



Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It

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Everyone is born curious. But only some retain the habits of exploring, learning and discovering as they grow older. Which side of the 'curiosity divide' are you on?

In Curious Ian Leslie makes a passionate case for the cultivation of our desire to know. Curious people tend to be smarter, more creative and more successful. But at the very moment when the rewards of curiosity have never been higher, it is misunderstood and undervalued, and increasingly practised only by a cognitive elite.

Filled with inspiring stories, case studies and practical advice, Curious will change the way you think about your own mental life, and that of those around you.

Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It Details

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From Reader Review Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It for online ebook

Lorrie says

We read this book as a group project/study group at work; hence, it took a while to get through it since we divided it into 3 readings for 3 different meetings. I intensely read the 2nd section since I was the moderator & wanted good notes to refer to. I'm really glad I paid such close attention to it because out of my own curiosity for being a conscientious leader at work, I instead felt intrinsically rewarded for being a faithful grandmother. A child is pretty much loaded with life's tools by the age of four. No matter what happens in life after that, the child with the most tools is the winner—to make short of a book long explanation. I really liked this book as well as did the others reading it with me.

James Lang says

Outstanding book. Fascinating, well-researched, and well-written. Artful mix of research, historical and contemporary examples, and journalism. A pleasure to read and learn from.

Kelli Boling says

I loved this book on a personal level as well as an academic level. I read it as part of a study on how to incorporate curiosity in the college classroom, and I fell in love with the idea of becoming more curious in my own life. Great perspective, very accessible writing.

Charlene says

Really strong start. As I began to read, I grew more and more excited that someone has written a book about curiosity. With over 500, mostly positive, reviews on goodreads, it seemed to me a really worth while book. Of course it would appeal to readers. Why else do we crack open a book, if not for curiosity.

But then he began his long focus on baby studies. Many of the studies themselves were fine, even enjoyable, but by the time he got to attachment theory, I felt like, "Come on already." At that point, I was still feeling relatively positive. That was until his anti tech rhetoric ruined the entire book for me. I still enjoy that he wrote about curiosity, and I would certainly read another book about curiosity from a different author, but it's unlikely I would ever read another book by this author.

While writing a book about *curiosity,* he bashed awesome tech, like Google search engines. He even tried to make the argument that in the good old days, people would research a topic and happily be led on and on to other topics, really satisfying their curiosity. Now, he claims, with a computer and phone, that hold the *world's knowledge*, people will just flitter from one subject to another, without really ever learning anything. Is he kidding me? #LackOfLogic. If you are curious, you will learn. I am uber curious. When I am out somewhere and something piques my interest, I look it up. No need to go to the library and hope it's in

one of the reference books. It's all there in the palm of my hand.

It is just as easy for someone to look at a page in an encyclopedia and flip to another page, without taking in knowledge, as it is to flip through wiki pages. It's the curious who will stay on a page and take in the info before moving onto another page. In addition, the less curious have to go through less effort to actually look stuff up. Does he really suppose as many people flocked to their libraries as the number of people who just look stuff up on their phones or laptops? The anti tech rhetoric continued throughout the book.

Complete absurdity. I would have loved a book about curiosity from someone who is a little more curious about tech.

Ian says

Dumb literature review for a buzzword. This is the shallow dive you were looking for. Drivel like "curiosity is underwritten by love" confirms that Leslie has nothing to add to the discussion. He quotes the authors and studies you've read about elsewhere, but where they had better context, and name drops every book and entity from The Odyssey to Google. As someone who takes curiosity seriously, and has studied the scientific literature, I found this a trivialization of an important idea.

Mark says

In this relatively short exploration of one of humanity's most distinguishing traits, Ian Leslie quickly formulates a definite point of view, but backs it up with good studies, strong interviews and a clear, winning writing style.

His basic contention is that curiosity is what has driven scientific and cultural advancement, and that that this powerful impulse in humans may be under threat by the Internet and certain ill-founded educational philosophies.

Unlike some other Internet alarmists, though, Leslie does not damn the Web completely, but simply concludes that it's a wonderful tool for the truly curious, and a damaging distraction for those who either have little curiosity or only a superficial desire to be amused for seconds at a time. He also cites studies to show that, besides such character traits as resilience and determination, the biggest factor in future life success, according to some meta-analyses, is the acquisition of core knowledge.

While some educational theorists have argued that filling children with facts stifles creativity (it's the basic message of TED Talks' most popular video, by Sir Ken Robinson), neuroscience has demonstrated that true creativity depends on being able to make novel associations among many different facts and concepts, and that a knowledge-based education is critical for that.

I found most of Leslie's arguments compelling, and there were enough studies and insights that were new to me, particularly from educational researchers, that it helped propel me through the book.

Philippe says

In this book, author Ian Leslie has a number of interesting points to make:

* Curiosity has always constituted an evolutionary advantage. In a complex world that's even more true as it's impossible to know what might be useful in the future. Hence it's important to spread our cognitive bets, i.e. to be curious. Curiosity as a personality trait is a solid predictor of academic and professional success.

* There are different types of curiosity: (shallow) diversive curiosity, (deeper, more disciplined) epistemic curiosity, empathic curiosity (about thoughts and feelings of other people). Diverse curiosity distracts; epistemic and empathic curiosity are forces that deepen the bond between the individual and the world, add layers of interest, complexity and delight to her experience.

* Curiosity is a feedback loop that is stimulated by understanding and by the absence of understanding. The more we know about something, the more intense our curiosity is about what we don't know. What counts in triggering curiosity is the context in which one encounters new information and the most important contextual factor is available knowledge.

* Digital technologies are severing the link between effort and mental exploration. The web erodes our penchant for epistemic curiosity focused on understanding. "Google can answer anything you want, but it can't tell you what you ought to be asking."

* In a world where inequalities in access to information are being leveled, a new divide is emerging - between the curious and the incurious. "The internet is making smart people smarter and dumb people dumber."

* So-called progressive educational approaches ('learning skills approaches') are misguided. Traditional teacher-guided, fact-oriented learning - if well implemented - is more effective in putting in place a foundation for epistemic curiosity. "Anyone who stops learning facts for himself because he can Google them later on is literally making himself stupid". Furthermore, progressive education ideas present themselves as anti-hierarchical, but in practice tend to entrench social hierarchies.

The second part of the book rehashes that material in 'seven ways to stay curious'. The idea is to provide practical guidelines to develop and maintain a spirit of curiosity. Leslie seems to veer a bit from his initial position of relentless advocacy for epistemic curiosity in that he aims for a balance between the diverse and epistemic, hence for a cognitive investment in detail and the big picture, in the mundane and the abstract, in theory and practice.

That's in a nutshell what this book is about. All in all it strikes me as a fairly coherent argument that revolves around the core insights extracted from the pioneering research by Daniel Berlyne (1924-1976) and George Loewenstein (born 1955). As with many of these books, I have the feeling that they make unwarranted claims to readers' time and attention budget. I am quite sure that a book half the length of the present volume - eschewing the tiresome and anecdotal references to Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill and Steve Jobs - would be more engaging and valuable.

Kirsten says

Enjoyable read, and I learned a few things which is always nice. Still, I found the argument that modernity's abundant and easy-to-access information is a threat to curiosity to be pretty weak (I often imagined an old man shaking his fist at "things these days", and the phrase "first world problems" crossed my mind more than once). I think it's clear that people intrinsically interested in a topic will take off their gloves and delve into it no matter whether the answers they're looking for are easy to find or not. Further, what's wrong with masses of generally incurious people having easy answers at their fingertips? If the effort to find an answer doesn't exceed their mild curiosity, they may be just as happy to go on in complete ignorance on the topic, which offers no improvement on the human condition in general. I understand the author's concern is also about all of the garbage that threatens to distract us from potential "eureka!" moments, but this is how it's always been, HuffPo/TMZ or not. One needs to master more self-control if one truly wishes to achieve any goal, intellectual or otherwise. The author also admits that serendipity often plays a part in sparking curiosity- maybe the accidental stumble down wikipedia rabbit hole is one futuristic, inclusive version this. I felt like the author was aware that he was making a half-hearted argument on this point.

We can argue that curiosity is a trait which leads to a richer, more fulfilling life, but nevertheless, different strokes for different folks; some people are intellectuals, some are brawn, some leaders, some artists- people have innately different approaches to fulfillment and there's a myriad of ways that individuals are inspired to function and serve in society. Not everyone is going to have curiosity at the center of their lives, though we wish they all could share in the fun.

In any case I did appreciate his bringing up the importance of quality interactions between child and parent during early development, and how the class structure perpetuates the gap between educationally advantaged and disadvantaged students. This social issue is a much bigger fish in my opinion and it's too bad the author didn't take this up as his cross.

Jerome Jewell says

We hear the term "intellectual curiosity" bantered about so often these days. Ian Leslie goes beyond the rhetoric to remove any ambiguity about what this term really means and why it's something that we need to embrace. He does so without preaching and also shows the reader HOW to accomplish the embrace.

After reading the first 20 pages, I sensed that "Curious" would be an especially-memorable reading experience. But it turns out that I under-estimated. This is possibly the most meaningful book I've read in a long, long time. Not the most fun, the most exciting, but yes, most meaningful...in the sense that it delivered value and clarity that will contribute to my thinking and intellectual stimulation in ways that few books have done over the past 50+ years.

I felt that rare sensation of believing that this book was written TO me, as it touched on themes very near and dear to me (i.e.- "daydreaming").

Ian Leslie presents his insights in a manner that is refreshingly void of lecturing or the tone of a guru. More specifically, I appreciated the fact that he did feel the need to push a model or set of theories. Unlike some authors, he did not attempt to congratulate himself for "discovering" something that predates our existence. Instead he simply did an excellent job of using stories to provide clear examples and then to dissect the value and importance of curiosity in a way that I've never witnessed before.

Daniel says

Takeaway: Curious

Motivation

I was motivated to read `_Curious_` because my girlfriend and I were interested in understanding the difference in our relative levels of curiosity. We observed that I demonstrate particularly more curiosity than she does. For example, I regularly struggle to not compulsively, and rudely, take out my phone during dinner to search for an answer to some unknown question that arises during dinner conversation. I am also often distracted by the exploration of some random topic, be it virtual reality, or artificial intelligence, or crustacean aquaculture. We wanted to know if there were methods to help her discover topics of interest, particularly in the context of searching for an interesting career path.

Book Review

I found `_Curious_` to be interesting, but disappointing. I was disappointed because a majority of the book was dedicated to unrelated diversions. If you're an avid reader like me of non-fiction self-help, psychology, business, and biography literature you will be familiar with a majority of the anecdotal tangents contained herein. The entrepreneurial fairy tales of Steve Jobs and Walt Disney; the inquisitiveness and creativity of Ben Franklin; the success predicting ability of "grit" and the marshmallow test (boy do I get tired of reading about this test -- I probably would have failed it as a child, yet I'm a successful adult); and so forth. I was hoping for a more detailed discussion of curiosity, particularly how to `_cultivate_` curiosity, but it wasn't there.

Takeaways

Despite my disappointing review, I did learn some things and leave with some takeaways worth memorializing here. In no particular order:

- * I was intrigued by the concept of an evolutionary origin driving human curiosity. Compared to other animals, it appears that humans possess a unique biological urge to be curious, to venture into the unknown. Some might say then that curiosity is a key trait of humanity: to be curious is to be human.
- * Curiosity is risky, but natural selection still favored those ancestors of ours who dared to explore questions such as "What is beyond that forest?" or "What's behind that mountain?" This is a really cool observation.
- * Curiosity goes in and out of vogue. Clearly the author of `_Curious_` argues that curiosity is a good thing, with a few exceptions. This has not always been the case and is not consistent across cultures. The ancient Chinese dynasties, for instance, favored `_exploitation_` over `_exploration_`. Whereas the Europeans embarked on long voyages and embraced (kind of) new cultures, the Chinese chose instead to remain a closed society. The Chinese are still catching up.
- * There are two types of curiosity: diversive and epistemic. There are actually three types of curiosity with the third being empathetic, but the author barely gives empathetic curiosity airtime.
- * Diversive curiosity is the "bad" form of curiosity, according to the author right now. Diversive curiosity

seeks quick answers in the pursuit of novelty and distraction. Think of it as an interest in gossip.

* Epistemic curiosity is the "good" form of curiosity (again in the opinion of the author). Epistemic curiosity is the pursuit of understanding and knowledge.

* The author frequently uses the analogy of puzzles versus mysteries to illustrate the difference between diversive of epistemic curiosities. Puzzles have finite answers whereas mysteries grow the more you work on them. If you want to cultivate epistemic curiosity, approach your interests as mysteries instead of puzzles, whatever that means. (It's kind of annoying how the author tritely cites the achievements of Alan Turing and [first name] Freedman in his tangents somewhat in support of curiosity, yet these cryptographers were notorious puzzle-fiends.)

* KEY PERSONAL TAKEAWAY: Ask questions. As technologies like Google make answers increasingly easier to access, success is no longer measured by controlling information (having answers). Instead, success is going to be gained by those individuals who ask the right questions. Fortunately, I am not shy about asking questions which is probably a symptom (and a cause) of my curiosity.

* Curiosity is recursive. It builds upon itself. If you want to become a more curious person, you need to start somewhere, slowly, and recognize that the more curiosities you pursue, the more curious you will become over time.

* If you feel curious about something, chase it no matter how random. Epistemic curiosity is more and more important in modern technological society, and curiosity is built upon itself, so whatever short-term loss you may encounter as a result of pursuing a random curiosity will typically more than be offset by the gains created by a stronger curiosity drive. (A significant portion of the book is devoted not to curiosity, but on the seemingly random nature of innovation, in which legends like Charles Darwin and Steve Jobs were able to change the world because they had insights made possible due only to pursuits of superficially unrelated topics. The classic Steve Jobs calligraphy course is cited here. Yes, I love innovation and creativity, but this does nothing to scientifically examine curiosity or provide practical advice on how to cultivate it.)

* I found the insight on couples and curiosity interesting. If your relationship is boring -- it lacks mutual curiosity -- it will probably be a bad relationship.

Angie says

This is a great summary of our current understanding of curiosity and the important role it plays in individual lives and the society built by those individuals. I see in some of the other reviews that it is dismissed as popular fluff. In a sense, that's fair, since it's a summary, and Leslie doesn't add any new scientific evidence to the academic field of curiosity and learning. But those who do define the field have produced works that are a lot less fun to read than this -- they're not popular for a reason. Good, simple communication is not just fluff. I would highly recommend this book to my friends and students, something I can't say of the more scientific works on the subject.

I appreciated the focused organization of the book. Leslie wrote a table of contents with chapter headings that are clear and honest (that's really what that chapter is about!) and stuck to his point in each one. He covers how curiosity works, how it gets started (early childhood stuff), and how it is encouraged (or not, or should be) in schools, and how it is sustained in adults. He also speaks convincingly of its importance in an

age of information. Machines will never learn to be curious, and therefore will not be creative.

In short, I really enjoyed this book, even if it didn't introduce me to a lot of new information. It is well written and has a chatty style, and the organization and simple analysis, in and of itself, helped me to see slightly different angles of the subject than I had before. But mostly I'm excited that there is finally a great little book about curiosity that I can recommend to others, even if they're not up on the field as a science.

Elena says

3.4 stars. Nice easy read, the type that i enjoy. Did not collect too much memorabilia, though (perhaps because it is getting colder and i am reluctant to stop my iPhone's audiobook app and take some notes) when i am walking. A couple. Culture is a technology for storing knowledge and building on previous "storage" gradually. Hitchcock was an information sadist (knew how to torture viewers with hooking hints and postponing the reveal).

Eric says

I'm starting to get a little tired of the "journalist writes about some vague topic" genre of popular non-fiction. It's a tried and true formula; anecdote, brief statement of some academic's viewpoint, historical reference, review of some study, story about Benjamin Franklin/Mark Twain/Isaac Newton/Winston Churchill, and concluded mercifully by some overstated thesis presenting something obvious as though it's novel. The cycle repeats itself a couple dozen times over this thin volume. The stories are fun, the conclusions affirming, the opinions benign. Leslie doesn't make you work very hard.

The book sleeve is made out of some futuristic semi-plastic polymer. This bumps it from a 2 to a 3.

Lisa says

Curiosity made me buy this book!

Browsing the shelves in a bookstore, it caught my eye and I spontaneously bought it, probably as a subconscious reaction to the fact that I have heard that I tend to be too curious about everything ever since I was very little. It is a topic that has followed me from early childhood over my academic studies and into motherhood and teaching.

As a literary phenomenon, it has a negative connotation, starting with Eve, who could not resist the temptation to know more, and was punished with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, or Pandora, who opened a box full of evil, with only hope left to cope with it all.

The ability to stimulate curiosity, on the other hand, can save lives, as Scheherazade experienced in the 1001 nights she told cliffhanger stories that needed to be finished before she was ready to die. Obviously, as a mother and teacher, I focus on stimulating curiosity, rather than punishing it, as it is part of effective learning. That's the theory, anyway.

However, I have to confess that I have plunged into a kind of reverse Eve-guilt many, many times, being too tired and distracted to engage in the curious questions I have been asked. When I had two toddlers and a baby at home, I used to read a lot to the 2 and 4-year-olds just to have an hour of sitting down instead of running. At one point I decided to introduce them to the mythical origins of our culture and read the children's bible. An avalanche of questions was the result:

"Why did god plant the tree if he didn't want Eve to eat from it?"

"Why is he so unfair to Cain?"

"Where do the other people come from if there was only one family in the beginning?"

And so on. After counting 17 "Why"-questions in a row during one session, I was exhausted and lost my patience, yelling:

"Can you please stop asking why?"

Silence. Then, quietly, my 4-year-old:

"Why?"

Oh, the guilt will never go away, and ten years have passed since then. But I haven't learned anything from it either. The other day, while I was reading this book and taking notes, my 10-year-old daughter came in and asked me something. My horrible answer:

"Not now, darling, I am reading a book about how to stimulate your curiosity."

????

Okay, I might win the medal for bad parenting, but in theory, I think I am aware of how to do it better, and this book is a concise summary of a common sense approach to stimulation of curiosity.

I particularly enjoyed the analysis of the correlation between knowledge and curiosity, and that learning more about a topic creates more interest in it. As a grown-up, I am responsible for giving my children a basis of knowledge that opens up wider horizons for them to be curious about. It is not enough to hand them a laptop and tell them to explore whatever they are interested in. The randomness of the information they will find online will rather kill their wish to know more than make them develop further interest in it.

I would recommend this book to parents or educators who would like to refresh some common sense reflections on why we work daily to create an environment of inquiry, and how we can keep it alive as adults as well. Curiosity can be trained, and nurtured, or stifled, depending on how much we work on it and feed it.

After reading this book I have vowed to answer at least 19 questions before losing my temper from now on. That will be enough to redeem myself from the guilt of the past, I reckon, considering how the questions have changed since my children were toddlers.

"Why do I have to go to the hairdresser?"

"Why does my room have to be tidy?"

"Why are you so annoying?"

When it comes to enhancing epistemic rather than diversive curiosity, nothing beats reading interesting books, and my children know I will always gladly answer their literary questions, at least. And ask some

valid questions myself:

"Have you practised piano?"

"Why is there only one gym shoe in the bag?"

"Do you think Gollum is a good or bad character? Why?"

There are not enough questions in the world!

Marcia says

had to skim lots of this book, was hoping for something similar to Malcolm Gladwell.

many interesting facts - just not interesting enough as a whole
