

# Are you living curiously in a world of constant innovation?

 By Joy-Marie Lawrence

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We are in the fourth industrial revolution encountering the integration of disruptive technology and the continuous search for innovative solutions to society's problems. How are we preparing for the future?



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The world is becoming increasingly complex, with innovation reshaping our personal and professional lives, as we navigate cutting-edge technologies and transition in new ways of how we live and work.

Futurologist, writer and businessman, Alvin Toffler, coined the famous quote:

“ *The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.* ”

Shaping our future are emerging and existing disruptive technologies such as the industrial Internet of things (IoT), advanced robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, psycho-technology, nanotechnology, space travel and space mining and more.

How curious are we about disruptive technologies and how these may impact our future world personally, in business, and society at large?

## Shift from incurious to curious

Behavioural tendencies are influenced by the characteristics of particular stimuli processed, which eventually manifest in narratives. As we grow, many of us stop having conversations triggered by our natural curiosity.

In children, innate curiosity feeds knowledge through curious conversations until:

- they reach an age where they become aware of external rewards,
- their levels of self-consciousness increase,
- their surface level self-awareness increase, or
- they form limiting beliefs, and they start second-guessing themselves.

These factors often lead to incuriousness, disinterest, apathy and unconcern. A desire to learn new things, showing interest and concern start with a question, it is the first step to having the mind fed - to engage with empathy, interest and to learning.

This shift is in part due to the value that is placed on the intellectual benefits (traditional school system) of curiosity, but there are also non-intellectual benefits that curiosity holds: psychology, emotional, social and health. To productively engage in a simple, curious conversation, we need to (1) listen by being interested in the conversation, (2) learn by questioning (ask open questions) and (3) be courageous by having meaningful engagement.

What ownership are we taking to develop skills that will enable and equip us to cope with emerging and potentially disruptive effects of technology? For us to thrive in our increasingly complex world, we will have to equip ourselves with specific skills and knowledge. How do adults own the ignition of interest? Firstly, by understanding that they need to shift into a curious-state-of-mind, and secondly, that they need to make this shift consciously.

Many professionals feel pressure to prove their worth, especially around the boardroom table and so they listen to respond. Don't listen to answer. Hone listening skills by learning how to listen and how to be fully present in the verbal exchange, to understand; (1) that which is said, (2) what gets asked, and (3) in a non-verbal exchange; keep the eyes and ears open for what is not said.

Tune into our inner-self and observe those innate responses to pick up on reaction cues. An excellent introspective question to ask is: Is my response gearing to react or am I engaging the verbal and non-verbal engagement curiously? This will aid and enable the attainment of some non-intellectual benefits of engaging in conversations curiously discussed below.

## **Meaningful conversations lead to a productive exchange**

If we consciously listen with curiosity, the conversational engagements become meaningful and impactful. We need to be more conscious of the impact we have and the individual power we hold to influence decisions and unfolding events.

## **Improved negotiations and disputes**

Being curious empowers an individual in negotiations and disputes. When a disagreement or negotiation comes from a defensive place, it triggers an unwillingness to listen, creating a clogged cognitive engagement. Curiosity in a non-defensive way disarms and engaging, and productive conversations will unfold.

Approach disputes or negotiations from a place of genuine curiosity. There is a correlation between the degree to which we are curious and our level of openness to opportunities from which we can grow personally and our capacity to connect with other people.

## Better insight into the self

Taking ownership of personal growth is one of the best investments that we can make. We have primarily been conditioned to place value on intellectual intelligence, and so we spend years to become experts in our chosen careers. Be it finance, law, the environment, accountancy, or software development, but we need to learn about ourselves. To become an expert of the "self", be willing to learn, unlearn and relearn the "self".

Being curious about oneself equips one with the insight to better-navigate the organisations in which one operates. It further helps to form authentic connections with people, improving relationships and helps to gain more profound insights into one's values, limiting beliefs, and hidden "isms".

## Receptiveness to learn

An openness to learn, create opportunities to be curious about others and feeds listening to others. When engagement comes from the point of learning and listening, enjoyable, productive and sometimes odd, unusual, and strange conversations unfold. Be courageous in those conversations, and it might just ignite the light of the soul, and help you shine brighter.

## Talent attraction and retention

For those holding leadership positions, develop a deep awareness of the transitions innovations will bring and support the soft and hard learning of teams and peers. Have encouraging courageous conversations about the future of work.

People will appreciate the leadership initiative to support transitions, and naturally, the business will retain and attract talent. Increasingly, the best talent is seeking to work at companies that have the capacity that creates learning opportunities and the environment that encourage conversations.

Be courageous in future conversations and boldly use curiosity as a tool, you will reap the benefits, be more prepared for the future and reach your remarkable.

## ABOUT JOY-MARIE LAWRENCE

Joy-Marie Lawrence is the Group Executive for the Western Cape at EOH Holdings Limited. Joy-Marie was appointed to the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) Board of Advisors effective 1 July 2018. An alumna of the GSB, she obtained a distinction for the Executive MBA in 2010. She is a qualified Integral Practitioners Coach, certified by The Coaching Centre and Middlesex University, London, (UK).

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