

## Curiosity as a Path to Mutual Respect and Trust

Standing in curiosity is a foundational tool for creating mutual respect and accountability, and resolving conflicts. Here is a quick overview of this approach, and a brief introduction to some corollary tools that follow and support the curiosity approach.

- Mutual respect is grounded in curiosity – wanting to know/understand the other person, not assuming you know what is happening for them, or that a behavior means the same thing if they are doing it than it would if you were doing it.
- Remember that “I don’t understand” means you need more information, or a different perspective; start from there.
- Let go of judgment (of yourself and others) – focus on learning and on finding creative solutions, not figuring out who is right and who is wrong.
- Try asking “what” questions rather than “why” questions when you are noticing what appears to be disrespectful behavior. If you are uncertain what to ask, perhaps start with:
  - What were you intending?
  - What is hard about this for you?
  - What would make this easier/better? Or What would work better for you?
  - What had/has your attention?
  - What do you need?
  - What are you concerned about?
  - What are you thinking/what is your opinion/perception?
- Practice acknowledgement. Notice what happens when we start by acknowledging:
  - What is there (i.e. it’s hard to manage current responsibilities and work on new systems, we’ve had a lot of change in the last two years already, etc.)
  - What people are contributing/have contributed
  - What people are expressing (reflect back)
- Model transparency/reflective practices. Being willing to acknowledge our own uncertainty and mistakes, and responding to other people’s uncertainty and mistakes with curiosity and support is critical to creating an environment in which people will take risks, take leadership, and ask when they need help.
- Remember that experiencing respect generally makes people feel safer, more open, and more able to be curious and respectful.

## Story-Based Mutual Respect Exercise

This is a three-stage exercise followed by a discussion. The whole process usually takes 40-55 minutes, depending on the depth and breadth of the discussion.

1. In revolving pairs: I feel respected when.... (3 minutes)

In a revolving pairs exercise, everyone stands up and pairs off. After sharing their names if they don't know each other, each person in the pair completes the sentence offered.

Once both people have completed the sentence and acknowledged each other without discussion, they each turn and find another person to pair with to do the exercise again.

It does not matter whether people offer the same ending to the sentence each time, or let it change. Let people pair up 4-5 times.

2. In triads: (10-15 minutes with set up – 2-4 minutes per person)

One at a time, each person in the pairs or triads tells a brief story about a time when they felt respected and trusted. Let them know that it does not matter whether that experience happened at work, or recently; any story is fine.

As they are listening to the person telling the story, their partners list what made that person feel respected and trusted.

*Optional:* Partners reflect back their guesses about what made that person feel respected and trusted. These guesses should be offered without explanation, as simply as possible. The goal is simply to give the person who told the story an opportunity to hear, and think about, what sorts of behaviors signal respect to them. If you want to do this, add 1-2 minutes/person.

3. Back in the full group: (20-30 minutes)

The facilitator mines the stories and rotating pairs by asking the participants to offer, popcorn style, answers to the two questions:

- A. What makes us feel respected and trusted?
- B. What emerges when we feel respected and trusted?

You can also invite participants to list:

- C. What makes us feel disrespected/distrusted?
- D. What emerges when we do not feel respected and trusted?

Discuss what the group is seeing, what creating mutual respect and trust nurtures. Ask if that is what the group wants to be creating in their work relationships. Then go on to talk about how to nurture mutual respect and trust. (see above).