

## CURIOSITY

### 115. If You Have to Ask ... Then *Ask* (and Ask and Ask.)

*"I don't invest in anything I don't understand."*—Warren Buffett

One translation:

*"I shall lead the league in Asking Dumb Questions."*

*"I shall become Questioner-in-Chief."*

*"I shall become 'Dumb Question'-er-in-Chief."*

*"I shall fill in no blanks—I'll ask until I 'get it' well enough to repeat it."*

*"I shall persist until I 'get it,' regardless of how dense it may make me appear at the time."*

*"I shall fight my ever-so-deep-seated instincts, and repeatedly say, 'Could you say that again, a little more slowly?'"*

*"I shall evaluate others in part on their skill and persistence at ... Asking Dumb Questions."*

*"We shall hire in part on perceived or measured Instinctive Curiosity." (For every slot.)*

**116. Reward DNK (Do Not Know)** Bosses and "brilliant" staffers are very prone to falling into the trap of not admitting when they don't know the answer or have trouble with the concept. (CEOs pocketing \$75,000,000 bonuses didn't grock the Super-derivatives served up by their U. Chicago math Ph.D.s—welcome to Recessionus Gargantuas.) The boss thinks "I'm supposed to know that"—and is loath to admit that he doesn't. He rarely lies outright, but he is very inclined to obfuscate his ignorance. So, too, those "brilliant" staffers who are paid large sums to be brilliant, not to not know.

Fact is, we should not only readily (gleefully?—"that's what I hired *you* for") admit when we do not know something, but also actively *seek out* things we do not know, or "DNKs." Perhaps start meetings by asking, *"What are our DNKs here?"* (And end the meeting the same way.) We can, and should, make it positive ... and praiseworthy ... for anyone to say "DNK" when he/she/you/me DNK. Publicly cheer the person who admits—*in front of a boss*—that he or she "does not know" the facts here, or the answer to this or that. In fact, you might make a game (a serious game!) out of identifying the "DNKs" regarding any analysis or proposed action.

**117. Work the Watercooler—Or: Are You Gossiping Enough?** The human brain is about nine times bigger, on a body-size-adjusted basis, than that of mammals in general. The reason is fascinating—and mostly counterintuitive. We are, of course, a long way from being the strongest of the species. So how did we win out over the Truly Big Dudes? Answer: Not by intellectual skill at calculating warhead (spear) trajectories, but by joining together in groups and outwitting and out-organizing the brutes. And what brought these groups of humans together? A brain that grew to accommodate: Gossip! As British evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar puts it, our brains expanded almost entirely to store social information. This "relationship stuff" allowed us to manufacture the "social glue" that would underpin co-habiting in sizeable bands; by developing social cohesion skills, we improved or maximized what we now call "organizational effectiveness" ... and became Kings and Queens of the jungle and beyond.

My point here is to suggest that anyone, as so many (esp. males) do, who dismisses or diminishes "relationship stuff" and "communication stuff"—and in particular "political stuff"—as "the soft stuff" is not only an ignorant damn fool, but also denying the essence of what it means to be human.

This document is #34 in a series of 48 highlights from Tom Peters' *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence* (HarperStudio, 2010). For more information, visit [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com).

