

25 Tested Ways to Nurture One of the Most Important Traits You'll Ever Need

Madelyn Blair, PhD

I think every day is a new day, every day is a new opportunity, and every day is a new chance. –Jennifer Winget

THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MORE

Have you ever wanted to ask a question and were afraid to appear ignorant or stupid or arrogant? Have you ever bought something major and realized that you didn't ask the right questions before making the decision? Have you ever wanted to make an impression and realized that if you had asked a question that demonstrated you understood what was being presented that would have been enough? Have you ever wondered why some people are always finding things useful and fun and you can't get yourself even engaged? There are so many reasons why learning how to be more curious and asking the question on your mind is the answer to making your life easier, more fun, more successful, more resilient.

When I did my research¹, I observed that highly resilient people asked questions all the time. They pushed the edges of what they knew further and further. They weren't trying to win a race, they were just trying to learn new things, gain new insights, explore possibilities. Their curiosity spurred them on. They were **insatiably curious**.

The good news is that you can nurture that questioning nature, your curiosity. You can do things that help you see more of what you are looking at. You can get more and more curious about what is not evident or what is suggested but not clear or missing entirely. You can become insatiably curious, too. In the process, you become more resilient as well.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space and in that space lies our power to choose our response. And in that choice lies our power and our freedom.”
–Victor Frankl

The working definition of resilience used here is that place between stimulus and response where you choose how you will respond. The power to choose belongs to you. The choice is yours even if you feel powerless to change what caused your distress. Being curious helps prepare you for when you have to make that choice.

Asking the proper questions is the central action of transformation. Questions are the key that causes the secret doors of the psyche to swing open. –Clarissa Pinkola Estes

THE TRANSITION TO A BETTER LIFE HAS MANY OPTIONS

Here are 25 ways to spark up your life, stimulate questions, and strengthen your resolve to ask the question that comes to mind. Read through them all, select one or two that look interesting for you and try them for a week or so. Start small but start.

Preparation

- Make it a habit to find things for which you are grateful – hot coffee in the morning, a job to go to, a loving mother, whatever it is – large or small. Once you have thought of one, be grateful. Gratitude allows your brain to boost the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine – both part

¹ This work is based on the book, *Unlocked: Discover how to embrace the unexpected*. Some of these strategies listed here are from that book, but most of them are different and additional.

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of nature's way of giving you a reward so that you feel better. If you're going to ask questions, make yourself as **comfortable** as you can.

- Write a story about when you learned an important lesson. What did you learn from writing the story. What questions still remain or have been stimulated by your story? This is a lesson on finding new information about yourself. It will **strengthen** you as you begin to search for and ask questions.
- Look at each task or project ahead of you and determine what about them brings you the real pleasure or joy, not just a sense of duty. This is a very practical exercise that brings you new insight, practice in finding questions, but it also clarifies your **value and contribution** to the task or project and its goal (yours or your organization's).
- Say, "I don't know" – just say it! See how you **feel**. What did you learn?

Developing your thinking

- If you were to create a museum that celebrated your life's work, what questions would you like it to answer for those who visit? This forces you to think of more about a topic you think you know everything about. It exercises your **critical thinking** and your curiosity.
- Read through the reviews of books you are interested in on Amazon. List the **questions** you still have about the book?
- Volunteer to be a mentor for a young person. See if you can get them to begin asking questions of you. It **turns the tails** and teaches you about developing questions.

Developing observation skills

- Walk down a new street and mark all the things you saw that surprised you. This exercise enhances your **observation** skills along with piquing your curiosity.
- Just as you ask yourself what you learned from a failure, ask yourself what you learned from your successes, too. This habit of asking every time makes it just '**business as usual**' and not a punishment for failure.
- How many images and objects can you see in three minutes of **cloud gazing**?

Developing questions

- Ask your team to spend a set period of time (say, 20 minutes) in which they can only ask questions about the topic/decision at hand. You will be stunned at the **perspectives** that come out simply by turning the frame of reference.
- Pretend to not be an expert and ask what might be considered **novice questions**. Then listen to the answers and don't interrupt.
- Always look out for people who seem to **ask just the right question**. Seek them out, have a conversation with them, and see if you can determine how they do that. If you can't do so, ask them how they do it.
- Dream about the future and come up with questions you think the future will answer. Then find someone you can talk with about the future of your profession, field, and/or industry and ask those questions. This is a great way to develop challenging questions – a skill that is called for when you want to **impress others** that you have taken time to think about what they have offered.
- **Never apologize** for asking a question.
- When you **spot someone** who asks great questions, ask them how they seem to always do so. Don't hesitate. You may find a great practice partner.

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Advanced skills

- Develop the habit of asking **learning questions** not *judging* questions. Learning questions are about discovering new information. Judging questions are about eliminating information. Are you about discovering or eliminating?
- When exploring a topic, try to see how much **detail** you can tease out. This is a hard practice as it requires attention to get the information and time to think about what it suggests to you as you integrate it into what you already know. Hard but powerful.
- Always have a **question for the speaker**. When you listen to a presentation with this intention, you hear a lot more!
- If you are **running a meeting**, turn each agenda item into a question or questions. This will focus the discussion more than you might think. It will also help you determine what you are really interested in the agenda topic.
- **Become a Practice Partner** for someone to hone your skills at asking questions. Give yourself a gold star if you choose this challenging action. NEED TO HAVE A REFERENCE THAT DEFINES PRACTICE PARTNER

If all else fails (It won't if you try!)

- Make it a habit to regularly ask the question, "What am I **assuming** about this?" This is to help you prepare for those times that you need to make major decisions that require careful due diligence.
- Drink more **water**. Water always seem to help the body do anything better.
- Get enough **sleep**. Sleep is the body's way of restoring itself. Running of empty never works as an on-going practice.

"Unsuccessful people make decisions based on their current situation; successful people make decisions based on where they want to be." Anonymous

YOU CAN MAKE THIS CHANGE AND OWN A NEW LIFE

When individuals decide they are going to improve a skill, they practice it. If you want a black belt, you go to the dojo as often as you can and practice. If you are a concert pianist, you practice your scales every day even just before the concert. If you are the safety on the football team, you practice running backwards every chance you get. In each case, they get better and better at what they chose to improve. They practice.

Resilience depends on an attitude of inquisitiveness. You were likely born with it, and something in your upbringing or schooling or work environment convinced you that you didn't need it. If life is throwing you one unexpected challenge after another, you need resilience to get through it alive and ready for the next one as you move through your career, family, or life in general. Curiosity is your friend. Decide today to do one or two of these practices and see what happens in a couple weeks. If you do it consistently, you will begin to see that you have more questions about all kinds of things which also means that you will begin to anticipate issues instead of being overwhelmed by them.

"When I started really asking questions for myself, I discovered I had been more confident at a younger age. So, why not now?" A.B. Workshop participant.