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3.3.

Be Curious About Your Surroundings

The most important thing about education is the appetite. Education does not begin with the university and it certainly ought not to end there.

– Winston Churchill

Another way to find that proper balance of peace in your life is by cultivating your curiosity. Harmony goes hand-in-hand with humility. Humility is understanding that you do not know and cannot do everything. It is accepting that you will always have much more to learn. Humility then includes a measure of healthy curiosity.

So by developing your curiosity, you can foster peace in your life. As I discussed earlier, achievers are usually totally focused on the results they are striving after. This single-mindedness often limits their powers of perception. But if they can nurture curiosity for the world around them, then attaining results will not be the only thing they have in their lives. They can then suspend their activities sometimes just to enjoy the fulfillment of figuring out how things work or how one thing relates to another.

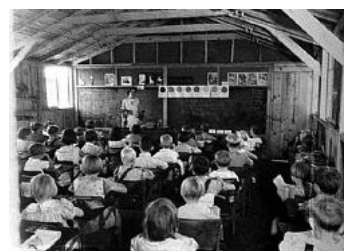
Education these days has become more important than ever. If you want to understand the rapid developments being made in just about every area of human endeavor, then you have to keep yourself up-to-date. This is especially true for achievers, who tend to serve as pioneers within their given professions.

Personally, I really think that the process of learning itself has unique value. For me, understanding how something works, in whatever context, provides a certain pleasure and satisfaction. In this respect, I must consider myself

as having an inquisitive mind. I believe that this inquisitiveness has contributed to a trusting attitude towards life. This inquisitiveness proved greatly valuable during my school years. At about ten years of age, I discovered, to my surprise, that most of my schoolmates did not share this curiosity. It had already been extinguished during our first years at school.

It is my belief that most children carry with them a natural curiosity from birth. There are no limits to what kinds of things children between the ages of three and ten can ask, but after that point, the questions begin to disappear. Is it school that deadens this inquisitiveness? If this is the case, then this is a serious matter. I believe the answer, unfortunately, is yes. It is the compulsory nature of our schooling that deadens curiosity. The moment that learning becomes compulsory, it becomes boring. Just try reading a book on a topic that you are not the least interested in.

Unfortunately, for many of us, most of our learning is institutionalized. My father likes to ask me when I plan to continue my studies, although he knows that I read four or five non-fiction books a month. But as far as he's concerned, this is not "studies". For him, "studies" means when someone else dictates what you study; it is when you take exams and earn a certificate or a diploma showing what you have accomplished.



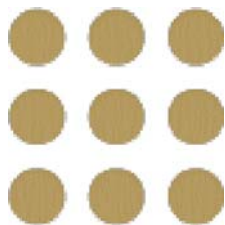
I believe that we need to reevaluate our traditional approach to learning. It is no longer acceptable to relegate our learning to certain periods of our lives. In a changing society, learning must be a process that takes place continuously, side-by-side with other activities in our lives. More and more people are finding that studying at a dusty university for five years, and then graduating, only to discover that the world has sped ahead without them, is a great waste of time and resources.

Employers are becoming less interested in formal schooling and more interested in just how teachable a prospective employee may be. In this ever-changing world, what you have already learned is less interesting than how readily you can learn new things.

That is why it is important to have a favorable approach to learning. I am afraid that many people find this difficult since school wiped out their inquisitiveness early on and turned them off to learning.

Luckily enough, I managed to get through school without any significant damage to my curiosity. I appreciate the value of this today. These days there is so much to learn about the world around us. But the choice is yours. In a world that is ever in change, we have to choose our attitude toward learning and toward change itself.

Change is often accompanied by fear and hesitation. This is because you know how things are now but you can never be sure of what change will bring. So to give ourselves a sense of security, albeit a false sense of security, we try to stave off change. If we can keep our world stable, then we are not forced to learn new things since we already have the knowledge we need to lead our lives the way we always have.

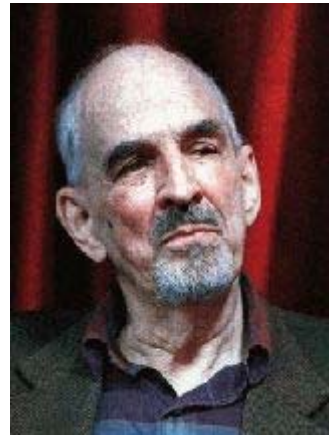


Do you have the curiosity it takes to figure out a way to connect the dots with only three straight lines? The answer can be found at the end of this section. Source: *Conceptual Blockbusting* by James L. Adams

There are other ways to approach change, however. Change can be met with anxiety and

skepticism, or it can be welcomed with curiosity and confidence. When facing change, if you already have a successfully cultivated thirst for knowledge, then you will have a greater ability to relax and see how things will work out. You will not be as likely to fall into panic or fear.

Another obstacle to having a positive attitude to change and learning is what I see as the contempt for knowledge that has sprouted up these last decades in protest to the compulsory nature of schooling. Unfortunately, this protest has been directed at knowledge itself rather than at the compulsory methods of teaching. Earlier in this book I have quoted from Olivier Assayas and Stig Björkman's interview book, *Three Days with Bergman*. I am going to quote the same book here, because of Bergman's excellence in describing contemporary phenomena. In this quote, Bergman describes how he had to fight against this kind of contempt for knowledge.



OA: How do you view this period and the radical movies it produced?

IB: *It's a bit difficult to explain using this country as an example because Sweden has certain tendencies that can be considered typically Swedish. We can be very wise and intelligent, but we can think of only one thing at a time!*

The revolution had suddenly come to Sweden, and young people were thinking about nothing but Mao. At this time, I was a teacher here at this theater. One of my sons, who is now an actor, was a student here then, which was about 1969. Most of the students were about 20 years old, and I said to them: "Try to understand something. You have to learn technique. If you do not learn the technique of speaking, of movement and roll analysis, then you will never be able to get across your revolutionary opinions and ideas from the stage. The audience won't listen to you because they won't be able to hear what you're saying. The audience won't watch you because you won't know how to con-

duct yourselves on stage. These are things you have to learn. The technique of stage movement and the technique of speaking." But they only whistled and waved Mao's little red book and said: "Let's read here and see what Mao has to say about this!"

What Ingmar Bergman is describing here can be applied to the many people who grew up under the delusion that they did not need to learn anything. Everything would work out fine, just as long as the political system was replaced. It was an age characterized to a great extent by naivety and foolishness. This attitude towards learning and education has unfortunately continued to spread its negative influence to different parts of society.

When I attended the university, our lectures consisted to a great extent of our professors reading from overheads word-for-word. We wrote down everything but never got a real understanding of the matters that our professors tried to convey. In this way, my professors' very real contempt of knowledge was passed on to my generation. We were never given the chance to learn just how fun learning and understanding can be.

Unfortunately, I think the same kind of contempt of knowledge and superficiality can be observed today, in the media, for instance. This is of course also a result of the media's commercialization. There are certain conventions about how to deliver information. In many cases, it seems that it's more important to make everything easily digested than it is to cover complicated issues from all sides. Everything is delivered in simplified form. The result of this is that it's all too easy to remain passive when watching TV. Everything washes over you and you never actually have to engage your brain.

Have you ever tried reading a book that you didn't quite understand because it was just a bit too hard for you? It can be quite satisfying, because all along the way you are forced to think through what the text is actually saying. You have to bite into difficult words or complicated issues and try to hash out your own explanations.



At the university, I was never invited to work out the underlying relationships of things. Everything was pre-packaged and served up on a silver platter. There was no depth to the knowledge presented to us. The professors seemed to be incapable of searching out that kind of depth in their fields of expertise. Most of them lacked that approach whatsoever.

I believe that this unfortunate approach to knowledge is evident in our school system and even within many areas of research today. The teaching offered is often shallow, which makes it dull, dry and uninteresting. It fails to spark curiosity or excitement.

Another contributing factor to this unfortunate approach to knowledge is that fields of study are becoming ever increasingly fragmented. If you wish to conduct research, you must first choose which minute aspect of reality you wish to address. This specialization begins early in our schooling. In our parents' time, you could put together a degree by combining several subjects from different university departments. That provided you with a broad knowledge base, which is an excellent foundation upon which to build further specialization and to keep it in perspective. A broad knowledge base also makes it more likely that you will be able to successfully pass on your specialized knowledge to others.

When I conducted my studies, however, it was common, at least here in parts of Europe, to choose your entire course of study when first beginning at the university. How this has developed in Northern and Central Europe has been quite different from how it has developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Unfortunately, the German so called *beruf*-tradition has been quite dominant here in the North.

In this tradition, even studies at the university are viewed as a kind of vocational training. Right from the beginning, students are supposed to decide what they are going to be when they have finished their studies. Fortunately, there have recently been signs of development in the opposite direction.

Such early specialization can lead to difficulties if you continue your studies by moving into research. Then you probably lack the general education you need to put your research into perspective. Without this general education, it is easy to become narrow-minded and to get lost among the details. It's also easy to find yourself conducting research that lacks any connection to reality whatsoever. All too often no one but the researcher himself finds his results valuable,

except perhaps some of his colleagues within his particular branch of academic discipline.

I believe that our universities, unfortunately, are peopled with far too many of these kinds of narrow specialists. This is contributing to the fragmentation of knowledge. Everything is dissected into smaller and smaller pieces and the big picture is often completely missed. Information is conveyed without mention of its larger context. Instead, it is offered as isolated strands of knowledge. With the larger context lost, students find it difficult to integrate this new knowledge into their already-existing knowledge base. This is because all real learning is a matter of new information being synthesized with old information. Knowledge is like a great weave in which all strands, old and new, become integral parts of the whole.

Still, it is believed in the scientific community to a large extent that the only way to increase knowledge as much as possible is to partition reality into the smallest areas of study possible. It is then only a matter of recombining these separate disciplines to reach an understanding of their entirety.

It doesn't work this way in real life. The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. Our understanding of the parts themselves is in constant flux. Reality itself changes character depending on who is studying it. The observer and what's observed sometimes become indistinguishable. It is therefore important that we try to get an overall view of what we study. We cannot continue delving only into one tiny area and leaving the rest alone. If we do this, we will

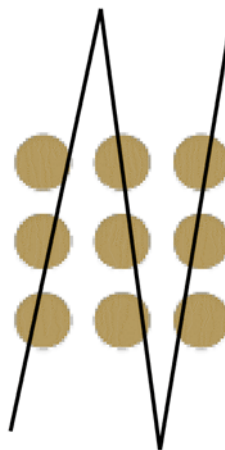
also find it more difficult to communicate our knowledge to others.

Who was the best teacher you ever had?
What did he or she do that was so right?
What is the best non-fiction book you've ever read?
Why was it so good?

Many students who are taught in this fragmented fashion try to solve this dilemma by learning things rotely. However, information that is learned by heart is quickly fades away. Even worse, this method destroys one's attitude to learning itself. This is because the message received is that it is completely acceptable to acquire knowledge without understanding. I am convinced that a great many university students graduate without experiencing the wonderful feeling of understanding something they never understood before.

I believe that this feeling of having reached some kind of insight is necessary if our knowledge is to be of a lasting nature. I also believe that we must be familiar with this feeling before we can move on and eagerly acquire new knowledge. This is how we can continue to develop our curiosity.

Just because our curiosity faded away during our school years doesn't mean that it is dead. It may need some artificial respiration but it will soon revive. So good luck rediscovering your curiosity for the world around you – the same curiosity that will help you reach a more humble approach to whatever happens in your life.



Answer to the question on page 2.