

# Deliberate Curiosity

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With my birthday coming up, I'm reminded once again that I'm slowly getting older. Fact is; we're all getting older all the time – you and me both. And regardless how old we are respectively, the one thing we all have in common is that TODAY is the oldest we've ever been. In other words, the oldest we've ever been in our whole lives – all of us, you listening and me talking – the oldest we've ever been is right here, right now; this very second. And in that sense, we're all in exactly the same situation, breaking new ground for ourselves as we go along. Right NOW is new territory for all of us.

I look back on my life, as we all do I'm sure, and there are certain things that stick out – like little movie clippings in my mind. Certain things that took place; things I did, things I saw and things people told me along the way. And there's one thing I remember well; something I was told at a young age – perhaps just 13 or 14 years old – and I actually don't even remember who it was who said it to me. But I remember the advice because it struck me as being so novel yet so obvious at the same time.

Whoever it was told me “everyone in the world is better at *something* than you are.” Everyone in the world is better at *something* than you are. Fascinating. That means everybody in the world has at least one strength you don't have. For me, it means that all of YOU are better at *something* than I am. All of you have natural strengths and abilities that I can't compete with. On the other hand, I must be better at *something* than ALL of you. And that's the core of my identity. It's my job in life to discover what that strength is and build my life around it.

But the purpose of life involves more than just discovering and exploiting our own abilities. It involves learning and expanding our minds by seeing the strengths of others. In fact, I would argue it's impossible to maximize your own potential if you don't first appreciate the endless knowledge you will never call your own. Seeing the strengths of others reminds us all how much there is left to learn. It humbles us and ensures we remain a work-in-progress, learning and expanding our minds.

As we get older, we become more and more “set in our ways.” It's natural. It happens to all of us. We become more and more focused on our own lives and become less and less sympathetic to the views of others. By contrast, when we're children, we're all naturally curious. We're like little sponges, wanting to learn from everything around us. “Why” is a favorite word when we're 2 or 3 years old. We want to know everyone else's opinion. We want access to everyone else's knowledge. But curiosity fades away as we take ownership of our own lives. And that's why this simple advice I received more than 20 years ago still resonates so strongly in my mind.

I believe it's this learning process that makes us feel 'young'. We feel like we're expanding our minds and rejuvenating our spirit. It's exhilarating to learn. It's exciting to think what life might be like NOW that we've acquired new information, new expertise, new knowledge. Yet, our reluctance to learn new things as we grow older makes us feel older still. Every day that goes by, the advice I was given becomes more relevant and more important. We need to train ourselves to resist the inward momentum of aging and challenge ourselves to remain curious, searching for the brilliance in others and allowing ourselves to benefit from their unique perspective; their unique identity.

And so, the exercise I propose as you read this article and as you go about your lives is to "stay curious". When you meet someone new, ask yourself what THEY might have that you don't. Ask yourself what strengths they've built THEIR life around. Don't judge. Don't compete. Just stay curious and be open to their vantage point; a parallel world full of experiences and memories completely different than your own; a world full of insights and conclusions you've probably never considered.

Most of us, when we're in a conversation, spend the time thinking about what we're going to say next RATHER than listening to what the other person is trying to communicate. Most of us, when we're in a confrontation, focus all our attention on justifying our own arguments RATHER than considering the other point of view. We do this because we're in a constant state of self-defense, protecting our proprietary thought process from outside attack; eliminating the need to question ourselves. But we've got it all wrong. It doesn't take strength to protect your point of view. It takes strength to consider someone else's. It takes strength to consider the possibility that you're wrong.

Stay curious. Listen. Learn. Expand. Grow. Believe me; your consideration of someone else's perspective is the biggest compliment you can give them, regardless how much you benefit as a result. People are happy to share their knowledge and insights with an interested and appreciative audience. Your deliberate curiosity benefits everybody and hurts no one. Life is your classroom and everybody you meet is your teacher.

Everyone in the world is better at *something* than you are.  
Be young again. Stay curious.

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*I write short musings like this from time to time when I feel inspired. If you would like to receive future articles via email (in PDF format), please visit my website and click on the 'Contact' tab. Enter your email address and put "Deliberate Curiosity" in the subject line.*

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