

# Practicing Curiosity

I recently participated in two national meetings that took place in different regions of the country in 2 successive weeks. The first was QSEN Rocks: Informatics and Simulation to Improve Quality and Safety Education and Practice. The second was NurseTRUST, a gathering of alumni from the Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Fellows program. The focus of the NurseTRUST seminar was, “Dare to Lead,” based on the research of Brené Brown. A common theme to both events was the Notion of Curiosity to Increase Effectiveness in Teaching, Leadership, and Interpersonal Relationships. An important subtheme was the need to practice.

Webster defines *curiosity* as a “desire to know: (a) inquisitive interest in others’ concerns; (b) interest leading to inquiry” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The concept should clearly resonate with faculty as we work with students in their professional formation and as we advance our own scholarship and research interests. However, as it relates to students, do we have an inquisitive interest in their concerns, or do we engage a more judgmental and evaluative approach? How might these different approaches influence learning?

Curiosity is increasingly linked to organizational performance in the business world. Gino (2018) cited several benefits to encouraging curiosity within the workplace. First, there are fewer decision-making errors. Individuals are less likely to look for answers that support their views (confirmation bias) or entertain stereotypes when they are open to alternative solutions. Second, curiosity promotes innovation and positive change.

Third, with regard to interpersonal relationships, there is less group conflict. Finally, curiosity fosters open communication and team performance. Clearly these benefits are relevant to nursing and health care, so how might we facilitate curiosity within nursing education?

Mary Fey (2019), Director of the Center for Medical Simulation (CMS), suggested that we begin with a basic assumption: “We believe that everyone participating in activities at CMS is intelligent, capable, cares about doing their best and wants to improve.” This notion was reinforced by Brené Brown when she asked, “Do you believe that people are doing the best they can?” This assumption facilitates curiosity and respect and can be operationalized and practiced using cognitive rehearsal (Clark, 2019; Fey, 2019).

Clark (2019) described cognitive rehearsal as a structured approach from behavioral science that builds confidence and reduces anxiety when one is confronted with stressful situations where uncivil behaviors might be present. The technique includes five steps: (a) prebriefing and preparatory learning, (b) identifying and describing uncivil scenarios for simulation, (c) using evidence-based approaches to role-play and rehearse responses, (d) using deliberate practice to reinforce the learning experience, and (e) debriefing and reflection. Curiosity is embedded in the evidence-based approaches associated with the third step.

The evidence-based approach used at the CMS is based in an advocacy/inquiry approach, which is rooted in clearly describing your observations perspective and realizing your perspective may not

be accurate. It can be described with the mnemonic PAAIL:

- Preview: State what you would like to talk about.
- Advocacy1: I saw. State what was observed, in objective terms.
- Advocacy2: I think. Your perspective and the impact of the observed behavior.
- Inquiry: I wonder. Ask the receiver what was on his or her mind at the time.
- Listen: To understand the frames behind the observed action.

Brown (2019a) summarized the relationship of curiosity and practice for interpersonal communication with a simple equation:

Grounded Confidence = Rumble Skills + Curiosity + Practice.

The “rumble skills” she refers to can be used within the advocacy/inquiry framework. Some common, suggested rumble starters include:

- I’m curious about....
- Tell me more....
- That’s not my experience....
- I’m wondering....
- Help me understand....
- Walk me through....
- I’m working from these assumptions, what about you?

Use these conversation starters to embark on a pathway to curiosity and avoid judgment. Practice the skills to build your confidence with challenging conversations.

Brown (2019b) defined a leader as “anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes and has the courage to develop that potential” (para. 2). We all have the potential to lead. It takes curiosity and practice to be

effective. How do you practice curiosity in your work and personal relationships? How might being more curious enhance your effectiveness? As you begin the academic year, I encourage you to embrace the basic assumption and adopt a practice of curiosity with your students, colleagues, family members, and friends.

## References

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The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.  
doi:10.3928/01484834-20190719-01