

Curiosity is one of our best qualities

by MARK PAVILONS

"No one is dumb who is curious. The people who don't ask questions remain clueless throughout their lives." ? Neil deGrasse Tyson

Our lives are filled with questions yet ultimately, few answers.

Sure, we make it through our lives the hard way ? by making mistakes and discovering the answers ourselves. Few are given to us in advance.

There are seldom any shortcuts, cheats or hacks along the way. And writing notes on your arm won't do in this test of life.

I heard recently that our children ask roughly a dozen questions per day, or a little over 4,000 per year. Parents, by all accounts, know the answers to roughly 40%, or 1,600 of them. Whew! And what of the remainder? I imagine they leave us scratching our heads, or picking up our phones to Google the information.

Queries from youngsters are the most genuine and innocent of all. The inquiries coming from youngsters ??n the few times I spoke in classrooms ? made me smile with hope in the human race.

John Locke noted that "there is frequently more to be learned from the unexpected questions of a child than the discourses of men."

My advice to the youngins ??eep ?em coming!

My son is addicted to asking questions. Some are rhetorical, others pointed, and some genuine.

Most have a hint of sarcasm or criticism.

Many centre around the government's role and control over our lives. Others are critical of taxes, bank loans, trying to start a new business from scratch, and the various hurdles involved.

Recently, I told him my silence and shoulder shrugging was due to the fact I agreed with his assumptions, having lived all of these things first-hand. Alas, I have no answers. And I lack the business acumen and financial backing to help solve his dilemma.

Yes, I am the household devil's advocate, and while I often shoot down such dreams, I only mean to shed some practical light on the situation. Yes, I tend to offer explanations, not solutions or positive reinforcement. I wish I had better news.

Is that based on my own experiences, skepticism or years in the journalism business??I don't know.

Some of it may have to do with my own upbringing.

My parents were both post-war European immigrants, who basically came here and started from scratch. They had basic education, a strong work ethic and a lot of common sense. The war gave them a keen survival instinct.

In my youth, I learned by watching and not so much by asking questions. We had an old set of Encyclopedia Britannica that I visited on occasion.

I did have a bit of a voracious appetite for knowledge and so I excelled in school and made frequent trips to the library to check out books on things like medieval history, astronomy and more.

In my line of work, I consume tons of knowledge on a daily and weekly basis, on all sorts of subject matter. In my thousands of encounters and interviews with people, I've learned a bit about everything from neuroscience and metallurgy to the art of oil painting and even circumnavigating the globe!

That's the amazing part of my profession, gleaned something from every person I meet. I am richer for each and every conversation, interview, email and article I write.

Early on in my career, there were a few subjects we avoided abortion, religion and sexuality. All three will end up in heated debates and arguments on all sides. Often, there is little safe, common ground on these matters.

But I love engaging in such exchanges nevertheless.

I find each of these subjects fascinating as well as controversial. I have also learned that ignorance tends to be at the root of false information and assumptions.

A word of advice from an old guy never assume anything and always give others the benefit of the doubt.

And so, I love to learn new things and new perspectives. I will admit it when I don't know something or have little or no experience in a certain subject.

But that shouldn't stop me or any of us from getting better informed, more aware. That's how we break down barriers and open things up for genuine discourse and an exchange of viewpoints.

In newspapers, the most read things are editorials, columns and letters to the editor. That's what sparks an honest dialogue and yes, sometimes heated debate.

But that's the beauty of presenting ideas, views and standpoints in a public forum. It's what makes us think.

Mary Pilon once said that journalism isn't about what you know or how clever your questions are. It's about your ability to embrace change and uncertainty.

And through our evolution and woke periods, shouldn't we all embrace change and uncertainty?

I've always loved assignments in school, or open exchanges where there were no wrong answers. It allowed us to be free and express anything we wanted. That's a beautiful thing.

A certain high school English teacher of mine never shot down a student for a wrong or off-base answer. He always encouraged them to speak out, think and at least try.

Maybe we all need to try a bit harder to understand one another.

In these conflict-ridden times, the need for deliberation is far more important than contention.

Take it from this old dog, you can teach everyone some new tricks.

Who wants in?