



A WEEK IN *Learning*

ARTICLE

LASSO'S LESSON ON CURIOSITY

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When reading the title above, did you assume this article would reference Apple TV's number one hit TV comedy series, Ted Lasso? If you don't enjoy wholesome stories with astonishing character development and impeccable story arches - not to worry - this isn't a dissertation on Ted Lasso. Instead, I want to share with you a specific scene from the show. A scene that, since its airing, has made a significant impact on my professional career.

A Walt Whitman Win

In [season 1, episode 8](#), Ted is asked to play a game of Darts against Rupert, an antagonist in the series. With a few verbal and nonverbal cues, it was obvious Rupert assumed that Ted wasn't someone skilled enough to win, well, anything. As Ted approached the board for his turn, he shared this anecdote:

"Guys have underestimated me my entire life and for years I never understood why - it used to really bother me. Then one day I was driving my little boy to school, and I saw a quote by Walt Whitman. It was painted on the wall there and it said, 'Be curious, not judgmental.' I like that."

Ted throws a perfectly placed dart

"So, I get back in my car and I'm driving to work and all of a sudden it hits me - all them fellas that used to belittle me, not a single one of them was curious. You know, they thought they had everything all figured out, so they judged everything, and they judged everyone. And I realized that they're underestimating me - who I was had nothing to do with it. Because if they were curious, they would've asked questions. Questions like, 'Have you played a lot of darts, Ted?'"

Ted throws another perfectly placed dart

"To which I would have answered, 'Yes sir. Every Sunday afternoon at a sports bar with my father from age ten until I was 16 when he passed away.' Barbecue sauce."

Ted throws a double bullseye to win the game

Curiosity VS Judgment

Walt Whitman (and our fictional hero, Ted) taught us a valuable lesson on human interaction and connection: the difference between curiosity and judgment. Though the lesson to "be curious not judgmental" may seem elementary, the truth is, being curious is hard. Being judgmental is easy. So, what is the real difference between the two and why does it matter?



"Judgment seeks to rapidly respond, whereas curiosity seeks to understand."

Judgment seeks to rapidly respond, whereas curiosity seeks to understand. Our brains are wired to make judgments every day because it is the quickest way for us to get information and move on to the next thing. Curiosity is more intentional; it takes time and a lot of thought. There is a form of evaluation that comes with judgment, and that evaluation ends with an opinion. In our Lasso example, Rupert made a quick judgment of Ted's ability to win at a game of Darts – based only on his opinion of Ted. If Rupert approached Ted with curiosity, asked thoughtful questions, he may have learned about Ted's unique skill.

Curiosity in Leadership

I used to think I was naturally curious. I thought that making constant observations and analyzing every detail I came across made me a curious and thought-provoking leader. However, I wasn't being curious. I was being judgmental. Now, judgment isn't always a negative act – there is a time and place for it. With that said, curiosity is still an important skill to activate in leadership.

Here are 2 tips that helped flip my natural, judgmental actions into thoughtful, curious moments:

1. **Ask Purposeful Questions:** Unfortunately, it has been ingrained in our society that leaders have (or should have) all the answers. Just because you hold a piece of knowledge, does not mean it is the only fact worth sharing. Being curious and asking questions will prove this.
The most powerful exercise to practice in leadership is asking questions with intent. This means ditching the YES/NO answer format and replacing it with an open-ended one. Most of these questions begin with “what” or “how” in order to allow the other person to provide more depth in their response. When we ask questions with purpose, we combat things like [confirmation bias](#) and begin building trust with the person we are speaking to.
2. **Listen Not to Respond, But to Understand:** The most talking we should be doing as leaders is through our questioning, with a small amount of follow-up responses. Other than that, we should be carefully listening 70% - 80% of the time. Listening is a harder skill to master than you may think. In his TedTalk, [5 Ways to Listen Better](#), Julian Treasure outlines 5 exercises to improve conscious listening. I highly recommend trying each one.

Something beautiful happens when we listen more – we understand. We understand that person's perspective, their communication style, and what is important to them. We build a better, stronger connection. In return, trust is strengthened and a healthy work culture is established and maintained.

I owe our fictional hero a heartfelt, “thank you”. The power of curiosity is a lesson I hope to continuously learn from. And I hope that you are curious enough to do the same.

“Barbecue Sauce”.

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