



APR/MAY 2026

RSA GROUP REFLECTIONS



Dear friends,

Humans treat curiosity with suspicion. There is danger in wanting to know too much, we believe. One saying around this – Be not so open minded that your brains fall out – is so popular it's been attributed to multiple personalities over the years, from scientist philosopher Carl Sagan to writer GK Chesterton to science engineer James Oberg. And then, of course, there's the classic: curiosity killed the cat.

It's a fascinating fact that back in the 16th century the original phrase was actually: 'care killed the cat.' Back then, the word care referred to fretting, anxiety, and worry, rather than today's primary meaning of looking after someone, or something. Care killed the cat suggested that if cats, known to have nine lives, could be fatally damaged by too much worry, humans were surely at risk too. In the second half of the 19th century a newspaper in Ireland used the curiosity killed the cat line, and over the following three or four decades both phrases were in use in popular culture. In 1916 the Washington Post ran a pure 'curiosity killed the cat' headline, and this seemed to mark the final victory of this phrase over its predecessor, pivoting the meaning of the saying to be both a comment on cats' well recognised

inquisitiveness and a warning to humans who just want to know too much.

I'm able to tell you this story not because of my passion for linguistic history but thanks to the power of AI. It took me all of five minutes to trace the history of the phrase, following a fun chat with a colleague about the idea.

I raise the point because we are in a fascinating period of human history where, I believe, we may need to seriously revisit our aversion to curiosity. We now have many tools – such as AI – at our disposal that put what seems like all of the world's information and knowledge at our fingertips. And yet, we live in a digital world dominated by self-reinforcing echo chambers of ideas. Much of the time, we use our new information powers not to explore and expand our understanding, but to affirm pre-existing beliefs. One of the hallmarks of our current intellectual age is the extreme difficulty we have recognising that several seemingly opposing ideas can have a degree of truth all at the same time. It's as if we've evolved into a state where only certainty will do, and where ambiguity makes us anxious and stressed out.

So, in a world swamped in instant information and answers to



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everything, increasingly our challenges aren't how to access 'correct' information, but how to ask the right questions. If you don't know what you're looking for, and why you need to find it, no amount of knowledge or fact power will help you. And to get to the right questions, curiosity isn't a risk – it's a vital force.

Even though human history treats curiosity with suspicion, if you look around (with an open mind!) you see that it is in fact a major feature of much of our lives. For example: in the fresh produce industry one often hears the phrase 'But this is how we've always done it!' However, in the South African fresh produce industry specifically, there's a fascinating paradox at play between 'this is how we've always done it' and the immense levels of sociopolitical change we've experienced in South Africa since RSA Group was founded over 40 years ago.

On the one hand, our industry has achieved as much as it has thanks to our deeply rooted traditions, relationships with farmers and ways of doing things. But we've also driven incredible successes through flexibility, a willingness to embrace ongoing change, and ability to keep on asking important questions, especially in tumultuous, confusing times.

Many of us, myself included, are struggling to comprehend the speed and depth of the changes the world is kicking up right now. We often discuss these challenges with a sense of desperation for answers. But, if we think about it carefully, it's clear that definitive answers won't help us nearly as much as knowing which questions to ask, and when. And to get this right, day after day, we will all need to work increasingly hard at understanding, and steadily developing, our curiosity.

With all this mind, my question to you is this: what is your curiosity protocol? How do you develop your curiosity muscle? And, are you placing as much emphasis in your life on asking the right questions as getting clear answers?

Now there's something to think – and be curious – about.

Best wishes
Jaco Oosthuizen

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