Cultivating a Culture of Curiosity

**Brian:** Welcome to the One Advantage Podcast, exploring the intersections of pure power, culture, and agility. Your hosts, Jason Richman, Mike Richardson, and Leo Batari, co founders of the One Advantage Community of Practice and Advantage peer Groups. For more information, please visit us at idealoutcomesinc. com.

**Mike:** All right, everybody, welcome back to another episode of the One Advantage Podcast. You can see, those of you watching the video already, that Leo Is not with us here today, but we do have the best of the best. We've got Jason Richmond and myself, Mike Richardson. Oops. We better not tell Leo that I just said that Jason, but I guess this thing is being recorded, so I'm in hot water now.

We've got a great one today. Cultivating a culture of curiosity. I'm going to be very curious, Jason, how you begin to think about curiosity. We'll come to that in a moment. But first and foremost, Jason, you've been all over the place. Once again, I just don't know how you do it. Tell us where you've been.

**Jason:** This week I'm still am in the fantastic city of Chicago. We've been working the last couple days with a technology company who's been going through some mergers and acquisitions, Mike, and you talk about curiosity, we just spent a day working with leaders from both organizations coming in, not knowing this group, not knowing anything about the direction that we're going to be taking.

Everyone in the room. was curious about the new world, right? The new group, how we come together, how we bring it together. And it was a great step one of a culture engagement, but it, we spent a whole day together being curious. It was fantastic.

**Mike:** Yeah. I love that. And we'll get into that more in a moment.

And I've been pretty much here. I've been having zoom calls all over the world. Of course. But next week, I think, as already, I get to go to the annual convention of REF, formerly Renaissance Executive Forums, a global peer forum organization in Cancun, Mexico, all the partners from all over the world coming into town for three days.

It's going to be a great opportunity to do exactly what you've just been saying, be very curious about. Where are we at? Where are we going? What's next? How do we get there? How do we tap into Collective intelligence, which is our mantra to an all next level. Wow, exciting times and I can't believe But here we are already almost at the end of September.

Don't blink. It'll be Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas Before you know it.

Cultivating a culture of curiosity, everybody. Curiosity can change the world. Goodness me, how many times have we seen that? When we create a workplace culture that encourages our employees to be curious and challenge the status quo, it has a profound impact on innovation, problem solving and personal growth. Often corporate policies, procedures, and practices, while developed with good intentions, hinder our employees natural inquisitiveness.

We're going to discuss ways to break through the barriers that block out of the box thinking. Experience transformation when your employees are empowered to ask what If, so, Jason, I'm curious, how do you think about this whole topic of cultivating a culture of curiosity?

**Jason:** I want to tell you a story, Mike, because I love stories but very early on in my sales and my sales leadership career, this goes back. And I had a coach. His name was Bob Pank a mentor and I'll never forget it. We were in Kansas city, Missouri, and we were driving back from a client meeting and I said, Bob, I said, you've been doing this a long time.

I says what's the difference? What makes the difference in, high performing sales professionals, high performing sales leaders. And, average or mediocre performing people. And it took him no time and he looked me dead in the eyes. And he says, Jason, it's the insatiable appetite of curiosity.

**Mike:** Beautiful.

**Jason:** He says, that is your number one key differentiator. In leading people, in influencing people and guiding people, taking interest in them over your own and having an appetite that just cannot be satisfied of curiosity. And I've taken that, I've taken that, made that my own, embedded that into my core personality for my whole career.

And he's right. To have an appetite that just cannot be cured of curiosity can really differentiate yourself in any role in any organization. And that, that the core is what I truly believe.

**Mike:** Yeah, I love that. I really do. And what I really love about the concept of curiosity and how it invites you to open up a conversation with a simple phrase of I'm curious about, or I'm just curious, and then you name the topic area.

I'm curious about your department. I'm curious about that product. I'm curious about that technology. Could you tell me more is that is a great way to open up. How many times do we want to open up a conversation and we either default to needing to state an opinion about something, which if we're not careful is going to get us into the, into an argument or.

We're trying to come up with a great question that will open that door more safely, and we're just struggling, and it's, the question is too loaded, it's too presumptive, and how cool is it just to go to the other side of the equation and say, Hey, I'm curious about that technology, that product, your department.

Could you tell me more? This is one of the safest ways to open the door to an evolving conversation from there. What would you add, Jason?

**Jason:** I I titled that type of question a power question. And it is a power question because the person you're talking to now has an opportunity to share their knowledge, their expertise the barriers drop down they tell you more than what they would ever tell you.

And it's a very open ended and it really gives them an opportunity, the other person, the opportunity to really shine and share their expertise and share their knowledge and their pride in what they are empowered to do and what they do for a living. So I think a question, especially in an opening situation from a sales or any leadership role is, I'm curious to find out more.

You are asking somebody to educate you and how does that, how can that not make someone feel good when you ask them to be educated?

**Mike:** Yeah, and I love what you've said a couple of times there, you've just touched upon, and in particular in sales situations, where you're stood now or sat perhaps in front of a client where you're looking for a next piece of business or a prospect where you're looking for a first piece of business.

And we all know, don't we, everybody, rule number one of selling is do not sell, because the moment you start selling. You're losing, right?

**Jason:** Yeah, correct.

**Mike:** But as soon as you can get the prospect, the client talking, you're winning and what a beautiful way to get them talking about, Oh, I'm curious about where are you with your business and where are you trying to go?

20 minutes later, they're still talking and you're learning and learning about their. They're their hopes, their dreams their blind spots, their hot spots, all of which is serving it up to you on a silver salver, isn't it? That you can then work with as you progress from there.

**Jason:** And that's one of the, that's one takeaways that I've got in regards to curiosities that stimulates learning and.

So many people view curiosity as asking questions and I've got several stories I might sprinkle in through this podcast today. But curiosity comes in so many different ways. An avid reader, they're reading because they're curious, right? It's not just asking questions. It's conducting experiences experiments.

It's trying things new. It's tackling a problem in a different way. It's a lot of reading. Just this week, I was speaking to a colleague. About thought leadership and all the thought leadership out there in the world and all the subject matter expertise and all the blogs and all the newsletters and all the research papers and everything done.

And we got talking about, the really impactful thought leaders in our world, in the business environment now, and it came to us very clearly, you're not going to be a very effective thought leader. A writer, if you will, if you're not reading and exploring and experimenting, right?

In order to be a thought leader, you have to read and explore and ask a lot more than you do write. And if you're not, I'm going to, I'm going to question the value of that thought leadership that you're putting out there.

**Mike:** Yeah. Yeah. It's a great point. And as I serve on a number of advisory boards and those kinds of things, and the CEO of the advisory board center posted a blog recently and she was talking about the danger of expertise in such a fast moving world, everybody.

What you, what was thought leadership? Yesterday can easily be thought lagger ship, today or next week or next quarter, right? And so you have to be so careful that your expertise hasn't become old school. More quickly and comprehensively perhaps than you realized. And she was really talking about the idea that in many ways advisors these days have to be experts at being non experts.

And so I wrote a quick blog about being an expert non expert, right? Which is I'm re I'm really a generalist. I'm not a specialist. I don't try to have specialist knowledge. In deep vertical domains of expertise. Yes. I came out of the oil and gas business and then the aerospace business, but that's 20, 30, 40 years ago.

And since then I've been like you working across such a diversity of businesses and industries. And so it, I work very hard on being an ever curious, expert at being a non expert, which is, I don't know your industry. I don't know your business. Tell me how it works. Tell me where it's going. Where has it come from?

What keeps you awake at night? What do you worry about with the future? What could disrupt you that you take for granted today? Probably bigger, faster, sooner than you think. If you just come with that hunger as almost, what do we call that? A beginner's mind, right? If you come with that sort of beginner's mind of an, I'm just an empty vessel, fill me up with knowledge, then curiosity is just a wildfire.

And I love it.

**Jason:** Yeah 20, 20 years ago, I I took a job, I took a career step and I started managing this global sales team. And I reported to the CFO. His name was Chris. And this was over 20 years ago. Chris now sits on the Board of Directors of Ideal Outcomes. And he's still currently my CFO.

And if you asked him, he'll still when we're in groups of people. He'll still tell the stories of when I first started working with him about the text message or the voicemails. And every time I call, he got sick of me saying why do we do it that way? Why can't we do this? What, why can't we look at things this way?

And we really laugh at it a lot now because it was so embedded into me that, that he knew every time we were going to have a conversation. There was going to be a why not? Why can't we, why, type of situation. And he'll tell you today that, the CFO mind. It's cut and dry, but, that relationship and that element of curiosity, has really helped him even grow into being more creative, looking at different ways to solve problems, being more adaptable.

And it really, it's really a foundation or a foster of our, Business and personal relationship all can be stemmed to that, that early on days of something that was frustrating to something now that is wow, that was, but we still laugh about it.

It was always why not?

**Mike:** I love that. And several things pop for me there, but I think the one I'll go to is it's so great that you mentioned your CFO and how, if you're not careful, CFOs can be cut and dried black and white. But of course, as you've indicated and is increasingly the case, you can't have that if you're CFO anymore, everybody, because the world is moving too far, too fast.

They in many cases need to be the number one co pilot of the business. They certainly have to be the the quarterback of your return on investment business case analysis, deciding what to invest in. And of course, not least of all, with regard to. Artificial intelligence that all businesses will be investing in wisely or not so wisely if they're not careful.

And your CFO is going to have to be front and center with all of that. And as one of the, one of the things that we've done with ref Peer. Forums is we've led the charge in putting out Peer. Forums specifically for CFOs and senior financial executives. Because we recognize that they are a pillar of strength that is underserved, with leadership development opportunities to fuel their curiosity. And there's no better place to fuel curiosity than to be in a peer forum where the number one approach that peers would take as they lean towards each other in a peer forum is, a couple of months ago, I heard you mention this and.

Last month I heard you mention that and now this month I've heard you mention that when I join those dots up I think I see some kind of pattern. I'm just curious What's that about? and then you just open the door to a whole, new chapter of conversation And perhaps insight with that member.

So I love the fact that you mentioned CFOs in particular.

**Jason:** Our business is built on relationships, Mike, your businesses, my businesses, Leo's business. I think any business and the businesses we're working on is built on relationships. And I just talked about this In this culture merger project that I'm doing here in Chicago.

And I put this out there and we had a long conversation about this just yesterday how curiosity really is a foothold or a pillar of relationships. It can really enhance our communication ability. If we truly have a high sense of curiosity we actively listen a lot more than just listen to respond or to ignore we're really showing a genuine interest in others.

If we're truly, curious and that alone, I call curiosity a pillar of relationships. I think it's a foundational piece to a solid relationship from a professional or a personal standpoint.

**Mike:** It's almost a master. It's almost a master competency, isn't it? Behind, behind human relations skills, the Dale Carnegie principles, those kinds of things, right?

**Jason:** Exactly.

Yeah, exactly. And, it impacts, think about it. How would we have innovation if people didn't ask why or go out and experiment with new things or try new things? Obviously it drives innovation, but I also think it really impacts how we make decisions. We've talked a lot about collective intelligence on this podcast, right?

AI, all these things, right? Curiosity is a driver behind all that. If we're not curious to get. A lot of different viewpoints or point of views on certain topics. We have a high probability of possibly making the wrong decision and maybe a negatively impactful decision.

**Mike:** Yeah, and innovation everybody is one of those topics, it's one of those words that we throw around a lot and it's really, yeah, it's really, relatively speaking it's very easy to talk about innovation.

It's very hard to do because innovation is like balancing on a pinhead, isn't it? You've got to have all the creativity that you need to be innovative, but you also need productivity out of innovation. Otherwise you do a lot of talking, a lot of ideating, a lot of brainstorming, you fill a lot of whiteboards and flip charts and all this kind of stuff, but you never really, produce anything that can go commercial and get merchandised and, and support the P& L or the balance sheet going forward. So it's a really hard thing to do to balance on the pinhead of creativity and productivity that you need for innovation. And in many ways, you've got to be curious about.

How do you find that right balance? What does it take to truly innovate on a sustainable basis? And how are we going to facilitate that amongst our team? A lot of questions to be very curious about to really crack the code of how to truly innovate. What would you add to that, Jason?

**Jason:** I'd say, sometimes innovation is misunderstood that it's got to be some big new idea or new concept or new product or new process. And. And innovation, more often than not is more about continuous improvement, right?

And challenging our status quo, challenging the way we've always done things. We're not gonna, we're not gonna throw it out or start over or come out with a brand new methodology or a new product, right?

But that innovation piece, by being curious, we're making constant, continuous improvement. And that goes, and that, that could be anything. A product, it could be a process, it could be a procedure, it could be a methodology. It could be just continuous learning in our own educational level, right?

**Mike:** It could be content. It could be the way that we position something, articulate something. It could be some innovative new phraseology that we find to the narrative of our differentiation that now becomes, the headline on our website. I think what Jason said, everybody is it can be, innovation can be from the smallest thing to the biggest thing.

And I love what you said about, continuous improvement. I like to frame innovation up as three levels, right? There's the sort of 1. 0 level of continuous improvement of our existing business model. How do we evolve it to 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 to keep our existing business model and products and processes and places and people on life support as it were.

Cause right now it's all that we have. That's all that is paying the bills. That's all that we have that is keeping the lights on. And, of course, above and beyond that, we've got to do sustaining innovation, right? 2. 0. How do we extend the life of our products? How do we sustain the relevancy of our offerings?

How do we sustain the productivity of our processes? Even though we know that there's a next wave of technology, coming down the path like artificial intelligence, for instance. And then 3. 0, if that's sustaining innovation, 3. 0 is disruptive innovation. And how are we going to self disrupt us before the world does for us, right?

How many people are going to get caught behind the curve with artificial intelligence? And, after the fact, begrudgingly. Realize they have no choice because the world disrupted them. They started to lose business to their competitors versus being ahead of the curve, being out in front, being curious enough to be driving that conversation proactively and preemptively.

How, in what ways could we, what if we could, how can we. Find ways to leverage artificial intelligence ahead of the curve to out compete, out innovate our competition before they out innovate us. What else would you add? Jason?

**Jason:** Yeah, I think you hit the nail on the head, Mike. I'm I love improv, right?

And we've talked about this and I just think improv is fun and it's so creative and it's a form of innovation in it, in itself. And I'm a big fan of Second City here in Chicago, and they wrote a book yes. And right. And I have all my people all my people in my team and my company and everything have all read that book, Yes and it's all about challenging the status quo. How often in leadership, in our careers, in management, in sales or operations, have we said no, no, we don't do that. No, but, or yes, but, yes, but we, change, you're not going that way. It's it it's really improv and this type of methodology is all about curiosity and innovation and saying, yes, and let's figure that out.

**Mike:** Exactly. Love that.

**Jason:** And that power of innovation and the relationship it has to curiosity, innovation personal growth. Stretching us out of our comfort zone, continuous learning.

I think it all goes hand in hand, Mike.

**Mike:** Yeah I think we've mentioned this before. Second City in Chicago, one of my favorite places. My son used to live a couple of blocks away there, up in the northern part of Chicago. So we used to go there frequently. And yeah, I'm a big fan of improv. And I haven't read that book though, so I definitely am.

But that is one of my favorite phrases. I am sure that I first learned that. sat in a Dale Carnegie classroom somewhere. Do not say yeah, but, cause even you don't get, you don't typically get yes, but do you get yeah, but so yes, and is a fantastic. And it's uncommon, frankly, everybody.

You hear people like myself, like Jason, who on a good day will use it frequently and but I come across so many people who, have to, I have to interject. And remind them, hey, yes, and, not yeah, but, yes, and, oh yeah, sorry yeah, yes, and because it's so easy to default back to that yeah, but, which is a reductive, it's a reductive kind of conversation, right?

It's subtractive, whereas yes, and is an additive sort of conversation that's going to compound and compound and end up going somewhere that you would never have imagined.

**Jason:** It really challenges and pushes people to think it think about things differently, look at things differently, be more creative, right.

And especially in client relationships and client requests. We, it's easy to get into routine and be repetitive. And this is what we do. And then we get a request that's outside of our norm. It's really easy to say, oh, we don't do that. What if we said we can do that or yes.

And let's figure that out.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Jason:** It could fundamentally, just think of Blockbuster said yes. And. They would have been the next Netflix, right? It's that simple if you really break it down.

**Mike:** Yeah, and Leo isn't here today, but a mutual friend of ours who's also a prolific author called Craig Weber.

I don't think you've ever met Craig. Wrote a book called Conversational Capacity, which has done very well. And he talks about the and proposition. So it's very much about yes. And the and proposition, which again is one of my favorite ideas, right? It's not an all proposition, this, all that it's an and proposition of this and that of curiosity and candor.

So his definition of candor is have an opinion, have a strong opinion and state it strongly and clearly. And I'm curious about your opinion.

**Jason:** Correct.

**Mike:** And how you look at this, and where I might be missing something, where I might be wrong, where I might have have an experience track here that's taken me off track a little bit.

So I'm really curious. About learning from your perspective, how you look at this, how you think about this, because more than likely, somewhere in the middle is a better answer for all of us. Let's go find it together.

**Jason:** Yeah, just think the level of inclusion and engagement you'll have on your teams if you approach your daily leadership style in that manner.

**Mike:** Yeah. It's it's been a great conversation around curiosity, everybody. It's somewhat of a small sort of conversation and yet it's a massive conversation because it's tentacles going to so many different directions, everything to do with peer innovation, which is Leo's work, culture which, and culture ignited and culture spark, which is Jason's work and agility, which is my work curiosity fuels the fire, all of those things, which of course you can read about.

In our our recent ebook The One Advantage, how to introduce a peer powered culture of agility into your organization. The One Advantage available as an ebook Kindle on Amazon. So please go check that out. And we've got some exciting topics coming down the path in future episodes no doubt we'll have some guests as well, final thoughts for our listeners Jason about curiosity.

What would you leave them with?

**Jason:** If you're, if you truly feel that you are a curious person and you do have a high level of curiosity, in my opinion, it's it really is the innate desire, right? You have the desire, to seek out knowledge. To explore and look at new ideas and ultimately a high level of curiosity helps us understand, the world around us.

Not the world that we're in, not the world that we live in today, not from our perspective, but it helps us understand the world that's around us. And that's a strong statement that, that let that sink in once in a while. There's a big difference instead of focusing on what's in front of us or what's right now or what's me, but focus on the world around us.

**Mike:** Yeah. And be curious enough, everybody to, to wonder what it's like to walk in other people's shoes and to see the world from their perspective. And for me, it's curiosity is this insatiable thirst this insatiable hunger to learn and grow and never stop learning lifelong learning.

And to continuously improve and sustain and disrupt and be ahead of the curve. Great Chang today, Jason, Orange County here real soon. So I can't wait to get together with you. There you have it, everybody. Another episode of the one advantage. Come on back and visit us for a future episode.

We'll look forward to having you with us then.

**Brian:** Thanks for listening to the One Advantage Podcast. If you liked this episode, please consider helping us by rating us wherever you listen, spreading the word, having us as a guest on your podcast or webinar, and mentioning us in social media. Find us at the One Advantage Podcast where you can get more information about us and this episode.

**Mike:** Thanks again for listening and we look forward to more great episodes to come.