

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 47 – Mike McGuire – Status Go

On Curiosity and Courage

And now a personal word,

Mike McGuire identified two core qualities that he seeks in employees: curiosity about the way things are and could be, and the courage to be decisive and effect positive change.

Be curious. Be courageous. Those are traits at the heart of a good life. There is a wonderful book by Brian Grazer, producer of *A Beautiful Mind*, *Apollo 13*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and many other movies. His book is entitled *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*. In a breezy, conversational way, Grazer wrote about how curiosity explains all his success: “Curiosity has been the most valuable quality, the most important resource, the central motivation of my life. I think curiosity should be as much part of the culture, our educational system, our workplaces, as concepts like ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation.’”

Grazer’s stated intent is to show how valuable and fun curiosity can be. His book is curious about curiosity. He defined curiosity as “wanting to know.” Curiosity starts out as an impulse, an urge, but is expressed in the world as something more active and urgent: as a question.

Grazer shared a great story about how after he graduated college, he went back to campus and asked his favorite professor for ten minutes to talk over coffee. That conversation lasted 1.5 hours. Grazer said the conversation had greater value for him than sitting in class for an entire semester. He decided to continue to reach out to people and have “curiosity conversations,” one-on-one discussions with extraordinary people—doctors, lawyers, scientists. Grazer asks questions about who they are, what motivates them, their challenges and accomplishments. He is interested in how they find meaning in life. He listens intently, one question leading to the next. Grazer has met a new person for conversation every two weeks for thirty-five years.

What are the benefits of being curious? Grazer devoted the entire book to responding to that question. Here are a few of his answers:

- It helps him make connections.

- It helps him identify original ideas.
- It helps him challenge authority.
- It helps him see the world through other people's eyes.
- It helps him be more intimate.
- It helps him be inspired.

Grazer's book makes this point: for curiosity to be effective, it must be harnessed to at least two other traits. The first trait is the ability to pay attention to answers. One has to absorb what one is curious about. The second trait is the willingness to act. Change disturbs the status quo. And that's where courage comes in.

There are so many definitions of courage. Aristotle took it on long ago, identifying courage as a central virtue, one of the principal virtues upon which all others turn. For him, a brave person takes fear into account and acts rationally in response to it. Courageous people act knowing fear and risk full well.

Brené Brown, popular author and research professor in social work, reminds us that the root word for courage is "cor," the Latin word for heart. For her, courage means "to speak one's mind by telling one's heart."

I'm partial to a definition of courage advanced by Jonathan Lear, professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, who wrote in his book *Radical Hope* that courage "is the capacity for living well with the risks that inevitably attend human existence." In plainer language, courage is a form of excellence. A courageous person not only gets the job done but also gets the job done well.

Mike McGuire wants his colleagues to ask questions and to solve problems. Curious and courageous people innovate. That gives his firm an edge. Curious and courageous people also create great places to work.

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