Chapter 1

Ever Curious

"Can I see the photograph, Daddy?"

Edwin Land was a brilliant scientist whose early inventions included Polaroid sunglasses and photographic filters. He later developed valuable cutting-edge technology that was used in World War II. Yet it took a simple question from his three-year-old daughter to unlock the key to perhaps his most famous discovery of all, the instant camera.

In 1943 Land and the young Jennifer were holidaying in Santa Fe, New Mexico, walking the streets and taking photographs along the way. It was decades before the advent of smartphones, digital cameras, or even the first "Fotomat" drop-off kiosk, and tourist "snaps" at the time took several days or even weeks to come back from the lab. For most consumers, the inconvenience of not knowing straightaway whether they had blinked or scowled was a small price to pay for the miracle of being able to distill a moment into a paper-thin memento. But Land's inquisitive daughter felt otherwise.

"Can I see the photograph, Daddy?" Jennifer asked after her father's index finger triggered the shutter of his 1941 Kodak. Unbeknownst to her, the young child had precipitated one of the great inventions of the twentieth century. Land was immediately taken by the concept of instant photography and set off on a long walk to think through the idea. He would later reflect:

> *"As I walked around that charming town I undertook the task of solving the puzzle she had set me. Within the hour, the camera, the film, and the physical chemistry became so clear to me that with a great sense of excitement I hurried over to the place where Donald Brown, our Patent Attorney (in Santa Fe by coincidence) was staying, to describe to him in great detail a dry camera which would give a picture immediately after exposure."*[1]

Land got to work creating Polaroid's first instant camera, the Model 95, which was launched in 1948. Polaroid instant cameras became an enormous commercial success.

Curiosity is our first and, in many ways, most foundational mindset for solving problems under great uncertainty. Without curiosity, inventors like Land would become pedestrian and fall well short of their creative potential. Asking "Why is it so?" is the key instinct for those who push beyond conventional answers, especially when the world feels unstable and uncertain.

Understanding Curiosity

Nobel prize winner Barry Marshall recounts a personal tale of curiosity: When he was 13 years old, he and his brother Bill read about an experiment with balloons in the *Newnes Popular Encyclopedia*. Curious to find out more, they could not resist the temptation to try to replicate it:

> *"We took an empty 4 gallon kerosene drum and soldered some connections to it so that we could fill it with house gas (propane) and then connect a balloon on the top and the water hose on the bottom, to drive the gas into the balloon, making a lighter-than-air balloon (we couldn't get helium in those days). However, we had not totally expelled all the air out of the drum, so we ended up with a highly flammable mixture of gas and air. My father pointed this out to us and demonstrated by touching a cigarette to a balloon. It was many weeks before his eyebrows grew back after being enveloped in a ball of flame!"*[2]

While we all know curiosity when we see it, it can be hard to define. Psychologists have been working for decades to provide an answer. Curiosity, they say, is the desire to close a gap between what you know and what you want to know. Psychologist George Loewenstein, argues that curiosity functions like a "drive state."[3] We are all familiar with drive states, even if we are not aware of the term. An obvious example is the desire to eat.

When great problem solvers seek to close the gap between what they know and what they want to know, curiosity *reduces* the uncertainty. That may strike some readers as counterintuitive. Particularly in uncertain times, wouldn't it be better to rein in curiosity, and try to anchor in certainty? What does curiosity have to do with uncertainty? A lot, it turns out.

Children, Curiosity, and Uncertainty

Research shows us that curiosity is a universal innate trait of infants and small children. Babies are enormously curious, and become more so through the first months and years of their lives. They explore their world, learning its patterns and developing and testing theories of what works.[4] First with sound and smell, then eyes and fingers, then mouth, often in partnership with parents and caregivers. The 2- to 5-year-old is always asking why, always testing what is known and reaching for what they want to know. We love the expression "childlike" curiosity. Some 4-year-olds are known to ask 200–300 questions per day. Little wonder that their loving parents are exhausted. From ages 5 to 12, curiosity diminishes rapidly as fewer everyday events bring surprises and the number of developed schemas (worked-out answers) increases.

Child psychology researchers have pinpointed a mid-level of uncertainty—a "sweet spot" that is neither particularly low nor remarkably high—that is distinctly associated with curiosity in babies. Too little uncertainty, or too much, and a baby turns away, bored on the one hand, overstimulated or afraid on the other.[5] This finding chimes with our own observations of problem solvers. When something is reasonably certain, or when a future event, such as a large meteorite hitting the earth, is highly uncertain, there is less need for curiosity. But once there is a middling degree of uncertainty, problem solving juices start to flow. That's when effective problem solvers can attack a problem with a reasonable expectation of success (see Exhibit 1.1).[6]

Curiosity in children relates strongly to the child's environment. "Curiosity grows from the safe and familiar. A secure child with a familiar teacher on a field trip to the zoo will be excited. She will explore and ask dozens of questions," notes scholastic researcher Dr. Bruce Perry.[7] Conversely, the same child may feel threatened and clam up on a trip to the zoo with an unfamiliar teacher. These states are commonly expressed as psychological and physical safety—and there is certainly a message here for how we construct our company and nonprofit cultures to encourage curiosity.

Environments Conducive to Curiosity

Curiosity is a powerful driver of creativity. Walt Disney, the genius who founded the eponymous Walt Disney Corporation, called curiosity the

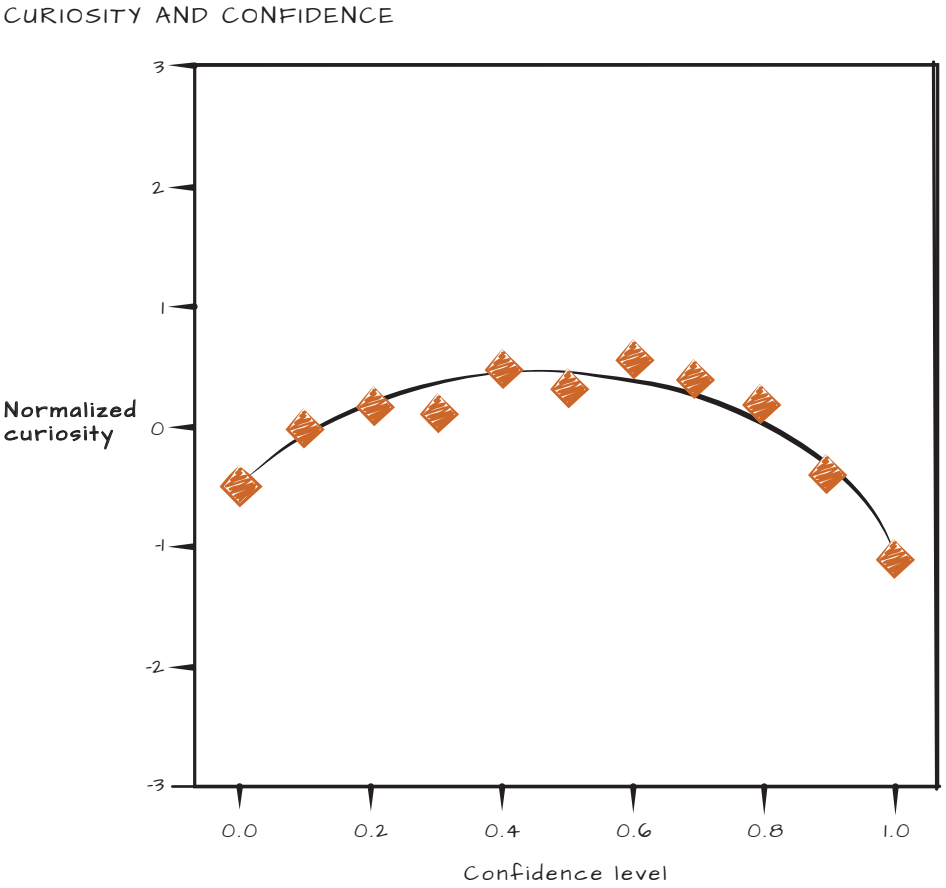

Exhibit 1.1

driving force behind his company's evolution.[8] But many large organizations seem almost hostile to curiosity. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Professor Francesco Gino surveyed 3,000 employees and found that only 24% feel curious in their jobs, compared to 70% who report that they face barriers to asking more questions at work.[9] We understand why companies might be resistant to curiosity—we, too, come from a world of Gantt charts and task lists, project managers, key performance metrics, and hard deadlines. Curious questions can be irritating when you're under pressure. But when companies stifle curiosity, they are shutting off opportunities to search, question, and experiment.

Dedicated Time for Curiosity

Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing, known as 3M, was a pioneer of employee curiosity. In the 1970s the company required employees to dedicate up to 15% of paid hours to noncore projects, in effect challenging them to be curious. Google picked up that idea in 2004 when its founders wrote:

> "We encourage our employees, in addition to their regular projects, to spend 20% of their time working on what they think will most benefit Google. This empowers them to be more creative and innovative. Many of our significant advances happened in this manner."

Even in organizations like Google, though, the pressure of meeting short-term performance targets can gobble up the free time, leading to what has been referred to as "120 percent time."[10] The Alphabet (Google's parent company) policy remains in place, with guidelines that current projects should only consume 80% of employee time. An Alphabet team leader expressed it this way: "It's really not about asking permission for everything you work on—but to empower you to try and experiment—it doesn't have to be a 'moonshot'—just something different."

We are not surprised by the findings of Professor Gino's survey and others like it. These days we all have too little time to daydream and wonder. We know that most profound questions can't be fed into Google, yet "ask Google" has become pervasive shorthand for the idea that all that is known can be found on the web. This blunts and dulls our natural instinct to wonder *why* and *how*. Why think, when you have search engines to find the "answers"? In our grooved or channeled lives, levering ourselves into a place where curiosity and problem solving can thrive requires a huge effort.

Unleashing Curiosity

The research about curiosity is a great starting point for thinking about how to unleash it in organizations. There are three important threads: being in the flow of ideas, asking audacious questions, and recognizing the important contribution that novelty, gestation, and safety play in curiosity-driven problem solving. Exhibit 1.2 takes each of these in turn and shows how individuals from several domains of human endeavor—business, music, and science—have turned curiosity to their and society's advantage.

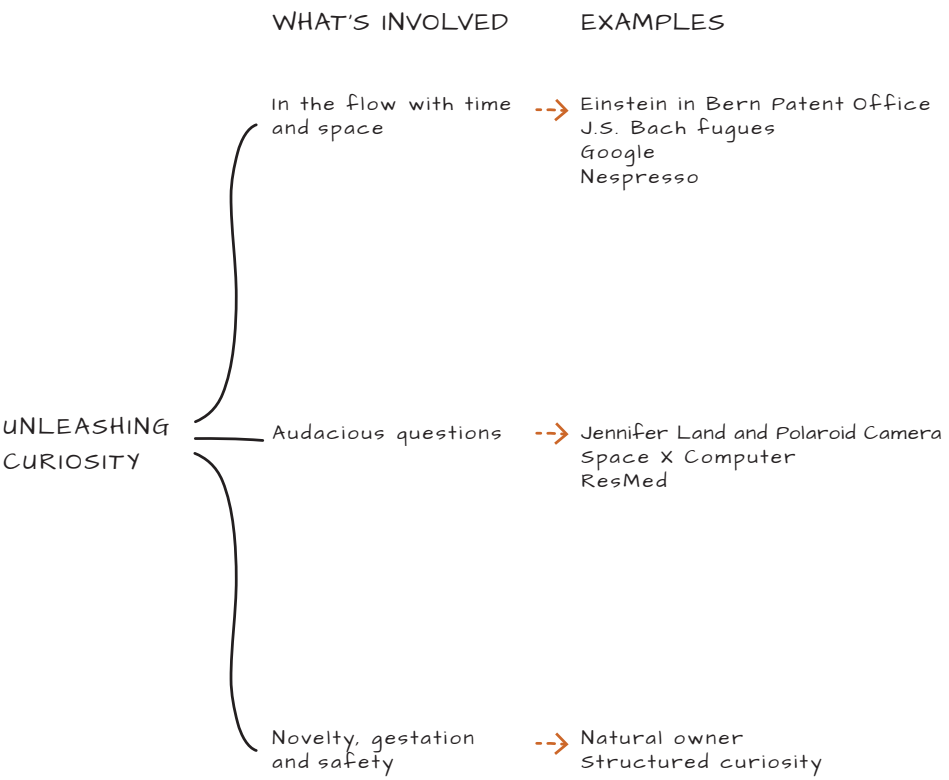

Exhibit 1.2

Flourishing in the Flow of Ideas

Einstein the Patent Clerk

Albert Einstein attributed his genius to curiosity. He famously said, "I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious." We'd venture to suggest that intellectual horsepower had something to do with his success as well. But there was more to Einstein's revolutionary breakthroughs than "just" brainpower and curiosity. He had the great good fortune to be a patent clerk in Bern, Switzerland.

On the face of it, it seems unlikely that a patent clerk in a mid-tier European city should have inspired the greatest innovations in physics for centuries. Einstein took on the role because he hadn't been able to get a teaching position after graduating from the Swiss Federal Polytechnic School two years earlier. A friend of his father eventually offered him a job

as technical expert—*third class*—in the Bern patent office in 1902. Einstein was given the responsibilities of reviewing electromagnetic patent applications, making sure they were original, and recommending whether or not an invention warranted a patent. He would do this for seven years. Rather than viewing his lot as lowly and bureaucratic, as many might have done, Einstein described the patent office as his "worldly cloister" where he "hatched his most beautiful ideas."[11] Just three years into this role, in 1905 he published four papers, including one on "special relativity based on the notion of time being relative to the motion of an observer, assuming constant speed of light." Our understanding of physics has never been the same.

Bern in 1902 was what today we would call an innovation hotspot, particularly for electromechanical and electromagnetic devices. From 1902 to 1905 the patent office registered hundreds of relevant patents of impressive range and depth, everything from remote alarms and clocks for railroad departures and arrivals to clocks indicating time in other time zones.[12] The synchronization of time and clocks was a critical challenge for European railroads at the time, particularly for scheduling trains and avoiding accidents on single tracks. Physicist and historian Peter Galison describes the vibrancy of Einstein's inventiveness:

> *"Patents now raced through the system, improving the electrical pendula, altering the receivers, and expanding system capacity. Time coordination in the central Europe of 1902–1905 was no arcane subject; it was front and center for the clock industry, the military, and the railroad as well as a symbol of the interconnected, sped-up world of modernity. By addressing the problem of distant simultaneity, Einstein was engaging a powerful and highly visible new technology that conventionalized simultaneity, first to synchronize train lines, and to set longitude, and then to fix time zones."*

In Galison's view, "time synchronization was the final, crowning step in the development of special relativity."[13]

In today's parlance we might say that Einstein put himself squarely in the flow of ideas, raising the likelihood of insight and discovery. In many ways, the Bern patent office in 1905 was like NASA in the 1960s, or Silicon Valley from the 1970s. It was a remarkable environment for the 26-year-old scientist—a "patent-officer-scientist refracting the underlying metaphysics of his relativity theory through some of the most symbolized mechanisms of modernity."[14]

Time and Space for J.S. Bach

The first piece of classical music Rob recalls hearing as a boy growing up in Broken Hill, Australia, was J.S. Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." This stunningly beautiful and peaceful composition used to come on the radio at 4 o'clock each afternoon to introduce "The Hospital Hour." It was written in 1723, when Bach took up the position of cantor at St. Thomas's church in Leipzig, Germany, a busy role in which he taught students, composed weekly cantatas, and directed 60 other performances of his own work a year, including festivals.

Bach's life was defined by a tension. Writing music every week "for next Sunday" often got in the way of producing the enduring musical masterpieces for which he is best known. As a result, he went through phases of being weary of his *kapellmeister* responsibilities, notably leading the choir and orchestra. Musicologists have speculated that he eventually became tired of his workload, depressed and burnt out.[15]

It was only when he retired, ending his daily grind, that Bach moved on from church music to produce *The Musical Offering*, *The Goldberg Variations*, and *The Art of Fugue*, none of which he was paid to write.[16] He became curious about how far he could push the boundaries of contrapuntal music—multiple independent melodies, all derived from a 12-note melody. The composition, *Die Kunst Die Fugue*, comprises 14 fugues. It was incomplete at the time of his death, deliberately unfinished, some believe, as a challenge to future generations to write their own ending.[17]

The time and space offered to Bach in retirement allowed him to indulge his curiosity. "Music asked questions of questions."[18] It is no coincidence in our view that much of his music "for next Sunday" has slipped into the annals of history, while his later compositions continue to be performed.

Deep Work to Make a Great Coffee

You have most likely heard of Nespresso, the brand that sells 14 billion coffee capsules each year. You may not have heard of Eric Favre, the person responsible for inventing it. Eric's "deep work" to make a great coffee started in 1973, when he joined Nestlé as an "intrapreneur." But his previous experience, studying thermodynamics and the dynamics of air as a rocket scientist in Switzerland, turned out to be hugely important in the innovation's development.

Eric's challenge was to come up with a better product than Nestlé's two market-leading offerings of the time—the roast and ground coffee prepared in a cafetière or Bialetti on a stovetop, and the soluble Nescafé instant coffee. Full credit should go to the Swiss multinational, a global leader in fast-moving consumer goods, for providing an environment in which Eric could not only indulge his curiosity, but come up with an innovative product that would likely cannibalize its revenues. Nestlé gave him space and time, in his own lab, free of operational demands and of budgetary pressures.

On a visit to Rome with his Italian wife Anna-Maria in the summer of 1975, Eric noticed that some locals were more interested in the quality of the coffee used in their espressos than in the interior design or location of the coffee shop. Curious about this, he discovered Sant'Eustachio II Caffe, steps away from the Piazza Navona. It wasn't much to look at, but he had to queue to get inside. The drinking experience was noticeably different: The coffee was denser, with greater aromas and a distinctive thick "crema" on top. Eric asked to meet the barista, who introduced himself as Eugenio.

Later, Eric set out to make Eugenio's coffee himself, but discovered it wasn't the same. How hard could it be for a rocket scientist to make a cup of coffee? Pretty hard, it turned out. Eric had to concede that it wasn't the espresso machine, the coffee, or the water that made for an otherworldly flavor. It was actually Eugenio himself, with his unique waltz, using an old piston espresso machine, a veritable "chef d'orchestre." But *why* was Eugenio's coffee so much better? Thanks to Anna-Maria's linguistic skills, she and Eric learned about how Eugenio's continuously raising and lowering the lever on his machine affected the brew. While Eugenio believed that his ancient machine was faulty, his stop-and-start actions were inadvertently sucking in more air, compressing it, and injecting it into the capsule. This was the secret that allowed Eric Favre to invent Nespresso (see Exhibit 1.3).

Eric returned to Switzerland, where he had his Eureka moment on a "calm Saturday night dressed in his bathing robe listening to classical music." He went straight to his lab, eager to test his hypothesis. There he had assembled an amalgamation of tubes and cylinders, a filter, ground coffee, hot water, and, most importantly, pressurized air at 200 Bar.

After opening the valve in the way of Eugenio, Eric produced a version of the tasty Sant'Eustachio II Caffe quality crema. True, it was still not up to the standard of the real thing, but it was a crema nonetheless. Eric's

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NESPRESSO CAPSULE

ERIC FAVRE'S ORIGINAL EXPERIMENT

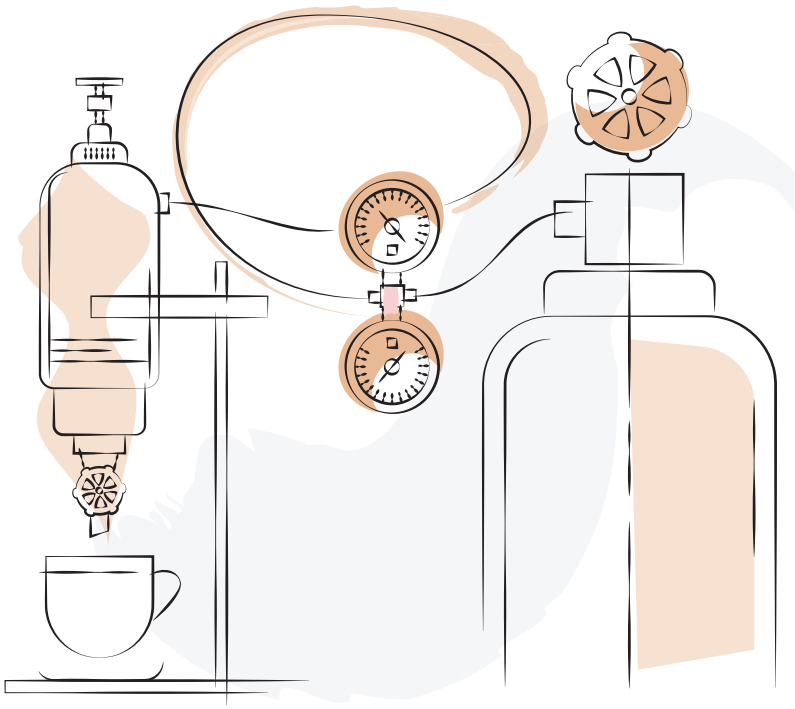

Exhibit 1.3

SOURCE: SIMON ALDOUS

curiosity revealed that the key to a perfect espresso could be expressed in a formula:

$$\text{Crema}\left(\text{froth}\right) = \text{Air pressure} + \text{Water} + \text{Coffee}$$

As he dug deeper, he came to understand the true importance of air in the equation, and in particular the importance of the 20% oxygen. The problem had been hard to crack but it was no surprise that the man solving it was an engineer well versed in the dynamics of air.

Nestlé patented the Nespresso system in 1976, and brought it to market 10 years later; in 2021 Nespresso accounted for more than $7 billion in sales for Nestlé. The product's development illustrates the

benefits of having time and space to explore curiosity, the resources to experiment, and a charter to innovate and possibly cannibalize a core business.

Audacious Questions

ResMed's Big Questions

We saw at the beginning of this chapter how Jennifer Land's disarming question prompted her father to pursue the goal of an instant camera. Many successful companies would not exist but for relentless curiosity of this sort. One of our favorite examples is ResMed, now a $30 billion leader in the treatment of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). ResMed was founded by Dr. Peter Farrell, a biomedical engineer who, as vice president of development for Baxter Labs, was looking for new med tech ventures in the mid-1980s. Peter was intrigued when he heard about a sleep treatment, developed by Sydney University's Professor Colin Sullivan, that required patients to wear a fitted mask providing continuous positive airway pressure (later called CPAP). In its first iterations the device made its users look like the Star Wars character Darth Vader, but the idea was revolutionary.[19]

Professor Sullivan's curiosity about sleep had tragically authentic origins: While he was still in medical school, he found his own mother dead in her bed. A long-time snorer, she suffered from a raft of cardiac disorders related to being overweight and a poor sleeper; she had died of a heart attack. As a consequence, Professor Sullivan devoted himself to developing treatments for sleep disorders. "The deep sense of loss and helplessness that, as someone training in medicine, I could not have prevented this in some way, still resonates today."[20]

One patient Professor Sullivan introduced to Peter had sleep issues so severe that he would stop breathing multiple times per hour at night, and inevitably fall asleep during the day. The patient had just had his first rapid eye movement (REM) sleep in years, wearing one of the face masks connected to an 80-pound Hitachi vacuum blower that ran through a wall to his garage. Peter, who says the contraption sounded like a freight train at this stage, assembled a design team to commercialize an integrated mask and machine that was lighter and quieter, and therefore more patient friendly, for home use.

In 1988 the first commercial sales of the Sullivan Nasal CPAP System (R2) were made. The following year Peter bought the business from Baxter and established ResMed to tackle what he viewed as a global market opportunity. He was right. Sullivan had thought that just 2% of the adult population suffered from OSA. More recent data has established that almost 40% of the adult population has a moderate to severe condition. Thanks to the CPAP machine, many sufferers have enjoyed better health and less interrupted nights.

A less curious person might have been tempted to declare victory and take a nap. But Peter was insatiably curious, particularly about whether the CPAP discovery could be associated with more sleep-related health problems. Digging into National Institutes of Health library data, he found that sleep apnea was also the leading cause of high blood pressure. Eventually Peter's curiosity drove a wealth of research, and unlocked discoveries about the links between sleep and strokes, heart disease, and diabetes. Sleep turns out to be the cornerstone of good health, and with the curiosity of Colin Sullivan and Peter Farrell, we now have a clear solution for large populations.

Killer Questions at Space X

There is a special class of curious questions we call "killer questions." These are the questions that cut through stale debates and allow us to see problems from a fresh perspective. They get to the nub of an issue, often in a strikingly blunt way. We know of no script that guarantees killer questions. But we do see a version of the 80:20 rule at work here—5% of team members tend to ask 95% of the killer questions.

"The best way to manage is to ask questions and not tell people. You can almost always take a directive and turn it into a question. A question shows respect for the person and also engages them in a more thoughtful way. A question means they have to reason on their own and gives them an opportunity to reply if they disagree. You are much better off asking questions, even if you know the answer as a leader. There are urgent cases where you have to state what you want unequivocally, and there are times where consensus does not work. But questions should be the majority of the way you work as a true leader."[22] *—Eric Schmidt, former CEO and chair of Google*

When Elon Musk interviewed astronomical computer expert Kevin Watson for a role at Space X in 2008, Musk asked if Watson could design a mission-critical computer for $10,000. Kevin Watson may not have used the term "killer question," but he knew it was a big one. To anyone in the aerospace industry it was an insane question: Musk was asking for a computer costing 1/100th of the typical cost of a NASA computer ($10 million). As Watson noted: "In traditional aerospace it would cost you more than ten thousand dollars just for the food at a meeting to discuss the cost of the avionics."[21] With 24 years at NASA, he knew the level of the challenge. Notwithstanding his skepticism, Watson promised Musk that he could deliver on that audacious goal . . . and he did so in less than a year.

Novelty, Gestation, and Safety

Grooved processes, like the regularity of standard operating and strategic planning, together with hierarchy, are the bedrock of organizations, corporate and nonprofit. We need regular processes to coordinate the rhythm and discipline required to run large organizations effectively. But grooved processes and chain of command frequently combine to crowd out curiosity. One way to tackle the impact of these forces on curiosity is to recognize the roles of novelty, gestation, and safety on creativity, and to use them as a counterweight to standard practices and authority.

Novelty and Surprise

From research into child behavior, we know that novelty and surprise play a role in promoting curiosity, which in turn helps take us out of our comfort zone. The child going to the zoo has questions because the experience is novel, and of course because the monkeys inevitably bring surprise and delight with their antics. Teachers understand this and employ it to good effect.

How can this be part of organization life? One way to "skip the needle" is to have major customers come to a board strategy retreat, or to visit an innovation hub where you will likely meet the very tech disruptors looking to eat your lunch. Another is to take a page out of the playbook of the CEO who spent an hour each week donning a headset in the call center, resolving customer issues. There is panic when a CEO or senior executive just

turns up at a branch because they are in the neighborhood. In our experience such events are remembered as visits of unusual frankness and candor, when questions are exchanged by the CEO and staff in an open manner. Novelty and surprise also play a key role in convincing people to change, a topic we explore in the show-and-tell mindset chapter.

Quiescent Curiosity

Quiescent curiosity, or latent curiosity, goes hand in hand with deep work. It's the mental process of mulling over problems, putting them away, having them stew half-consciously, only to revisit them when a new situation triggers an insight. Some years ago, Rob and colleague John Stuckey were working with conglomerate businesses and had to answer a fundamental question on corporate strategy: "What businesses should be in our portfolio?" The prevailing wisdom was to adopt the General Electric mantra of being #1 or #2 in market share in an industry, or to exit that business. The concern they had was that in some industries like airlines you could be #1 or #2 and still lose shareholder value. John had leveraged the Structure-Conduct-Performance model to explain this conundrum (in some unattractive industries, industry structure and competitive conduct don't lead to cost of capital returns), but still didn't have an answer to how to decide on the ideal portfolio of businesses.

Rob and John kept wrestling with this problem for a good five years. Their curiosity trigger came during the battles between the financial raiders like T. Boone Pickens and Carl Icahn and established corporates in the 1980s. This led to the insight that the right strategy was to hold a business if you are the "natural owner"—the owner who can generate the largest net present value of cash flows, including options, relative to other competitors.

John was serving a conglomerate with businesses that included tug boats, engineering firms, and coal mines and was trying to advise which businesses to retain and which to divest. Rob was serving a conglomerate with building materials, forestry, and fishing businesses. The natural owner concept introduced a higher bar for deciding what should remain or be added to the portfolio than the conventional "cash flows exceeding acquisition price" test. The term was quickly understood by clients.

CURIOSITY PROMOTERS VS. KILLERS

THIS "Curiosity Promoter"	NOT THIS "Curiosity Killer"
1. Safe environment for questions	"That's a dumb question"
2. Learning from failure	No tolerance for failure
3. Time and space	Current operations 100% +
4. Permitting deep work	Distractions, fragmented time
5. Threats to success	Status quo comfort
6. In the flow of ideas	Internal focus
7. Novelty and surprise	Grooved processes

Exhibit 1.4

The notion of the natural owner, sometimes called the best owner, has been deemed the fourth cornerstone of corporate finance by Tim Koller, co-author of *Value: The Four Cornerstones of Corporate Finance*. The concept was the product of quiescent curiosity triggered by disruptive events in financial markets.

Safety and Creativity

We saw how a child clams up if they consider a trip to the zoo as feeling unsafe. By the same token, having a psychologically safe environment in which to ask "dumb questions" is essential to the promotion of curiosity

in organizations. The most inspiring and effective team leaders *speak last* in brainstorming sessions to encourage team members to ask questions and present their views candidly. It's often the most junior member of the team who asks the killer question.

Our friend Professor Robert Wood created the idea of "structured curiosity" to address the issue of psychological safety: Questions not requiring an immediate answer are accumulated and shared at the end of the week in a separate session, without reference to who asked them.[23] He came up with this approach to help his daughter, a junior employee who had been asked by a more experienced colleague, "Why would you ask that?"

Bob reasons that it's difficult to find the best time to ask questions, so having a "parking lot" makes sense to provide that sense of safety. It's worked well and is now being trialed, with his help, at a major bank. See Exhibit 1.4 for a list of curiosity killers and promoters.

Building Curiosity in Your Organization

A former colleague of Rob and Charles heads recruiting for a sizable international consulting firm. He told Rob that his recruiting criteria when interviewing graduates are curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity, and humility, and he has cases to test each attribute. The approach seems to have worked for his firm, but in other organizations merely recruiting for curiosity may not be enough; more comprehensive initiatives may be required. The first step in developing them is to calibrate where you, your team, and your organization really stand on curiosity. Then consider these practical steps to try to make it a feature of "the way we do things around here."

1. ***Set a curiosity benchmark.*** We all want to know how we compare to others. Dr. Diane Hamilton, author of *Cracking the Curiosity Code,* has developed a curiosity index for this purpose.[24] The index is calculated from an assessment of four curiosity inhibitors, which she calls FATE: fear, assumptions, technology, and environment. By replicating Francesco Gino's survey, then dividing the percentage of respondents who feel curiosity is valued by the percentage who are discouraged

from asking questions, it is possible to derive a rough curiosity quotient (call it CQ). In her survey, it was 24/70, or 34%, across participants. That's a failing grade in our view!

2. ***Ask what a good balance between questions and answers looks like.*** There is no one fixed balance that applies for all units and seasons. But executives can lay out performance and growth objectives and then map questions and answers against them. We know that organizations that always value answers over questions are likely to fail to innovate, especially in uncertain times.
3. ***Introduce structured curiosity.*** One useful practice is to set team norms, particularly when deploying teams that are engaged in rapid prototyping for innovation. Agree on what curiosity promoters and killers need to change in order for ambitious objectives to be met. Keep a running log of questions, without attribution, to be addressed at the end of the week.
4. ***Make curiosity fun with surprise, novelty, and the joy of child-like questioning.*** "Be more curious—damn it!" is unlikely to bring the desired results. You can't just demand curiosity. More curiosity is likely if we put in place the same curiosity triggers that inspire children to ask questions. Step outside regular routines: Encourage mixing across your whole ecosystem (customers, suppliers, technology partners); place a board member into a strategic gaming workshop; ask executive committee members to spend the first hour of their monthly meeting as customer service representatives. Use surprise to get curiosity flowing.
5. ***Put yourself in the flow of ideas, do deep work with few distractions, and assess the results.*** You don't have to wait for a curiosity policy to emerge in your company. When you embark on your next innovation project, do what Einstein did and put yourself in the flow of ideas. Experiment in a structured way, as Eric Favre did when making Nespresso crema. Negotiate the time and resources to do deep work with minimal distractions. Take stock of the results, and see how your experiment might be extended to other teams. Create a curiosity portfolio of initiatives that you test over time.