

FLEXING YOUR LEADERSHIP APPROACH: BRINGING CURIOSITY

When can curiosity be a valuable part of your leadership repertoire? Whatever your leadership style, bringing a sense of curiosity can enable apparently fixed positions to be explored more openly, and allow new possibilities to emerge. Curiosity can be about the facts underlying an issue, or the sequence of events that led to a situation. Equally, it can be about understanding where others are coming from and exploring the scope for common ground.

Bringing curiosity might mean drawing on questions like:

- I wonder what might be the result if....?
- Could you tell me more about that?
- Help me understand why a particular view is being taken?
- Might we share what is going on in our heads on this issue?
- What would our customers think is most important?
- How might an entrepreneur see the potential opportunities here?

It can be helpful to summarise what you hear and play it back to the other person: they will often be prompted to add something which could prove to be a breakthrough.

If pausing to be curious does not come easily to you, you might think about:

- In which other areas of your life are you energised by being curious and how might that translate to your working life?
- Who could be a good partner to prompt thinking in new ways?
- When has your curiosity opened up fresh insights in the past?

Your default management style can influence the way you express your curiosity. Others may experience your questioning in unintended ways. It is worth reminding yourself that:

- A rapid series of questions to a junior team member may feel like an interrogation that stops them thinking straight
- A challenging question to a colleague in front of others may be received as an attack
- Some people may wonder whether you are asking questions to avoid making a decision.

A key element of curiosity is a desire to learn from what you hear – and for others to see you are open to changing your view. Body language and tone of voice are as important as the words you use. Sometimes you just need to be silent and give others time to think.

Our current series of Prompts explores how we might flex our leadership style. The introductory Prompt in this series was on Knowing your Default Leadership Approach.