ordinary questions, and responses can be maximised through a process of “going back and forward” with the idea until a well-rounded idea is born. Similarly, Toyota is using the 5 Why’s approach, to stimulate employees to investigate and solve problems in the workplace by asking: Why?

Harvard Business Review revealed three important insights about curiosity in the workplace. First, research has revealed that curiosity is much more important to a company’s performance than previously thought. Cultivating curiosity helps employees and their leaders adapt to market conditions and pressures. Curiosity allows them to think innovatively and rationally about decisions and come up with creative solutions. Curiosity also helps leaders gain respect from their employees by building a more trusting and collaborative relationship. Secondly, it only takes small changes to enable leaders to encourage curiosity from their employees. Lastly, many leaders stifle curiosity fearing that it will increase risk and inefficiency.

Effects of curiosity outside of the workplace

The good news is that curiosity is not only beneficial in the workplace. It has been linked to psychological, emotional, social, and the general health of all human beings in the following beneficial ways:

- **It helps us to survive.** The urge to explore and seek novelty helps us remain vigilant and gain knowledge about our constantly changing environment, which may be why our brains evolved to release dopamine and other feel-good chemicals when we encounter new things.
- **It makes us happier.** Research has shown curiosity to be associated with higher levels of positive emotions, lower levels of anxiety, more satisfaction with life and greater psychological well-being. Of course, it may be, at least partially, that people who are already happier tend to be more curious, but since novelty makes us feel good, it seems likely that it goes the other direction as well.
- **It boosts achievement.** Studies reveal that curiosity leads to more enjoyment and participation in school and higher academic achievement, as well as greater learning, engagement, and performance at work. It may seem like common sense, but when we are more curious about and interested in what we are doing, it is easier to get involved, put effort in, and do well.
- **It can expand our empathy.** When we are curious about others and talk to people outside our usual social circle, we become better able to understand those with life experiences and worldviews are different than our own. Next time you have the chance to talk with a stranger, especially someone who may be quite dissimilar to you, try engaging them on a personal level (respectfully, of course) and showing them that you are interested in what they have to say.
- **It helps strengthen relationships.** Richard Murdock said the thing that has served him best in life is his curiosity. One study asked strangers to pose and answer personal questions, a process scientist call “reciprocal self-disclosure.” They found that people were rated as warmer and more attractive if they showed real curiosity in the exchange (while other variables like the person’s social anxiety and their levels of positive and negative emotions did not affect the partner’s feelings of attraction and closeness). This implies that demonstrating curiosity towards someone is a great way to build your closeness with them.

- **It improves healthcare.** Research suggests that when doctors are genuinely curious about their patients' perspectives, both doctors and patients report less anger and frustration and make better decisions, ultimately increasing the effectiveness of treatment.

Conclusion

They say curiosity is like a Swiss Army Knife with all the attachments. It gets the job done in nearly every situation and is easy to access once you have it in your tool kit. However, although leaders might say they value inquisitive minds, in reality most stifle curiosity, fearing it will increase risk and inefficiency and burden them with a bunch of hard to manage employees.

However, Einstein said: "Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structures of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day".

Curiosity, at its core, is all about noticing and being drawn to things we find interesting. It is about recognizing and seizing the pleasures that novel experiences offer us and finding novelty and meaning even in experiences that are familiar. When we are curious, we see things differently; we use our powers of observation more fully. We sense what is happening in the present moment, taking note of what is regardless of what it looked like before or what we might have expected it to be. We feel alive and engaged, more capable of embracing opportunities, making connections, and experiencing moments of insight and meaning — all of which provide the foundation for a rich, aware and satisfying life experience.

In short, curiosity is at the core of every successful business effort. If you do not have curiosity, you cannot expect to be successful as an entrepreneur, a salesperson or even as an engineer.

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