

Curiosity over Knowing

From the certainty of expertise to the openness of inquiry

In unhealthy workplaces, leaders are rewarded for their confidence and “knowing”. But knowing often shuts down other voices, stops growth, and becomes a defense against vulnerability. Workplaces fueled by curiosity ask you to loosen your grip on what you think you know and stay genuinely open to what you might discover. The result is that teams collaborate more effectively, become more innovative, trust more deeply, and are far more able to navigate uncertainty and change.

KNOWING

The certain version

- Saying “We tried that before, it doesn’t work”
- Listening to respond, not to understand
- Using expertise to shut down conversation
- Using certainty as a shield against being wrong
- Staying within the boundaries of what’s already known

CURIOSITY

The open version

- Asking questions that genuinely unsettle your assumptions
- Listening with the intention to be changed by what you hear
- Letting others’ knowledge challenge and expand your own
- Sitting with not-knowing as a leadership practice
- Following the question wherever it leads, even into discomfort

“Judge a person by their questions rather than their answers.”

— Voltaire

THREE PRACTICES OF CURIOSITY

01

Ask better questions

Replace statements with questions. Replace closed questions with open ones. The quality of your curiosity is reflected in the quality of what you ask.

02

Listen to be changed

Approach every conversation with the genuine possibility that you might leave it thinking differently. That is the standard curiosity sets.

03

Make not-knowing visible

When leaders model comfort with uncertainty, they give their teams permission to think, explore, and bring their own knowledge forward.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

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1. Where are you bringing conclusions to conversations that would benefit from genuine questions?
2. When did you last leave a conversation having genuinely changed your mind? What made that possible?
3. What would it look like to make not-knowing a visible and valued part of your leadership?
4. Who in your team has knowledge or perspective you haven't yet been curious enough to access?