

# Resilience Tools for Tough Times

## Tool: Cultivate curiosity

During a recent ramble in Portland's Hoyt Arboretum with Linda (my wife and walking buddy), I experienced a surprising turn of events that filled me with a newfound appreciation for curiosity. My unspoken plan was the usual brisk march through the tree museum to hit my target heart rate. But Linda had a markedly different agenda — she was on a mission to track down the Dawn Redwoods we knew existed but had never seen. These aren't your average garden variety conifers. They're deciduous, shedding their needles in the fall and sprouting new ones each spring. This was April and she wanted to see the cute bright-green conifer needle babies.



Caught up in my hustle, I was marching ahead when she called out, "You know, we ARE in an arboretum," reminding me of her desire to find these rare trees (and reminding me that there's more to life than just counting steps). We tracked down the Dawn Redwoods (including the materfamilias of all those in this grove) surprised to see that they had their very own sign and learned about their long journey from China to Portland around the end of the Second World War.



I went from feeling frustratingly hobbled in my headlong pursuit of 140 beats-per-minute to feeling heart-stopping awe and amazement at this botanical wonder not ten minutes from our home. I was humbled by this everyday magic and admitted as much to Linda. What started as a task to check off my list had turned into an epiphany about the transformative healing powers of slowing down to cultivate curiosity for all the wonders of our everyday existence. Curiosity isn't just for cats, academics, and explorers. It's a potent human capacity we all can leverage to ease our anxiety and open up to some awe-some new perspectives and possibilities.

## What's the connection to resilience?

Curiosity is like the Swiss Army knife in our resilience toolbox, a powerful all-in-one mind tool for more gracefully finding our way through life's thickets and brambles. A curious mind is an open and ready mind, unencumbered by "how things are done around here." With curiosity, we are better able to drop our limited perspectives and self-absorbed agendas. As we turn our minds toward learning and exploration, we savor the present moment and interrupt our patterns of black-and-white thinking and anxious rumination. And with curiosity, we're more open to considering differing viewpoints, which in turn helps us to find more creative, comprehensive solutions while forging stronger connections.

## How to use this tool

Like most of our resilience tools, cultivating curiosity first requires that we pause in our mindless rush to "gitter done." When you catch yourself in a speedy, anxious pattern, take a slow deep breath (or two) and try on one or more of these tips for growing your own curiosity:

**Question everything:** Make like a toddler and ask "Why?" and "How?" It could be poking at the reasons behind a workflow at the office or diving deeply into a hobby you've always eyed from afar. This is especially handy when we're feeling stuck in a seemingly unsolvable conundrum. Get curious to think outside of your well-worn ruts and go-to fix-it strategies.

**Stretch your comfort zone:** Step outside your comfortable but limited views of things by opening up to new and different experiences, people, and ideas. Put your own well-worn views on pause as you purposefully ponder opposing views. Mix things up by meeting new people or trying something outside of your usual routine. It's like adding a splash of (bright green) color to a gray day.

**Look more deeply at the things that scare you:** When you get frightened and anxious, it's hard to see anything but limitations and threats. Curiosity is like WD40 for our brains, helping to unstick frozen perceptions and rusty perspectives. With curiosity, you can shift your automatic fear-based reacting to more measured, understanding-based responding; and in turn, you might just find new paths through passages once unseen.

## Your turn

Why not give your curiosity a little nudge today? It starts (like most things) with awareness; a simple pause in our mindless busyness to wonder and ponder. Each small discovery adds richness, color, texture, and insight to our everyday lives, connecting us to the endless treasures right outside our own back door.

And please share: In what ways have you allowed curiosity to show up in your life? How has curiosity helped you to be more resilient and resourceful? What additional challenges might you now tackle with a more curious mindset?