

Reclaiming curiosity in the workplace:

Passion, purpose and potential in market research



An interview with author and innovation expert Evette Cordy

It's time to reclaim our passion for curiosity. What drives a high level of engagement? What makes us continuously strive for a better tomorrow? When we unpack all the reasons why we love what we do, one theme seems to come up over and over: curiosity. Market research truly gives us a unique opportunity to feed our inquisitive nature. After all, this is why many of us entered the field in the first place: we wanted to understand human behavior, motivations, needs and why marketplaces work the way that they do.

With all the talk and buzz around the latest and greatest technologies—from blockchain to artificial intelligence and much more—sometimes it feels like our entire industry has lost sight of the human component. While we believe there is a balance that can be found between what we like to call “art and science”, we want to shine a spotlight on what motivates us and invigorates us on a daily basis in our work uncovering insights for clients: curiosity.

We recently sat down with Evette Cordy, an innovation expert, registered psychologist and the chief investigator and co-founder at Agents of Spring. She uses curiosity and creativity to help organizations to create human-centred products and services and facilitate new ways of thinking. Evette is the author of *Cultivating Curiosity: How to unearth your most valuable problem to inspire growth*. She had a very interesting take on how curiosity can play a role in our daily work as researchers, and how we can start to shift our thinking back to our passions and, ultimately, achieve better outcomes.

Infotools: We think a lot about how technology has the potential to free us up to feed our natural curiosity as researchers. What is your experience with this? Does technology help or hinder the curious mind?

Evette: Technology has undoubtedly freed up time for researchers to make space for curiosity in their daily work. For example, the introduction of automation has produced significant efficiencies and enhancement in the quality of data. Many tasks, such as data reporting, were historically completed manually—which was both time consuming and error-prone.

So yes, technology can free us up to be more curious. First, you need to activate your curiosity. You must be willing to step into the unknown. After all, if you believe you know it all, you won't learn anything new. As American musician Frank Zappa once put it, 'A mind is like a parachute. It does not work if it is not open.' If you make little or no effort to be curious, being open will only get you part of the way. It's like beginning a fitness program, it might feel strange and hard work at first, but by dedicating regular practice, you can improve and cultivate your curiosity.

But technology can also hinder our curiosity. How many times have you wondered about something only to turn to Google to provide you with the answer and close your information gap? Curiosity is at its peak when we don't have any information, and we want to fill that hunger with knowledge.

Curiosity takes commitment, effort and persistence. You can also use technology to help organize and create space for curious moments—to exercise curiosity more consciously in your daily experiences, by scheduling time for curious moments. By doing so, you can transform routine tasks, reviving them with new energy and opportunities for discovery. It can start as simple as scheduling curiosity conversations and talking to someone new every day or week.



Infotools: We love how your book highlights “unearthing your most valuable problem” as the foundation for inspiring forward movement and growth in companies. Can you tell us a bit more about this concept?

Evette: Every organization is busy, but are they busy solving the most valuable problem? A 2018 *Harvard Business Review* study, “Are You Solving the Right Problems?,” found 85 percent of 106 C-suite executives in 17 countries strongly agreed or agreed their organizations were bad at diagnosing problems, while 87 percent strongly agreed or agreed that this flaw carried significant costs. Organizations are under incredible pressure to produce quick results, with leaders chasing immediate results. When a business problem arises, their reaction is to jump into finding a solution without checking to see if the problem they are setting out to solve is a commercial one that will return the best investment.



We often think of a problem as a crisis. In Chinese, the word ‘crisis’ is represented by two characters that translate into the words ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity’—two very opposite meanings. This shows there are both positive and negative perspectives of any problem. So rather than regarding problems as burdens to be avoided, we need to learn to value problems. There are always lots of problems to find and solve within a business, but you need to find and solve the problems that represent the biggest growth drivers—the most valuable problems. And being curious is the key to accessing it.

Infotools: At its core, “curious” seems like an abstract concept to most—an adjective, not a verb. How do you put curiosity into action to achieve goals?

Evette: My definition of curiosity is “a hunger to unearth insight.” Curiosity is like the compelling urge to scratch an itch. It makes us want to seek out more information—it makes us want to find problems.

Behavioral economist George Loewenstein developed the Information Gap Theory of curiosity in the 1990s. He believes curiosity is a critical motive that influences behavior, and that arises when we feel a gap exists between “what we know and what we want to know.” You are more likely to seek out information if you are curious about something because that’s how you ‘scratch your itch’.



We also know from science that cultivating our curiosity has significant organizational benefits, it leads to better problem finding and problem solving, because teams are more likely to ask questions, stay open-minded and look at problems from many different perspectives.

I developed to six curiosity mindsets, which are detailed in my book *Cultivating Curiosity* that you can cultivate to help identify your most valuable problems and the future growth drivers of your business.

The Six Curiosity Mindsets

- 1. THE REBEL:** challenge the rules, assumptions or authority to risk a better way of doing things
- 2. THE ZEN-MASTER:** be present and focused on the task of hand
- 3. THE NOVICE:** adopt a beginner’s mind and ask questions instead of being the expert with all of the answers
- 4. THE SLEUTH:** listen with your eyes and ears to look for the disconnects between what people say and do
- 5. THE INTERROGATOR:** challenge assumed truths and ask brave open-ended questions
- 6. THE PLAY-MAKER:** use play as a tool to unlock complex problems to solve

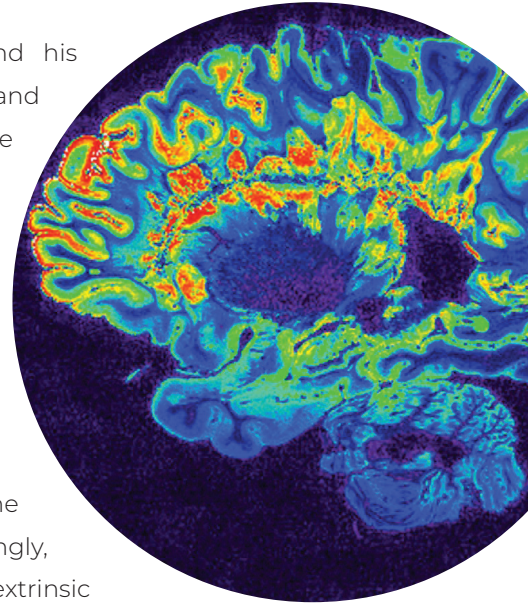
Infotools: How can putting curiosity to work in a company help to ignite passion?

Evette: Curiosity is a state where you anticipate an intrinsic cognitive reward. When we are curious, our brain lights up. We feel good! Curiosity stimulates the pleasure and reward system of the brain.

Cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Matthias Gruber and his colleagues experimented in 2014 to better understand the effect curiosity has on the brain. Participants were asked to rate how curious they were to learn the answer to a series of trivia questions. Their brains were scanned while they were exposed to the questions and waited 14 seconds for the answer.

The experiment revealed that the more curious a person is to see the answer to a question, the more their brain activity lights up the parts of the brain that regulate pleasure and reward—that is, the dopamine circuit or the wanting system. Interestingly, this circuit in the brain also lights up when we get extrinsic rewards such as money or treats. Think about a kid in a candy store or anticipating your annual bonus payment.

What this tells us is that there are individual and organizational benefits to encouraging employees at work to pursue projects they are most curious about.



Infotools: Do you have some tangible examples of how this approach has created real change in someone's business?

Evette: Daryl Bussell was once a shift manager for the global family-owned confectionery company Mars at its Australian factory in Ballarat, Victoria. This factory is where household chocolate favorites like Snickers®, M&Ms®, Mars®, Maltesers®, Pods®, Bounty® and Milky Way® are manufactured. The 35-billion-dollar company is owned by John Mars and his siblings, who inherited the business from their father. Every year, John Mars would travel to Australia to visit the local operations and meet with his associates. On one such tour, John identified an issue in the factory and challenged the team to find out what it was within 24 hours.



He offered a \$5 reward if the issue could be found. Daryl was always up for a challenge so happily accepted. He described the whirlwind 24 hours following, "We went around the factory and must have changed 20 things, found 20 different small issues."

The next day when John came into the factory, Daryl and his team shared their discoveries and the results from their problem finding exercise and were rewarded with a \$5 note. This got framed and put on the wall; however, everyone (including Daryl) remained in the dark as to what the original problem was that John had found.

"We suspect we may not have found the exact issue," says Daryl. "He was just challenging us to be better." What John Mars did that day was he activated his employee's curiosity and showed them that they always need to be on the hunt for problems to solve. He opened their minds and eyes to look at their familiar work environment in new ways—with a curious mind.

Conclusion

So why did you enter the market research field? Was it because of your curious mind? Even if you didn't specifically identify with that motivator, the likelihood is that it was part of your unconscious or conscious decision to study human behavior.

It's easy to forget to focus on your creative side when you are caught up in the everyday grind. Reclaiming it can be as easy as raising your awareness and taking the time to feed your curiosity during the tasks you are already undertaking during your workday.

Harnessing curiosity is an important part of success in your workplace, and we hope Evette's insights gave you some new ideas. It's time to reclaim our passion for our jobs and our whole industry will benefit.

Curious to learn more?

Let's schedule time to
spark ideas for your
next research project.

Connect with Infotools



@infotools



@infotools1



linkedin.com/company/infotools



www.youtube.com/c/InfotoolsLtd



hello@infotools.com



infotools.com

About Infotools

Infotools is an award-winning market research software and services provider, used by some of the industry's most curious minds, globally. Our powerful cloud-based software platform, Harmoni, is purpose-built for the processing, analysis, visualization and sharing of market research data.