

## Curiosity and Leadership

I was interested to hear the word “curious” come up on recent coverage of the leadership crisis at the BBC. An executive was accused of lacking any “curiosity about the situation.”



The ability to remain *curious* about what surrounds you is, I believe, a key aspect of excellence in leadership. One of the problems of the Boardroom is the isolation that can creep in. Directors, who lose touch with their “curiosity” about things, find it all too easy to close down their awareness and look for what confirms their own point of view.

In conversations with Directors, I have found a new appetite to address this. This is partly due to the growing realisation that they have to question how they have led their organisations in the past; Leaders are increasingly aware that they need to challenge their own leadership and find a different – and more “curious” way of engaging with the wider organisation.

I was speaking to a senior manager recently, who makes it his business to invite Execs and Non Exec Directors out with him on regular site visits. These visits had opened the Directors’ eyes to day to day realities and kept them close up and curious about the sharp end of the business.

Here are some questions that Directors can ask themselves about their own leadership – and are good “*curiosity stimulants*”:

- How easy do I make it for subordinates to challenge me? Ask for – and keep asking others for their points of view, not their confirmation of your view
- How well do I listen to points of view that run counter to my own? Hold back from slipping into judgemental inner dialogue: “...s/he sounds hesitant. I don’t think that approach would work.” Instead: ask another question
- What is my sense of my identity as a leader? Be honest, “do I at some level feel I should have all of the answers? Reassure yourself – having all the answers would be frankly boring as well as unlikely. Stop the heroics
- Can I hold back from judgement (the opposite of curiosity) for a moment longer to find out more about this situation? Hold back from stating your point of view – yet. Find out more first
- How can I remain really curious about a person from a different culture or background to me? Practise just being extraordinarily curious

When these “curiosity questions” are used by leaders, this is good news for business, as it is likely to lead to a more inclusive style of leadership where alternative points of view are encouraged – and they add a dash of humility which is a good antidote to the “hard to resist” but damaging isolation of senior office.

For support and challenge to liven up your “curiosity” antennae, do get in touch.

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