

MY VIEW



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CURIOSITY

I like to think of myself as a good listener (although my wife may disagree.) After all, I've spent my professional life listening to others. But after a few recent experiences of not listening adequately to friends and family members, I've come down from my "*I'm a good listener*" perch to acknowledge that I'm just an OK listener.

What keeps me from being a good listener? One word...**CURIOSITY**.

I'm a curious person, and I've always seen my curiosity as a positive attribute. My intellectual curiosity has made me an avid reader; my curiosity about places has led me to extensively travel; and my curiosity about people has let me to working in the helping profession.

But unfortunately, my curiosity has been my listening "downfall." How? Inevitably as someone begins telling me about an important event in their life (a travel adventure, a loss, an achievement....) I become very curious about something in their story. It's usually something I haven't experienced myself and want to know more about it... Now! Here are 2 examples...

1. **Storyteller:** "*It was a very sad day. We buried my wife at sea...*"

Wayne The Curious: "*How do you bury someone at sea? Are their companies that do that? Do you need a permit?*"

2. **Storyteller:** "*I went to Istanbul on vacation. It was a vacation of a lifetime...*"

Wayne The Curious: "*I've never been to Istanbul. What are the people like?*"

In both examples, I heard something I wanted to know more about (Istanbul... burial at sea) and my curiosity got the best of me. I hijacked the discussion. It now became about me... about what I wanted to know and not about what the storyteller wanted to tell. In both examples my curiosity seemed harmless enough. **Wayne The Curious** now knew more about Istanbul and about burial at sea. But the storytellers in my two examples wanted to tell me their whole stories, and I didn't give them the opportunity.

I know that I'm not the only listener with a "Curiosity Problem" because of how others listen to me. Often when I'm telling an experience in my life I'm interrupted by a listener asking me about something specific they want to know. "*I'm just curious*" they say innocently. That curiosity usually brings my story to a screeching halt. It's sad but true that I'm rarely able to tell my life stories from beginning to end without a well-intentioned listener interrupting.

If you are someone who like me is "Curiosity Challenged," what can you do? Here is what I do...

First, I remind myself that when people start telling me about something that happened or is happening in their lives, they want to tell me whole story in their way. They don't want to stop to educate me about something that I'm curious about.

Second, often when I'm listening to someone tell a story, I hear a curious voice in my head whisper "*Wow, that's interesting. I want to know more about...*" I've learned to bite my tongue and not to give my curiosity expression.

Third, I acknowledge that my curiosity is often a good thing... just not when someone is telling me about a life experience. Timing is everything. I've come to realize I don't need to satisfy my curiosity NOW. I can ask what I'm curious about after the story is told: "*You mentioned _____ earlier. Can you tell me more about that?*"

I've saved my prescription for the Curiosity Challenged till last. As I begin listening to someone tell a story about their lives, I say to myself: **Curiosity killed the cat**. On the face of it, this old and pithy phrase seems silly and seems to have nothing to do with listening. But it works for me. It reminds me about the dangers of being curious when communicating with others.