

John Boyd. Ace fighter pilot. Real-world, cutting-edge aircraft designer. Teacher of the already elite. Ground-breaking strategist. Antagonistic military misfit who ultimately helped change that very military. Robert Coram, Boyd's primary biographer, captures his truly unique story engagingly and exquisitely.

Colonel Boyd was a complex, fault-ridden, yet still amazing man, someone who impacted multiple spheres that he was appointed to in very unusual ways, several times while being a virtual outsider with regard to those spheres. This podcast episode on "being relentlessly curious to completion" is part of a series on Boyd that follows several episodes about Boyd: building snowmobiles and the art and science of high performance, for example. Go listen to those!

In this current episode, Boyd captures our attention because he was a relentlessly curious pursuer of high-end knowledge who then translated that curiosity into active, integrated completion of his vision.

Why is this important? Because, for those leaders who pursue deep relevance, strong results, and enduring impact, a relentless curiosity is crucial. You see, for thousands of years, the vast majority of people around the world lived what many would say were rather dreary lives vocationally—say, for example, learning from the preceding generations how to farm on the same tired piece of land or learning a marketable trade to serve the local village. In fact, many surnames in America reflect a heritage of what families did for a living: the Smith family blacksmithed iron for horseshoes...the Miller family milled grain for eating...and the Bakers baked for the whole village!

But the Industrial Revolution dawned over a couple of centuries ago and, in many countries over time, innovation and inventions and improvements began coming in waves. Then, relentlessly, in bigger waves. Those cycles deeply changed the way of life for many people from the rather mundane villages and limited opportunities of the past. And all that was much for the betterment of humankind, of course. So, the modern era's pace of change is so rapid that every leader must seriously adopt a posture of relentless curiosity. Here's why: the risk of not being relentlessly curious is to be rendered substantially irrelevant.

The knowledge needed for a leader's effective results is essential...and that is especially the case in an era when information itself is increasing exponentially, in fact it's increasing radically exponentially! Some of the emerging knowledge that we need should and will replace old ways of doing things. Other emerging knowledge that is needed will simply come alongside existing ways of doing things. Still other emerging knowledge that is needed requires thoughtful integration into evolving, complex processes.

But wait, here's a critical point: the vast majority of the information available to you should be ignored or discarded immediately! So why is that? Because it's useless clutter that takes up space in your brain...or, worse, it's actually harmful nonsense. Try this. Go into a large physical bookstore like a Barnes and Noble. What should be the first thing you notice? Rows and rows of books you don't want or need! Literally thousands of books there that are truly a waste of your time. Likewise, the internet—yes, there's so much to explore there...but there are also many, many dead ends with bitter fruit or that bear no fruit at all. Are you wasting at least some of your valuable time on the internet, social media, gossip rags? That's *bad* curiosity!

So a key issue is this: how do we become fruitfully curious in our everyday life...in ways that lead to our optimal equipping? Are you a continuous learner? Do you have a working framework, an actual plan or program for crafting and solidifying your ongoing education? Do you hungrily identify trends that your organization and your industry must grapple with? Do you benchmark to great companies and great leaders, and in doing that, glean new, integrated approaches that will define market leadership in the coming years? Do you study the Bible for all it's worth? Do you routinely learn from history? Do you read

biographies? How about meaningful book reviews to steer you productively? Reliable news sources? So, are you relentless in your curiosity in a patterned, proven way and bring that curiosity to full harvest?

We should be relentlessly curious concerning meaningful history, looking to the reliable lessons from the past. All the more, as Christians, we should read history from a Jesus-lens, a Kingdom-of-God lens! Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall throughout history. Meanwhile, a core message that Jesus proclaimed was that of His Kingdom being at hand! Daniel 2:44 and Hebrews 12:26-29 highlight every earthly kingdom crumbling—Christ’s Kingdom being unshakeable. Do you read history with this perspective in mind, as one who seeks to be a part of God’s great meta-narrative?

And how about that vital dimension of the future? Are you looking to key emerging trends...trends that will be crucial to helping your organization survive and thrive, like the proper use of cutting-edge technology? Effective, fruitful curiosity takes a relentless approach to both astutely understanding the past and forging the future in light of emerging developments and trends.

And that brings us back to John Boyd. John Boyd was “relentlessly curious to completion.” That means he left no stone unturned in the challenge occupying him at the moment, looking at every angle, not simply trusting the so-called “experts” but rather he spent time digging in, researching, pondering, concluding, then revamping for newly spotted weaknesses. Then more testing, researching more, curiously opening up new lines of questions. Then, he would execute the finale: bring his relentless curiosity to completion—a product or idea or results ready to present and implement.

And here’s one of the amazing dimensions of Boyd’s life: he did this in several very major areas of study as he morphed his career into new directions.

First, Boyd did this as a fighter pilot. Designers would give their best shot with a prototype and then give the airplane to Boyd to fly. He would take the design plane in the air and push the machine well beyond its design limits, risking a crash and even his life. But when he landed, Boyd would give them feedback that often fostered dramatic improvement.

Second, Boyd designed fighter aircraft himself, and in doing that, he often took on the best minds and the powerful leaders who had agendas not purely focused on the effectiveness and safety of the airplane and its pilot. Many a time, Boyd went head-to-head against these experts with flawed ideas because he had pursued deep curiosity to completion: he knew every detail and how it integrated and why his solution was superior to the others being presented. In this phase, for example, Boyd co-pioneered the energy-maneuverability theory that led to significant improvements to the USAF’s F-15 and F-16 series of aircraft.

Third, Boyd captured world-class fighter-pilot techniques with what is widely known as OODA loops—and this capturing allowed elite pilots to train at much higher levels than ever before.

Fourth, Boyd then took some time off and stepped back, studying classic philosophy and the best writers he could find. His friends were astounded...are you kidding, they would say, what that got to do with the effectiveness of the military? As part of that process, Boyd did study the greatest thinkers about warfare, including Sun Tzu of ancient China and Carl von Clausewitz of the Prussian empire. He ultimately found some fault with everyone, except Sun Tzu. And then Boyd proceeded to rewrite how to do war. In due time, US Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney discovered Boyd and his new ideas that were based upon seasoned principles—and that initial, very brief war with Iraq in 1990 using Boyd’s principles was prosecuted and won in record time...to the astonishment of many civilian and military leaders alike.

That’s Boyd: a lifetime of “being relentlessly curious to completion.” Just how are you doing that, too?

A&A: Application & Action

1. Describe your specific approach to studying the past and key elements for the future. What are the key reading material sources, podcasts, etc. essential to your ongoing development?
2. As leaders, we should effectively work to integrate the Bible with other areas of life, sometimes manifesting in ways that surprise others. Give three examples of how you personally have applied “relentless curiosity to completion” specifically in your personal gleanings from the Bible. If you haven’t done so, find three and report your results to a qualified accountability partner.
3. Do you cultivate and reward fruitful, relentless curiosity in your workplace team? How? Be specific.