

Remembering to Be Curious

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From its beginnings in the 1970s, at the heart of NLP has been the attitude of curiosity. When Richard Bandler and John Grinder started NLP by modelling the language patterns of Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, and Milton Erickson, they were really curious as to how these therapists were able to be far more effective in their communication than other people. This curiosity was their first step in being able to try to see the world from other points of view. It is this attitude of curiosity that makes it possible to step into someone else's map of the world and begin to understand the patterns that make up their excellent performance. So let's begin this article with one of the greatest tools that we have to get people curious... a story:

Once upon a time, there was a small boy who banged a drum all day and loved every moment of it. He would not be quiet, no matter what anyone else said or did. His parents were quite forward-thinking people and believed that it is important to make your own decisions. So they didn't just take the drum away from the boy. Instead, they tried to persuade him. They called upon many wise men and asked each one of these people to convince the boy to stop playing the drum.

The first person who came was a scientist. The scientist explained to the boy about sound waves and the power of sound. He told the boy if he continued to play the drum in that way, that there was a good chance that he might break his eardrum. However, the boy was just a child and this scientific thinking was too difficult for him, so he just kept playing his drum.

The next person who came was a priest from the temple. He came dressed in his colourful robes and burning incense. He explained to the boy that drum-beating was a sacred activity and should be carried out only on special occasions and at certain ceremonies. But the boy didn't really understand, and besides, he really wasn't all that interested in these gods that he couldn't even see, so... the noise continued.

The third person who came was an engineer who had studied in the university in the capital and she was very smart indeed. She was also very practical at finding good solutions. She didn't even bother talking to the boy because that seemed inefficient. Instead, she gave the parents and the neighbors earplugs. It was a great idea, but unfortunately, the earplugs couldn't keep out the constant drumming from morning to night.

The fourth person who came was a teacher. He gave the boy a book and tried to get the boy interested in education. "There is so much more to learn – so many amazing things in this world – and books can be the doorway to a new world for you." The boy looked at the pictures for a while and then turned back to the drum. It seemed so much more fun.

The fifth person who came was a therapist who believed that the child suffered from anger issues. Obviously, the child was playing the drum all the time because he was angry at the people around him. So the therapist gave the boy meditation exercises to make him calm and explained that all reality was

imagination. The boy sat in the right pose and made the right ‘om’ sound for what seemed like a long time to the boy – almost one whole minute, in fact! And then he picked up the drum again and the noise continued.

And you’re probably curious about how the story ends, and it’s good to be curious, isn’t it? Because when we are naturally curious about something, it is so much easier to learn. If we’re teaching something, or trying to persuade someone of something, or even trying to sell something to someone, doesn’t it make sense to try to engage their natural curiosity?

When I was a kid, I had this great old radio that used to belong to my grandfather. Actually, it was never really mine – I just sort of made it mine by taking it out of the garage and putting it into my bedroom. And I was a curious kid – of course, all kids are naturally curious. So naturally, I wondered what was inside the radio. And one day, I got a screwdriver and I took the radio apart and I laid out all the pieces carefully. And I learned so much as I examined each bit and became even more curious about what all the pieces did. Then I carefully put the radio back together... and found that I had three extra pieces! The radio never did actually work again, but I sure learned a lot.

And there was another time at Christmas when I was about 11 years old when my brothers and sisters had combined their pocket money and they bought me a single present. So of course, I really wanted to know what that present was. There it was sitting under the Christmas tree, wrapped in purple shiny paper, and every day I would sneak into the room and carefully shake it, smell it, try to judge the size, and even try to carefully peel back some of the wrapping paper... all because I was so curious about what was inside.

My Christmas present curiosity wasn’t unusual! If you look at any children, they are naturally curious – always wanting to find out stuff and driving adults crazy by asking, “why? But why?”. It’s not just humans either – look at a kitten or a puppy and you’ll see real curiosity. Everything is so fun and so new.

So to help you remember your own times of natural curiosity, and to develop and anchor those states of curiosity, here is a fun exercise to try now.

Exercise 1

Remember back through your childhood. What were three things that you were really curious about?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you can’t remember, I’m sure that your father or mother will be able to help you!

And then what happened to us? Because most adults aren’t nearly as curious as kids.

Exercise 2

Think of three reasons that might lead to people being less curious as they get older.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Yet some people never lose that natural curiosity. Some people just keep learning all through life. Some people are always willing to find out more. And don't we live in an amazing time to find out more with tools like Google and the Internet and easy access to millions of books and videos? When I was a child, we had a really expensive set of encyclopedias that my parents bought – they were probably \$1000 or more. And anytime we had a question like, "Why is the sky blue?", my mother would immediately send us to check the encyclopedia. And naturally, we would then spend more and more time finding out about all the other fun stuff. Now, you have Google! That's the most amazing encyclopedia in the world right there on your telephone or computer! It's so easy to be curious now. And while many people lose that sense of curiosity, others seem to be able to keep it right through their lives. So how do some people stay curious?

Exercise 3

Think of someone you know who has a really strong sense of curiosity, someone who always wants to learn.

What is different about that person that allows them to be curious like that?

It's not just that it's fun to be curious and to learn all through your life. The attitude of curiosity is at the heart of NLP because it's so important for helping us to understand other people's maps of the world.

Being curious is also good for your health, it's good for your career, and it's good for your communication. In research, it has been shown many times that your brain stays healthy when you keep learning new things. Learning a foreign language, a musical instrument, or a skill like knitting helps you to stay healthy and to decrease your risk of alzheimer's disease. And in today's job market, things change so quickly. If you want to keep a good job all your life, the single most important thing that you can do is to keep learning. Of course, being curious is good for your communication and relationships because as you learn new stuff, you will be more enthusiastic and a more interesting person!

Enjoy life – be curious! And if you were curious about the end of the story...

And then finally, an old woman came by and heard the drum and said, "What is that noise?" The neighbours explained about the boy and how the scientist, the priest, the engineer, the teacher, and the therapist had all been unable to help. It seemed like nothing could be done. The old woman looked at the situation calmly and smiled at the boy. Then she picked up a hammer and chisel and said to the boy, "I wonder what is inside the drum?"

