

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1768 The Brain and Curiosity When Encountering Change

Change is something that affects different people in different ways. For most of us, it makes us pause to think about what the change will mean to us individually, and how we should think about it. I'm Jerry Roberts, and would you be surprised to know that our level of curiosity can play a role in this? We'll talk about this, and how our brain figures into the equation, next on The Extra Point.

Anne-Laure Le Cunff is an award-winning neuroscientist and entrepreneur, and she recently posted an article about the brain and curiosity...which made me curious to learn more.

Curiosity is often dismissed as a mere quirk, something playful and childlike. However, neuroscience reveals that when we engage our curiosity, our brain's dopamine system activates, similar to the way it responds to rewards. This response makes the prospect of discovering something new enjoyable.

Moreover, curiosity boosts our ability to learn. Research indicates that when individuals are curious about a topic, they remember that specific information better. Let's go deeper.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of curiosity is its role in promoting neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to reorganize in response to new experiences. This is valuable during times of change when we need to break old patterns and establish new brain connections. Okay, this tells us what's happening inside.

Change naturally brings uncertainty and often stress, triggering responses similar to those experienced in physical danger. Curiosity calms it down, transforming uncertainty from a threat into an opportunity to explore.

This makes sense. When we're exploring we're not in fear mode. We're more focused on kicking over rocks to see what's underneath.

When I was growing up I heard two statements regarding curiosity. Maybe you've heard them,

too. "Curiosity killed the cat – a warning that curiosity can lead to trouble; and "Curiosity is the mother of invention", suggesting that it is curiosity that drives creativity and innovation.

Maybe you're saying to yourself, "Hey Jerry, all this is really good I suppose, but I'm just not a curious person." I've got you covered.

Curiosity is a skill that can be developed. Here are five strategies to nurture curiosity, especially during times of change and transition, given to us by researcher Ms. Le Cunff:

1. Ask "What if?" Instead of "What now?" Shift fear-based thoughts to exploratory questions. For instance, instead of saying, "I don't know how to handle this new role," consider, "What if I view this role as a chance to learn?" This change activates the part of the brain that reduces stress.
2. Make notes along the way. Sometimes, we get so engrossed in what we're discovering that we forget to jot down surprising moments, questions, and reflections. Then, we forget. A digital memo on your phone or — if you're old school — a pen and paper, is much more reliable than our memory.
3. Experiment along the way. Test the things you learn to see if they're valid and hold up in real life. This eliminates uncertainty.
4. Embrace not knowing. This used to get me. "Why don't I know?" "Who can I call?" You might use the phrase, "I don't know yet", and see if that helps.

This particular issue can get us into the weeds when it comes to decision-making. If we know we don't know and yet have a decision to make, that will create anxiety and stress. You pull together what information you can and, fully realizing it's not complete, you make the best call you can.

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5. This will be hard for many people, as it once hard for me. Treat failure as data. Instead of viewing our setbacks as failures, we consider them valuable lessons.

This perspective transforms discouraging moments into opportunities for growth.

Curiosity activates pathways in the brain that enhance learning, memory, and adaptability, equipping us to navigate uncertainty with greater ease.

So, the next time you face change and you can feel it weighing on you, ask yourself: "What if I got curious instead?"

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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