

Transcript - Dr Brennan Jacoby - Are you as curious as you'd like to be?

🕒 Fri, 04/05 16:11PM · 44mins

Ross G 00:07

Hello, you're listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast to help you build your leadership and management skills. I'm Ross Garner

Ross D 00:13

and I'm Ross Dickie. This week we're asking are you as curious as you'd like to be?

Ross G 00:18

What are the benefits of curiosity? And can we learn to be more curious? To answer these questions we're joined by Dr Brennan Jacobi, a philosopher and founder of Philosophy at Work, an organisation that helps businesses think their best.

Ross G 00:31

Brennan holds a BA, MA and PhD in philosophy and his doctoral work analyses trust in the context of interpersonal relationships and corporate character. How are you doing Brennan?

Brennan 00:40

Yeah very well thanks, it's great to be here.

Ross G 00:43

It's good to have you on the show. I wonder if you could get us started maybe with, I mean you're an academic so we'll define your terms, what is curiosity and why does it matter in the workplace?

Brennan 00:55

Yeah, great question. I think it's always really important to define our terms. And not just for sort of dry academic reasons, but I think we need to know what we're talking about.

Ross G 01:05

Ah, you're the one that said dry.

Brennan 01:06

Wow, yeah, okay. I'm layering on a bit there, but, you know, curiosity in particular, you know, it carries some connotations, you know, I don't know, in English we say curiosity killed the cat, that sounds a bit dark, curiosity, we might even say, oh, that's curious, which, you know, is that a good thing or not?

Brennan 01:26

I don't know. So, you know, if you go back into what it means, if we want to define the term, I would like to talk about the feeling of curiosity and sort of work our way back into a more of a definitional understanding there.

Brennan 01:41

So, when I think about curiosity, what I really mean by it, and this is borne out in the research around the value of it, particularly in work as well, which I suppose links back into one of the other things you mentioned, but curiosity is that feeling of sort of leaning into something, whether that's a physical leaning, sort of, gosh, what's going on here?

Brennan 01:59

Or just sort of a mental cognitive leaning in to go, hmm, I want to know more about that. So, you know, when someone says, I don't know, something that sparked your attention, right? So, gosh, well, you said academic was dry, Brennan, you know, that makes me go, oh, yeah, right, why did I say that?

Brennan 02:19

And that's sort of that leaning in. And I think that's really important because some of the reasons that we know curiosity is really important, particularly in the business context, as well as in life, is that it's in that leaning in, that interest, that engagement, really, is what does the work of curiosity.

Brennan 02:39

So, you know, there's been some interesting work done showing that there's a strong correlation between being curious and having less conflict, for example, because if, you know, say the three of us really disagree on something really important, you know, difference of values or something like that, on the face of it, we might just go, well, the other person is clearly wrong.

Brennan 03:00

But if I'm curious about why you think that thing, then I'm going to sort of lean in and go, okay, I'm going to withhold judgment for a moment and just tell me more about where this is coming from. So, it's that curiosity is that engagement, that desire to know more, the mental and physical leaning in, that does a lot of work.

Brennan 03:19

And I think, I hope that's enough of a definition to get us off the ground and not get too stuck in the weeds about, well, is it this or isn't that?

Ross D 03:28

Yeah, I think that is really helpful. How do you know if that sort of behaviour is happening in organisations? The way you've described it sounds like something that is great, but I'm curious how you know whether or not people in your organisation are genuinely curious.

Ross D 03:49

I don't want to sort of drag us out of academic methodology conversation, but how would you go about sort of trying to measure curiosity in your organisation?

Brennan 03:57

Yeah. So I think it's very hard to quantifiably measure curiosity, though I suppose we could try to do some sort of metric like counting the questions that are asked versus the answers that are asserted in a meeting or something like that.

Brennan 04:12

But I think that's a little bit misleading actually because I think you used a really key term there when you're talking about authentic curiosity. And it's possible to ask a question which is not really authentic, which is not really curious, right?

Brennan 04:28

So for example, if I asked you, you know, did you really think that was the right thing to do? Well, that's, you know, that's more of a judgmental sort of I'm implying that I think it was the wrong thing to do.

Brennan 04:41

And it's not really an authentic curiosity. So if we were just counting questions, you know, transcribed sentences that ended with question marks versus those that didn't that wouldn't really get us very far.

Brennan 04:51

I think instead what we're looking for is a withholding of judgment and instead favoring exploration. So what that might look like is, is people, you know, have in the midst of a meeting when the maybe there's some time pressure saying, everyone, I know that we're a bit pressed for time here.

Brennan 05:15

But I think there's a really important thing that we haven't really addressed, you know, those kinds of phrases or I know we said we chip this today, I think it's worth us circling back and just checking something here.

Brennan 05:28

Or can we, you know, what do we mean by this? Anytime we're asking, what do we mean by something? Does it have to be this way? Of course, those are all those are all questions, which signal curiosity.

Brennan 05:40

But I think they're sort of more true to authentic curiosity, because they're trying to get into what's really going on versus questions that are maybe about a person's identity like that judgmental one of, do you really think that was the right thing to do?

Brennan 05:54

I'm sort of, you know, making a dig, dig at the other person, right? I think that's, that's not a sign of authentic curiosity. So to circle back to what you're actually initially bringing up, how do we, how do we look for it?

Brennan 06:06

I think we're looking for people who are behaving in ways that are deviating from just the sort of plan, right, that it would make sense for us to talk about this point, and then the next point, and then the next point, and do this sort of normal lifecycle of a project or something.

Brennan 06:24

But when we see people going, Oh, hang on, we need to press pause and go over here. That looks like curiosity to me.

Ross G 06:31

I think the examples you gave there, I think, bring up some of the difficulties with being curious at work. So one example was, oh, we're going to ship this thing today, but maybe we should just look back and ask this question.

Ross G 06:45

Now, there is a pressure there to not look back and ask the question because you've got to get the thing shipped. And so, how do you work out if you want people to be curious, but not to the point of being difficult or conflicting with organisational objectives?

Ross G 07:00

Or do you? I don't know. What do you think? There's a tension.

Brennan 07:05

So, okay, so I, my background's in philosophy, right? Um, that puts me, it doesn't have to put me in someone, but I would say that-

Ross G 07:14

I'm a corporate shell which is why I'm on the side of shipping the product.

Brennan 07:17

I mean, I guess maybe it's the studying philosophy or maybe it was something about me that made me study philosophy. I'm not sure, but I'm someone that definitely, I would say, values questions over answers and recognises the importance of stopping to really interrogate things well and get things right rather than just getting them done on time.

Brennan 07:43

Now, at the same time, I've been with philosophy at work. I work with corporate clients and I'm well aware of the sort of reality of day-to-day business. And we do need things to get done on time and we do need answers.

Brennan 07:58

And I like to think that I appreciate both, but at the same time, I know I have a bias towards questions and interrogation in the most possible way, not the sort of like single light bulb in a dark room interrogation, but rather the curious understanding, critical thinking kind of interrogation.

Brennan 08:17

And so to what you said there at the last point, yes, I'm kind of a fan of curiosity that can be difficult sometimes. But at the same time, I take the point that there's a real need to balance that with getting on with the job.

Brennan 08:33

And there's definitely a lot of clients that I work with where we're doing sort of practical workshops on asking great questions, being curious as leaders. We'll deal with this all the time and say, do you know what?

Brennan 08:44

There's a time for a great question and there's a time when there's not. And the things that are, I don't think that there's a one stop shop sort of answer for saying, here's the time to ask a question.

Brennan 08:56

Here's the thing not doing. Here's the way to do it so that it doesn't, although I think we can say some things about how to do it so it doesn't create too much conflict. But I think it's very context sensitive and it boils down to, well, with this specific

example that we're talking about, the project we have to ship or whatever it might be, what's most important?

Brennan 09:14

Is it that we get it right? Or is it that, is it already been delayed? And is it already pretty good? Is it good enough? Then maybe in that case, it's fine to just ship. And if you're someone like myself, I need to have a degree of self-awareness to know, is this a question that really needs to be asked?

Brennan 09:31

Or is this something that I'm just really interested in? And so I think something that we're starting to highlight that we might talk a bit more about is curiosity itself isn't enough. I think curiosity lives in a family of skills that are all really important.

Brennan 09:48

And you have to balance your curiosity with that self-awareness, with relationship, work, or something like trust so that we can have the trust go ahead of our curiosity so that when we're asking difficult questions, we have enough of a relationship there that it doesn't break things down.

Brennan 10:04

And we have to have the self-awareness to know, is this the time or not? Those sorts of things. So I think you've touched on a really important point where curiosity has to be balanced with other strengths that are going to be really important for each of us to work out, is this the right time?

Brennan 10:20

Is this too contentious or not?

Ross D 10:24

Yeah, I think trust seems to me like something that would be key. So I think both on the part of the person that's asking questions, do they feel like they're going to, do they have this sort of psychological safety where they feel like they're, they have the license to ask questions and say, well, we've always done it this way, but why are we doing it this way?

Ross D 10:42

Or what if we did it this way? I heard about something like this other process we could follow that might actually be better for us. But then also on the other side of, you know, if someone's asking questions, how do you sort of make space for that, but then also sort of keep the eye on the product that needs to be shipped or whatever it is you're trying to do.

Brennan 11:08

Yeah, so I guess part of what we're looking at here is another side of that question around how do we make curiosity really work? You know, how do we benefit from curiosity while also having it not derail us, right?

Brennan 11:24

I mean, is that sort of what we're after? Yeah.

Ross D 11:29

Because I could keep asking lots of curious questions until everyone sort of blew in the face and then nothing ever really gets done. So I guess knowing when to stop being curious is a key thing.

Brennan 11:41

And maybe if we dip back into some of the benefits of curiosity, I think that, and also some of the challenges around it, it shows up, you know, and maybe we just need to populate the landscape a little bit more with detail to see, to see the way through it.

Brennan 11:52

So some of the reasons that curiosity is really good is that it helps with diversity of thought, right? So we know that it's one thing to hire diversely, but if everyone isn't feeling safe enough to ask their questions and share their views and draw those views out, that we're not really, I mean, there's lots of things that are not good about that, but particularly when it comes to innovation, we know that we're not benefiting from all the views in the room.

Brennan 12:19

And so curiosity is good for that because if we go into our work with curiosity, then we're more likely to say, well, this is what

I think, but what do other people think, right? So it helps draw that out.

Brennan 12:30

It's also good, as I mentioned, for sort of reducing conflict because before I just go, gosh, this person's clearly wrong. I'm going to jump in instead and say, well, tell me more about this. It's good for also innovation, as I've mentioned a couple of times, but specifically for the reason that if we're not curious, then we just go, oh, hey, this issue we've got or this product we're trying to develop, oh, it's just kind of like the ones we've done before.

Brennan 12:53

We know how to do that. Let's just roll out something that ends up being a bit cliché. But instead, if we're curious, we go, well, actually, what's this really about, right? Then we might notice a nuance that makes it different and spark something else.

Brennan 13:03

And we might go, actually, I was watching this show on the weekend that I think is relevant to this and we're making lots more connections. So these are all the things that are really good about it. When it comes to some of the sort of limiters of curiosity and going back to what you mentioned before, some of them are our time pressure.

Brennan 13:19

So it might just be too busy, something we've talked about a little bit already, but it might also be experience and expertise, right? So if we've got a lot of expertise around a specific thing, then it's easy for us to think, oh, I already know about this, right?

Brennan 13:32

So I'm not going to ask too many questions. And if we've got a lot of experience, we might go, oh, I've seen all this before, so I'm not going to exercise my curiosity. Never mind also, in addition to busyness and experience and expertise, like just fear of sort of asking a silly question, right, or asking a question that's too contentious.

Brennan 13:50

So if we bring all this into play and then we ask that question around, so how do we make curiosity really work? How do we know when it's not going to derail us and everything? I think my answer is unfortunately going to be really nuanced and context sensitive.

Brennan 14:08

What a philosopher. I hope it's me who wants to do it, but it's basically down to us saying, okay, well, let's look at where we are in the journey. Is it early in this project, in this relationship, in this situation, or are we at a place where, gosh, everything's actually already gone to print?

Brennan 14:33

And now if we're going to ask a question that would mean we'd have to change a graph on page three that's already at the printers, it's got to be a pretty important question, right? Because there's a lot more at stake there.

Brennan 14:46

If it's earlier on, then, gosh, that's the time to ask those questions and make sure that we really get it right. But also that shows that maybe at different life, different points in the life cycle, it's going to be really important for us to make space for curiosity explicitly, right?

Brennan 15:01

So if we're, I don't know, working on sort of a project with a number of different people, we're leading on the project, or even if we're not leading, it might be really important for us to say, hey, everyone, this is the first, you know, little period of this project.

Brennan 15:16

Can we make sure that we're really, really throwing the net wide here and asking lots of questions? I want to hear from all the people in the room and what's on your mind. Make sure that we've thought about some of that.

Brennan 15:25

But then also build some of that trust so that, gosh, even if it has gone to print, people still feel safe enough to ask those

questions and say, you know, I don't think we should maybe reprint it now.

Brennan 15:37

I know it's already on the print, but actually, I was reflecting, I think there's something else important for us to consider here. Maybe it'll be really important for next time. So I guess part of what I'm hearing myself articulate is the way that you frame the question, you know, the way that you land it.

Brennan 15:56

So instead of just going, this is important, here's a question, instead of instead to say, I know it's already gone to print. I'm not necessarily suggesting we redo it, but I think this is important for us to consider maybe for next time.

Brennan 16:09

I think there's a lot of ways in how we articulate that make the difference.

Ross G 16:13

Yeah. And I think if you're, think what you're describing is you want to have opportunity for the people to ask questions where, it might be a challenging question, so if you're not experienced, say that you're relatively new to the world of work or you're in a new job or something like that, and you think it's important to say something, you want to have the space to be able to vocalise that, and hopefully the ideal outcome is that the more experienced people there actually do have a good answer because it has been thought of, but they might not.

Ross G 16:46

And then you can have a kind of sort of go, no, go discussion almost on it. And one of the ways that you create that environment is if you're the more experienced, the more senior person in the room, you want to be asking these questions all the time as well.

Ross G 16:59

And so allowing yourself to be visibly challenged in front of your team so that you have the space where that's the expectation, it's the norm. It's not just like, oh, they've been here for ages, so I assume they know what they're doing because I have no idea and I'm definitely not going to question it.

Brennan 17:14

Yeah, definitely. And I think there's some interesting things going on there. I mean, for sure, we need to we need leaders to normalise curiosity, right? To say, Hey, everyone, this is what we do around here.

Brennan 17:25

You know, we're not just interested in you having the answers. Even if we feel like there's an obligation to know and you know, to get things right. Certainly, we need to get things right. We need to get things done on time.

Brennan 17:36

But that just means that we need to we need to plan accordingly so that there is space towards the star and throughout for us to to be curious and benefit because otherwise, I mean, if we put to one side for a moment, imagine an office or a business or a team that doesn't have curiosity, right?

Brennan 17:54

It's the kind of space where you've got to get it all right. You're not allowed to ask a question. There's there's little value in learning from mistakes. You know, it's that kind of just pressure cooker space.

Brennan 18:08

Yeah. And and I think particularly, you know, where we are at this point in time over the last couple years, I think no one no one wants that. And we recognise the down down says that. But then another thing, you know, there's there's a lot of I've been talking about relational dynamics, quite a lot and, you know, project life cycles and things like that.

Brennan 18:25

But actually, there's also just something about the state of the world, where there's more complexity, there's more uncertainty. And we know that questions are better suited. They're a better sort of tool when you're when you're trying to navigate that kind of a landscape.

Brennan 18:40

So for example, there was a piece of research that was done by an academic named Keith Grint. Keith G R I N T Grint. And it was when he was at Warwick University. Now he's at Oxford. But he and his team of researchers were looking at three different like the types of challenges that that that leaders and businesses face.

Brennan 18:59

And they said there were three types. There were these urgent problems, what he called tame problems. And then lastly, wicked problems. In a nutshell, urgent problems are really time sensitive ones. It's like, you know, the buildings on fire.

Brennan 19:11

That's what that's an urgent role. A tame one is not so time sensitive and something that we've kind of dealt with before. And we have a policy for, you know, maybe we need to hire someone that's a good tame problem, right?

Brennan 19:21

You just get the binder off the shelf or open the folder that says how to hire how to onboard and we just do it. Wicked problems are not necessarily just about urgency. And they're definitely not things we've experienced before.

Brennan 19:33

Instead, these are problems that are defined by the really characterised by complexity and uncertainty. And and so, you know, I think most of us would admit that the kinds of things that are on our mind these days, whether it's in work or out, are those kinds of challenges.

Brennan 19:50

You know, yes, we still have urgent and tame problems in our day to day, but there's the sort of big issues, the places where there's opportunities to be made as well. There's a lot of complexity. Now, the reason I mentioned this is that what Grint and his team found was that actually, when you're faced with those kinds of challenges, the complex, uncertain ones, the last thing you want to do is give an answer.

Brennan 20:10

Because we've never been here before. How could there just be a quick answer? Instead, the first thing you need to be asking questions. And through asking questions, then we sort of break things down and we go, oh, actually, we thought there was this one big issue, but it turns out there's sort of three, and one of them is a tame problem.

Brennan 20:26

We've got a policy we can sort that out with. Another one is an urgent one. We've got some answers we can deal with that. And then there's this other part that we need to keep interrogating, right? And so, through asking questions, you really sort of break things down, see the lay of the land, and you're able to start moving forward.

Brennan 20:41

It has a lot more integrity as well. I think some of the problems we see with leaders who are facing loads of complex issues, but stand up because they feel like they've got to lead and have an answer.

Brennan 20:52

And they just go, right, this is what we should do. And it just sort of falls flat because everyone goes, this is just too complex a thing for it to be that simple. So I guess I'm saying that there's a lot of another reason that we need curiosity right now is not just about the relational benefits and the kind of projects that I was talking about, but because of just the nature of life these days.

Brennan 21:18

And that suggests that it's really important to normalise it. It's really important for leaders to lead with questions and not just be seen as the people that should know.

Ross G 21:28

So when you were describing the kind of pressure cooker situation where you can't ask any question and you have to know the answer straight away, it sounded both like the workplace but also like Twitter.

Ross G 21:43

Twitter is a platform for discussing all sorts of wicked problems, racial equity, Covid vaccinations, trans rights, all these sorts

of things, where you better not ask the wrong question. Which is kind of weird in a way because you would think that because we have this access to so much information online, it's like the internet feels like the ideal space for curiosity.

Ross G 22:06

But one of the difficulties is you can get destroyed for asking the wrong question and also you can find whatever answer you want. So how do we know if we are actually curious or if we just think we're curious but actually we're just feeding ourselves the stuff that we want to consume by choosing where we go or who we speak to and these kind of things.

Brennan 22:31

Yeah, that's a really good point. I mean, I guess I would distinguish between, I'd sort of challenge the, the, the relationship there between saying, you know, are we actually curious, or are we just feeding ourselves with these things?

Brennan 22:44

I would, I would run on your frame, it's slightly different and say, we could be authentically curious, but then be feeding our curiosity in ways that are unhelpful, right? So, so maybe I'm...

Ross G 22:56

So you genuinely are curious, but that doesn't mean that you're finding the right answers or being open to anything that might come at you.

Brennan 23:03

Yeah, I'm genuinely, you know, and there might be some things there that are definitely in our control, there might be some things that are less in our control, right? So I could be authentically curious about, you know, you name it, any number of social challenges these days, and start Googling around to try to educate myself.

Brennan 23:23

But maybe algorithms direct me towards things that I've, you know, they think I should want to see, and so I get into an echo chamber anyway, even though I'm trying to find stuff that's not very echoey, right?

Brennan 23:38

Or it might be that I am, you know, I really do, I am curious, and I want to hear stuff that I think is right, right? So it could be that I'm authentically curious. There's a bit of a decision tree right here.

Brennan 23:49

So I'm authentically curious, and I seek out information which is not helpful because of my own bias, or maybe I'm authentically curious and I seek out information that's not awful because of the biases of the tech or whatever it might be.

Brennan 24:08

But there is something really important here to say around curiosity is continued, right? So if we only said that searching on Twitter or whatever starts with curiosity, and then the curiosity is done, it's sort of just like that initial burst that gets the space shuttle up into the, you know, out of the atmosphere.

Brennan 24:29

No, we need we need continued engines of curiosity that keep going because if my curiosity makes me do the Googling, but then I switch off my curiosity when I'm reading the answers, that's not very helpful.

Brennan 24:41

Yeah, sure. Being curious and I mean, so it makes me think of this quote from Rainer Maria Rilke, who was a Austrian poet in the 1800s. And he was a household name at the time. And there's this great book called Letters to a Young Poet, where a young a younger poet as that, you know, it's not a very creative title, because it is just just what is it does what it says on the bar.

Brennan 25:06

But this younger poet was writing letters to Rilke when Rilke was really successful. And the younger poet sort of saying, you know, I'm really wrestling with my poetry, I don't know what to do about this, what do you think I should do and all these other things.

Brennan 25:19

And in one of the letters, Rilke writes back and says, look, the point of life is to live everything, like just which might sound a bit, you know, like no brainer, but yeah, the philosophy. Yeah, the point of life is to live everything, which I guess I take him as saying is, you know, to actually go through it, actually experience it don't don't sort of be mindless.

Brennan 25:40

And he says, the point is to live everything. He said right now, maybe all you can do is live the questions. But by living the questions, at some point, you know, he goes on to say, you'll you might just live your way into the answers.

Brennan 25:55

And that's, you know, it's very poetic, it's very philosophical, it's kind of vague. But I think at the heart of that, there's something that really resonates here. And is is this idea of going, when there's complexity, when there's echo chambers, when there's like, tension, where it doesn't feel okay to ask the the wrong question on Twitter, or whatever it might be.

Brennan 26:17

And maybe we just need to sit with the curiosity. And we need to keep pursuing that we need to keep our curiosity switched on, and not just go, okay, I'm not going to ask, I'm not going to, I'm going to retreat into some sort of comfortable answers.

Brennan 26:30

Because, you know, curiosity, when we're facing a complexity is kind of all we've got at the start, right, we just have to sort of try to understand what's going on. And that requires curiosity. And then maybe at some point, we'll be able to live our way into the answers and go, Oh, yeah, actually, those important questions kind of brought up some some pretty good stuff.

Brennan 26:47

And we can probably stop questioning now, you know, at least in that line, keep the curiosity sort of switched on, since we don't want to, we don't want to sort of slip into assumptions. But okay, we can move on now.

Ross D 27:00

I think a sort of organisational analogue for what Ross was saying about Twitter or going to Google, you can have a genuine curiosity about something, but it's natural for us to go and speak to the people we speak to all the time, the people that we enjoy speaking to, the people that are friends at work.

Ross D 27:18

So we go and we ask them for their opinions, and then there's a risk that they just confirm because they're like us. They confirm the things that we already believe, and so it creates this echo chamber.

Ross D 27:28

So a sort of practical thing that someone could do is think about the people that you're often engaging with if you have an idea at work and try to extend that circle, speak to people in maybe different departments or in different teams, and try and just make sure you're gathering a diverse set of opinions rather than just those that are sort of closest to your own.

Brennan 27:49

Right. And that's why it's so important that curiosity is normalised and sort of built into ways of working, because it's just really normal, really natural for us to want to hear what sort of feels nice, right?

Brennan 28:03

And we, you know, we're friends with people for particular reasons, and we tend, it tends to be people that, that when you, you know, what was it? C .S. Lewis, the author who said a friend is someone who says me too, you know, and sort of somebody goes, oh yeah, you get that sense.

Brennan 28:16

Oh yeah, I've been there too, right? So, so there's going to be some overlap in how we think and what we care about and stuff. And, and that's, that's kind of okay in some ways, but it's, it's really not good when it comes to challenging our, our values and the way that we think and things.

Brennan 28:32

So yeah, we, but, but because it's very normal, we need therefore structures and leaders to nudge us towards, towards curiosity beyond those, those boundaries. So things like, you know, hey, everyone at the start of all of our meetings, we, we always ask this or that question, or, you know, we, whenever we're working on a project, we bake into the process this a

time for, for questions.

Brennan 29:00

And, you know, one, one really simple win there is to get everyone to write a question down on, say a post-it or whatever on the computer. And, and then go around and ask them, because if we just say, what questions do people have?

Brennan 29:12

Then again, there's probably going to be one person who's, who's a bit happier to speak up and they ask one question, everyone else goes, yes, that was a great question. That's us done. Whereas, you know, if we all have to come up with them, then, you know, we're all thinking for ourselves.

Brennan 29:24

We're all being curious for ourselves. And that's really what we need because the world that we're living in, no one person is going to have all the right questions. We need everyone to own their curiosity.

Brennan 29:35

And so, you know, more processes and practices like that will be really useful.

Ross G 29:42

I was laughing when you were giving the answer because, so Ross and I are on the same team and we used to at our team, we didn't have a question of the week, so we would take turns to in advance someone would write a question on Miro, Miro, I'm not sure how you say that, the on-board, online point board tool, and then people would kind of put a no answer then we would discuss it.

Ross G 30:01

And we ended up stopping because we were running out of time to talk about project work. So squeeze our curiosity in favour of the operational side of it. So maybe that's something we can revisit as a team.

Ross G 30:12

We are at time. So let's wrap up. Ross, what will you be taking from this conversation and applying in your life this week?

Ross D 30:21

I think I'll just generally be trying to be more mindful of my own biases and assumptions and the power that they have to sort of squash my own curiosity. If I'm being possibly more honest than I should be, I approach this podcast with a degree of scepticism.

Ross D 30:40

I thought, well, what is curiosity anyway? How do we really measure it? Can we really say it has a sort of strong, sort of empirical value in organisations? But I've been absolutely persuaded by everything that Brandon said today.

Ross D 30:54

And also, I think we approach this podcast with a sort of set of questions that were neatly structured out. And we veered off from those and just gone where our curiosity is taking us. I think the conversation has been more beneficial for that.

Ross D 31:06

So yeah, I think I'll just be trying to make opportunities and sort of be a bit more aware of things that might get in the way of my curiosity this week. Ross, what about you?

Ross G 31:19

Well, so, I mean, I'm a project manager. It's my job to get things done, basically, and get digital assets out the door. And so that's why I was bumping so strongly on the you should ask questions at any point in the project lifecycle.

Ross G 31:32

Although I likewise was convinced by Brennan's response that, okay, it's too late on this project to change anything, but that doesn't mean you should stop asking questions because there's another project coming next.

Ross G 31:42

You want to learn from what you're doing. So I think that balancing of curiosity with the operational pressures, I think, was something that really struck me. Well, just stay quiet because it's too late.

Ross G 31:55

There might still be some value in asking the question. Then, Brennan, I'd love to hear what one idea would you like listeners to take from this conversation?

Brennan 32:04

Great question. So I think I would love all of us to go and this is something that keeps resonating with me whenever I remember it, pops in my head, I go, ah, yes, I need to do that. Is I supposed to notice, you know, that quote from Rilke about living the questions now, the reason I think that really resonates, at least with me and a lot of times when I share with people, there's sort of, you know, aha, noises, those sorts of things.

Brennan 32:28

I think the reason it resonates is because when we live the questions, it takes courage and I'd love us all to just pay attention to the desire, the temptation to run away from curiosity and notice those moments.

Brennan 32:49

For example, when we have a question, when it would be like, I'm going to live the question, if living the questions means, you know, taking up a new hobby or asking something contentious in a polite way, you know, during a meeting or considering, you know, moving to a new area or something like that.

Brennan 33:08

If living the questions is risky, then there's going to be that moment of temptation to not do it. And I think it's really important to notice that and not necessarily just throw ourselves into the risk, but go, why does this feel risky to me?

Brennan 33:35

Our own fears, our own, you know, inhibitions and where that's coming from, that can really sort of free us up to actually really live the questions and gain a lot more in life in general. So I'd love us to go away with that idea of, you know, where am I sort of holding back my curiosity and why?

Ross G 33:55

Right, that's really good. I also, I don't know if it would've come through in the audio, I was making aha noises to the quote from earlier on, so we can put a link to that in the show notes as well.

Ross G 34:03

Cool. Now let's move on to our regular feature, One Thing I've Learned This Week, where we share something that we've picked up over the past seven days. Ross, do you want to go first? What have you learned?

Ross D 34:19

Absolutely. So I was having dinner with some friends recently, and one of them mentioned that it's not generally well understood where eels come from. I don't really remember how this came up in conversation, but my-

Ross G 34:33

In what sense? I'm curious.

Ross D 34:36

People do not understand how eels reproduce, or like where in the world they breed and that sort of thing. And so I was skeptical about this, but I followed my curiosity and did some digging, found an article in The New Yorker, but actually found a few different articles with slightly contrasting opinions.

Ross D 34:53

So take this with a pinch of salt. But it was long believed that to sort of on examining silver eels, they did not seem to have any reproductive organs. What it turns out was that there are four different types of eels that were sort of metamorphosed or transformed into different creatures that people thought were different.

Ross D 35:15

Whereas actually, it's just a sort of earlier iteration of what would become the silver eel. And by the time it reaches an older silver eel, it sort of stomach dissolves, internal organs dissolve, and it loses its reproductive organs.

Ross D 35:28

So that was one thing. The other thing was that European eels are believed to originate in this Sargasso Sea, which is in the Atlantic, because that's where the smallest larvae have been identified.

Ross D 35:43

However, scientists have gone to the Sargasso Sea, they have tracked these larvae, they have used listening equipment, and they have yet to observe eels reproducing in the wild, at least if this article is to be believed.

Ross D 36:00

So something I just found kind of, yeah, curious and slightly bewildering. We know so much about so much in science nowadays, but something that seems fairly elementary, which we don't really have a good understanding of, so make the world seem a little bit....

Ross G 36:16

What kind of restaurant were you in? I'm curious what the segue was into eel reproduction.

Ross D 36:22

Over eating a delicious eel soup. No, I don't actually know how this came up, although one of the other things that I said in the article was that eels used to be a sort of mainstay of the European diet for a long time.

Ross D 36:35

And they're actually like a lot of sea creatures becoming less and less common in the wild. So I think that's part of the reason for the decline in popularity. But no, I have no idea why we started talking about this.

Ross D 36:47

It's something that came up.

Ross G 36:49

Brennan and what have you learned this week?

Brennan 36:50

So I have I've learned about roasting coffee at home and so I first of all learned that you could even do this

Ross G 36:59

Oh No, You're in good company with Ross.

Ross D 37:04

I'm a fellow coffee nerd. I mean, not to the extent, but, uh, I'm intrigued for you. Good to see.

Brennan 37:08

You know, I just, I've, um, I love, I love my coffee and, um, last few months got a, you know, sort of proper espresso machine at home. And then, um, yeah, well, basically when I, when I went, actually this is, this is brilliant.

Brennan 37:23

So when I went to, um, I bought it used from someone and when I went to pick it up, the guy that sold it to me was just so, so into it, it was brilliant, so like infectious energy. And he was just like, can I show you the coffee roaster, um, where I roast my, my coffee as well.

Brennan 37:38

And you know, he made me an espresso that was really, really good. And so I was like, yeah, sure. So he talked me through that and I was like, I've got to see if I can get into this. But the machine he had was pretty, you know, big and proper and expensive and stuff.

Brennan 37:48

And so I was Googling around and things and I learned that, um, you know, basically roasting coffee is, why I listened to one podcast that said roasting coffee is really simple. It's just taking green coffee beans and turning them brown.

Brennan 38:03

Um, you can really over, you know, complicate it, but that's all it is. And so I did it in a frying pan. I got some beans from a, I live in Oxfordshire and I got some beans from a place in Oxford that was selling them fairly cheaply.

Brennan 38:17

And the first thing I learned is that that's a really long way, long way to do it because you've got to keep moving them the whole time and you lose a lot of heat and that means it's also actually quite an expensive way to go.

Brennan 38:31

But then I learned that you can roast coffee in a popcorn popper, like an air popcorn popper, in like five minutes and it's, it's great fun. And so yeah, so I, yeah, I mean, I, I've been, I don't know, I feel like I'm, your eel story is better because it feel like you've got some clear facts.

Brennan 38:49

Whereas I'm, I'm just saying I'm just been, I'm started on this learning journey of the first thing is that you can do it at home and then learning about what they call first crack, which is when, uh, get the coffee to that point where it's technically roasted and anything from a light roast to a sort of dark roast and stuff is between first and second crack.

Brennan 39:08

So I'm teaching my ears the difference of sound between first crack and second crack. Um, and yeah, it's a big learning journey, but I'm really enjoying it.

Ross D 39:16

Do you add, did you like the coffee that you roasted?

Brennan 39:18

Yeah. Do you know that that's the other thing? I assumed that it wouldn't be very good because it felt like too easy. You know, there's so many businesses, there's so many businesses doing really good coffee roasts, you know, so many roasteries that sell it pretty expensively that you'd think this shouldn't be possible.

Brennan 39:34

And actually, and I'm a big fan of, of really nice roasteries and I've, you know, I've spent some money on good coffee and you know, maybe there's a bit of a bias because I made it, you know, things taste better when you make them yourself, but I, yeah, it is, it is really good.

Brennan 39:50

And like people I've made for other, when I've made it for the people, like, you know, they really like it. The other fun thing is that you can only fit a little bit in the popcorn popper. So I'm only doing a batch of like a hundred grams, but three different beans and you can sort of each time you make it, especially you can blend different beans.

Brennan 40:06

You sort of go, Oh, do I like it with like this ratio of Brazilian to Peruvian? You know, it's, it's, I don't know, I'm enjoying the sort of experimental side to it. So maybe, you know, I'm sure I'm getting better quality when I still buy beans, but it's incredibly fresh, which makes whatever it is really good.

Brennan 40:23

And yeah, I'd say it's pretty good.

Ross G 40:26

No, the secret's out. The coffee isn't actually, the pre-roasted coffee is actually not as valuable as everybody thinks. That's like the, you know, in cinemas, they basically make all their money off popcorn.

Ross G 40:37

Like, the film is just a mechanism to get you into the room so then you can buy popcorn because the margin of popcorn is crazy.

Brennan 40:43

Yeah, they should be roasting coffee. There you go.

Ross D 40:47

Ross, what's one thing you've learned?

Ross G 40:49

So I was reading an article in the Guardian Lefty Man About Town That I Am. This was by David Robson, author of The Expectation Effect, How Your Mindset Can Transform Your Life. And he was writing about, why would you rethink our relationship with stress?

Ross G 41:07

So he gave a few caveats of things like if you are always stressed or struggling to cope, you're in a damaging relationship or have an unacceptable workload, then you probably want to do something about it.

Ross G 41:16

But if you're just occasionally stressed by things like having to give a presentation or having to perform on a test or whatever it might be, having to record this podcast, then you should think of stress almost like a performance-enhancing drug.

Ross G 41:28

And so instead of thinking, oh, I need to relax, I'm so stressed, you think, oh great, this is really going to help me perform with that thing that I have to do, and I'm going for better than I would do if I didn't feel this horrible way.

Ross G 41:40

So I really liked about it because I do get stressed about doing this podcast still. I've still before each episode feel anxious. And that's great. I hope that feeling never goes.

Brennan 41:53

That's really good. That's very nice

Ross G 41:55

Brennan, do you want to mention anything before we wrap up, like where people can find out more about you and the things that you do?

Brennan 42:03

Yeah, definitely. Thanks Ross. So people are interested in the value that philosophy can bring to the way that you do your work, the way that you lead your teams and things, then do check out [philosophyatwork .co .uk](http://philosophyatwork.co.uk).

Brennan 42:17

We've also got a pretty good resource page there with reports and blogs all about the nine skills, the thinking skills that we teach, things like curiosity, self-awareness, critical thinking, navigating change, trust and psychological safety.

Brennan 42:32

So there's lots there. The sort of work that we do all the time is training sessions virtual and in person in businesses, but have a look at resources there because we're always trying to come up with things that spark curiosity and are really honestly helpful to people.

Ross G 42:54

And that's it. You've been listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast with me, Ross Garner and Ross Dickey. Our guest this week was Dr. Brennan Jacoby. Until next time, bye for now.