

# Build a culture of curiosity to retain clients

 By [Tony Spong](#)

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I became curious about curiosity when I came across a nice article in the *Guardian* that pointed out how unhelpful the expression 'curiosity killed the cat' was to children's development. Why would you want to encourage someone to be less curious?



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When my young nephew comes to stay, he frequently wakes me up at 7am (my wife provides the essential tea and custard creams) to ask me all his burning questions; why this and why that. There is nothing nicer, I feel, than watching a brain grow. Indeed, in the first 90 days of life, our brains double in size, filled with all those first experiences.

Just think of all the things that wouldn't have been invented, created or discovered without curiosity. The benefits created by inquisitive minds are all around us, from boiled egg and soldiers to the technology we use to send a probe to the sun. Research is emerging that reveals there is a wide range of benefits not only to the individual but also to organisations.



Are you living curiously in a world of constant innovation?

Joy-Marie Lawrence 26 Nov 2018



## Curious people ask questions

A recent study by Dr Maria Kangas, associate professor of psychology at Macquarie University, Sydney has identified that, at a basic level, "curiosity promotes an openness to unfamiliar experiences and information. Curious people ask questions, they read more and, in doing so, significantly broaden their horizons.

At a minimum that has a huge impact on the way we learn and remember". Indeed, she goes on to say that curiosity has been found to have an enormous impact on memory.

If your curiosity is engaged, not only will you better remember the subject of your inquiry, you'll also absorb significantly more peripheral information without even consciously paying attention to it.

Think of all the times you have researched something and then heard that word, seen that car, dress, or phone and wondered why you had never noticed them so vividly before.

Curiosity was also found to have enormous potential in enhancing interpersonal bonding experiences. "Curious people connect with others on a far deeper level, including strangers," says Dr Kangas.

"They ask questions, then actively listen and absorb the information instead of just waiting for their turn to speak. The result is they become more empathetic and better able to understand and accept different viewpoints."

New research published in the recent *Harvard Business Review* also shows that curiosity is vital to an organisation's performance. When we are curious, we view tough situations more creatively, and we're less defensive and less stressed. All of which leads to improved group performance.



## Curiosity leads to knowledge

Dhiru Soni, Regent Business School 2 Oct 2018



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## Recent research

This dovetails nicely with some research the AAR Group have just undertaken. I have written in the past about a growing concern for the diminishing investment in the role of account management and how that's affected agencies' ability to retain clients' business.

In response, the AAR Group co-created, with agency leaders, a list of five key attributes of an account manager – leadership, passion, entrepreneurship, curiosity and the ability to collaborate – and they were keen to get these validated by clients.

And here's the thing. The overwhelming outcome was that curiosity, above all the others, was seen as the foundation stone. Now we have something to build on that instinctively feels focused and valuable to the role.

All the client comments were affirmative. They said curiosity sounded incredibly positive and forward-looking:

*"Supportiveness and curiosity is a winning combination."*

They felt it tapped into a number of positive emotions and associations, and by-passed cliché and lack of specificity:

*"You need curiosity to be innovative, but just being innovative could sound a bit gimmicky."*

They thought it suggested on-going dynamism, looking out for the new ideas and not being complacent:

*“Means you are pondering things and not satisfied.”*

*“Wanting to interrogate stuff, to be interested, rather than just accepting everything we say”*

And they saw it as indicative of a desire to go deeper and further, which is usually true of the best creative brains (and everyone aspires to creativity). But they felt it could also be translated into a desire to deliver the best of the agency:

*“This means they can unlock other areas of the agency for you that are relevant to your challenges.”*

## **Real barrier**

Despite the well-established benefits of curiosity, the *Harvard Business Review* found that organisations are set up more often to discourage it than nurture it.

This is because leaders often think that letting employees follow their curiosity will lead to a costly mess. They fear the organisation will be harder to manage if people are allowed to follow their interests. This mindset is a real barrier to unlocking the power of employees to question the status quo and come up with better ideas to drive commercial performance.

If we look at Henry Ford’s well-documented obsession with efficiency, we see that over time his company was exposed to competition from those that explored how different types of cars could be made, other than the standard one-size-fits-all Model T Ford.

The conclusion is that if we can develop a culture of curiosity within the account management team, focused on the client’s business, we will not only engender a value in the role that has been eroded over recent years, but also start to attract the type of talent that will help to grow the client’s and the agency’s business.

## **ABOUT TONY SPONG**

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