

Are Workplace Trends Making Your Job Better — Or Just Wasting Your Time?

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“Let’s limber up a little before the trade show.”

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Workplace trends come and go, promising to make your job better, increase engagement, and drive innovation. But do they actually deliver real change, or are they just corporate buzzwords that employees quickly learn to ignore because they see them as just wasting their time?

Employees hear a buzzword tossed around in meetings, managers champion it in company emails, and yet many workers roll their eyes. For some, it feels like just another HR-driven initiative that fades as quickly as it arrives. Others, especially experienced professionals, see it as a repackaged version of skills they already have—something companies use to feel progressive without making meaningful improvements.

I recently spoke with a seasoned sales recruiter who shared this skepticism. After 30 years in sales, she had seen countless workplace trends—from emotional intelligence training to “we’re all rowing the boat together” slogans. Because I am a curiosity expert, we debated that term. To her, curiosity sounded like another neat-sounding concept designed to get buy-in without

producing actual results. But is that what curiosity really is? Or has the way it's been introduced in workplaces created the wrong impression?



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Is Curiosity Just Another Business Trend in the Workplace?

For those who have spent decades in their industry, curiosity might sound unnecessary. After all, the best salespeople, engineers, and leaders might already ask the right questions. But research shows that most people aren't naturally wired this way.

Companies that encourage curiosity see measurable benefits. A Harvard Business Review study found that organizations with cultures of curiosity experience higher levels of creativity, collaboration, and fewer decision-making errors.

Lack of curiosity costs businesses billions. Gallup reports that disengaged employees cost companies \$8.8 trillion in lost productivity annually. One major factor? Employees don't feel they can ask questions or challenge ineffective processes.

The best workplaces encourage curiosity strategically. Studies have found that when curiosity is framed properly, it leads to better learning outcomes, higher engagement, and stronger innovation.

Curiosity isn't just about asking questions—it's about knowing which questions to ask, when to ask them, and how to ask them in a way that leads to action. This is where diplomatic curiosity comes in.



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How Do You Ask the Right Questions in the Workplace Without Frustrating Others?

It's no secret that endless questioning can slow progress. We've all been in meetings where someone asks the same question in five different ways or derails the discussion with a point that doesn't move the conversation forward. But the solution isn't to discourage curiosity—it's to refine it.

Curiosity works when:

It's tied to an objective. Instead of asking, "Why do we do it this way?" reframe it: "I noticed this process takes extra time. Have we explored other options?"

It considers the audience. Leaders don't want questions that feel like traps. Instead of asking, "Why is leadership ignoring this problem?" ask, "How does leadership see this issue, and what challenges do they face in addressing it?"

It's respectful of timing. Curiosity is valuable, but it's not always urgent. If a question doesn't need to be answered in the moment, find a better time.

This is why diplomatic curiosity matters. It's about striking the right balance, challenging ideas and exploring solutions without derailing progress or alienating leadership.



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Why Do Some Leaders Avoid Tough Questions in the Workplace?

Even when questions are framed well, some leaders still resist them. Why?

- They see questions as a challenge to their authority. If a leader is insecure in their role, they may feel threatened by employees questioning existing processes.
- They worry about efficiency. Some leaders associate curiosity with wasted time and endless debate.
- They've seen curiosity used in unproductive ways. If leaders have experienced employees asking off-track or irrelevant questions, they might assume all curiosity leads to unnecessary disruptions.

This doesn't mean curiosity is the problem—it means the way it's been introduced and applied in some workplaces has created resistance.



**“Ok, we’ve emptied the Suggestion Box,
and glued them all to the wall.
Should we actually read them?”**

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Why Do Some Mid-Level Managers Misuse These Concepts in the Workplace?

My sales recruiter friend made another sharp point: some mid-level managers (what she called Peter Principle managers) love concepts like curiosity and emotional intelligence—not because they believe in them, but because it gives them something to latch onto. Instead of leading by example or working alongside their teams, they hide behind corporate trends to justify their roles.

She’s not wrong. Companies should not introduce curiosity initiatives just for the sake of doing something new. Programs that lack purpose or execution frustrate employees and make them less likely to buy into future initiatives.

This is why curiosity alone isn’t enough. It has to be applied in a way that leads to real change.



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What's The Opportunity Cost of Avoiding Curiosity in the Workplace?

Leaders who dismiss curiosity as just another buzzword risk maintaining the status quo at the company's expense.

- **Lost Innovation:** Organizations that cling to outdated processes miss opportunities to evolve.
- **Lower Engagement:** Employees who don't feel heard are less likely to contribute ideas, leading to a disengaged workforce.
- **Missed Market Trends:** Companies that resist curiosity fail to adapt to changing industries, while their competitors move ahead.

A Deloitte study found that companies that encourage employees to ask thoughtful questions and explore new ideas outperform their competitors by 30% in revenue growth. In contrast, businesses that resist curiosity often struggle to retain top talent and adapt to industry changes.



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How Can Leaders Make Curiosity Work Without Making It Feel Like Hype in the Workplace?

If curiosity has felt like just another trendy corporate slogan in your workplace, here's how to make it real:

- Tie curiosity to measurable results. Don't just say, "We want a culture of curiosity." Instead, say, "We want employees to challenge outdated processes so we can save time and increase efficiency."
- Make curiosity practical, not theoretical. Instead of running curiosity training that only discusses why curiosity is important, integrate it into real discussions about company challenges.
- Create a safe space for questions—without letting them derail progress. Encourage people to ask thoughtful questions while setting expectations for when and how questions are addressed.



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Moving Beyond the Buzzwords in the Workplace

The seasoned sales recruiter I spoke with challenged whether “curiosity” should even be the word we use. She argued that if a concept is truly valuable, it shouldn’t need a catchy label. I understand her frustration—many companies throw around terms without delivering real change. But here’s the reality: naming something helps define and communicate it. Without a term to describe the ability to challenge the status quo and think beyond routine processes, how would we discuss it? Whether we call it a mindset shift, breaking free from status-quo thinking, or something else entirely, the key is how it’s applied—not just what it’s called. When approached strategically and diplomatically, curiosity drives progress instead of stagnation, fosters engagement rather than disengagement, and elevates performance beyond mediocrity.

Conclusion

This raises a larger question: Are workplace trends actually improving jobs, or are leaders just spinning their wheels? The answer depends on execution. When curiosity is treated as a box to check, employees dismiss it. But when leaders tie it to real business challenges, model it themselves, and encourage the right kind of questioning, it becomes the catalyst for better decision-making, innovation, and engagement. So, does your workplace use curiosity to drive meaningful results? The answer isn’t found in whether the word appears in corporate emails—it’s found in whether people are empowered to ask smart questions, challenge assumptions, and take action in ways that move the business forward.