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C is for the Curious, Connected & Committed

Katie Mehnert explores what 'C' really means.



Katie Mehnert on a recent trip to San Jose, California, at the Facebook Headquarters doing her favorite thing, connecting.

I'm having fun with the alphabet the past few weeks. It started off with just writing one post on A. A is for authentic, I thought. Then I figured, why not go for B. After "B for Bossy" I had to give it a whirl. And then I thought about what got me onto these letters anyway.

It was my curiosity that drove me to continue.

Could I do this? Take each letter of the alphabet and write something meaningful? Could I connect and make a commitment to go for it?

Well, I have. And I might choose to take a break in between letters, but for now this alphabet soup for the soul is driving me to think creatively.

Wow, 122 words into this and I've already created three things that stand for C.

So there we have it. C is for the curious, connected and committed.

I've written about the success of curiosity before, but in this piece, I want to do something different. So I asked a few questions of my own social circle about the topic.

Here's what I learned:

'I know being curious is a sign that I am engaged. It's how I learn.'

'When I am curious, I ask tons of questions so that I might be able to mimic. I get excited when other people ask questions and when you can see the excitement in their faces.'

'Curiosity is one thing. Being a nosy shooting cow is different! I question a lot. Inquire. Ask questions related to fact. I can ask the same questions the nosy chick asked without seeming nosy. Instead of asking just "why", lean in just a bit and says "how interesting! What a neat idea! What results did it give you?" Just "why" can seem antagonistic.'

'When I see, hear, or learn about something unknown, I enter "capture" mode. First, I observe, think of what I

want to know, and move closer. I ask for more information if there is someone to ask, else I enter "discovery" mode. When I feel I have enough information, I analyze what I learned. As for part two, I love to be asked about anything – as you well know.'

So curiosity can create engagement, stimulate more curiosity or create antagonism. I've always been curious and it can run wild. It's like anything else though, it has to be moderated. Dial it up or dial it back. But in the end, showing a genuine appreciation for new information creates opportunity.

Curiosity is a tool to build connectivity. I brand myself as a super connector. If you'd ask me 17 years ago what that was, I wouldn't have known. What I did know then is I liked to ask questions, engage and interact. I liked to learn about people, things and the world around me. So my inquisitive nature coupled with my desire to meet people created opportunities for me to connect. I didn't know it then but it was the start to building a village of people around me.

And who knew that the Internet and social media would just accelerate my love for what I was already doing in connecting with people and developing real relationships.

If you've read my blog before you know I write a lot about connecting. It's actually one of those things I just do. I like to connect people and ideas to

other people and ideas. Information is no good if it's not synthesized and integrated with people who can make great stuff happen. People had no idea what to think about me. "There's that Katie out there all over the place. What is she doing? Why does she care so much about connecting the dots?"

So I stumbled on connectivity. But it started with curiosity.

But curiosity and connectivity are nothing without commitment.

What does that mean? Well you can ask good questions, connect and meet new people, but then what? You have to act. It doesn't mean you have to act immediately but it does mean you need to make a commitment to do something with your newfound knowledge. Most of the time when I meet people, the first thing I do is to think about how I can connect my new friend with other connections or ideas. I always found it a compliment to help someone if I could. When you first start connecting with people, it's not as easy but the more curiosity, connection and commitment you put into it, you become an invaluable resource to others.

When you commit, it builds trust and value. In a world so full of disappointment, it really is everything.

So how do you put the C's into action?

• **Curiosity** – If you've read this far, congratulations. I've managed to keep you from getting distracted. You're

showing naturally curiosity already. Flex your brain more and think about ways you can show your affinity to learn new things. Make a list of questions. Shift your conversations from "tell" to "learn"? *Power Questions* is an excellent book. What other ways have worked for you?

• **Connect** – Connecting is about putting that curiosity in action. If you can get some good questions framed, the next part can be tricky, especially for those of you who have a hard time speaking up or reaching out to people. Start small and stay small. Connecting is NOT about being in a room with numbers. In fact, I'd argue it's the opposite. It's all about quality. It's about one to one engagement and creating a unique spark. Those are the moments we remember. Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Gain Influence* is another one of my favorite resources.

• **Commitment** – Begin with the end in mind. Before you show curiosity and connect, what do you want this to yield? What's in it for you and what's in it for them? Sometimes I know what the commitment might look like and at other times I may not. It's always good though to walk into any conversation with what "good looks like" for both sides. And like I said, you don't have to have that answer. It's just good to think about the next steps and get your mind to practice curiosity.

When I was feverishly writing about today's letter, something really awesome

happened. I had posted a few times on a thread on Facebook about gratitude. A stranger reached out to connect. Aside from spam and the other crazy requests I've received before, if someone shows the curiosity to connect with me, I show the courtesy of the same. (This hasn't always worked out – another piece, another day.) My new curious friend and I spent at least 30 minutes private messaging about all the things we had in common. Lisa works in behavioral workplace safety but does public speaking, is a fitness nut and loves to help people. **We were a match!**

How's that for curious, connected and committed?

What are you doing to show your curiosity? How are you using that to connect with others and to other ideas? What are you committing to do as a result?

Katie Mehnert (pictured) is a global talent development and change executive with 17 years of helping people and companies get curious, connect, share, grow and perform better. She has recently been appointed CEO of Pink Petro; www.pinkpetro.com, a platform to connect women and men in the energy industry and advance females in her industry. Prior to her latest venture, Katie was a Director with BP, joining after the Deepwater Horizon incident and worked in various leadership roles worldwide with Shell. She's a dynamic speaker and author having been featured in LinkedIn, CEO.com, Business Insider, and Yahoo. As a work-in-progress marathon runner, wife and working mom, you can follow her musings on balancing it all on her blog at www.katiemehnert.com, or email her at katie@katiemehnert.com