



# Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**  
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## That's Curious!

I recently came across something that I am trying to adopt as my new life mantra: Be curious, not judgmental. Read that again: Be curious, not judgmental.

Now, you may be saying to yourself, isn't she a therapist? Shouldn't she always be nonjudgmental? Oh, that it were so! In the therapy room I am pretty good at remaining curious. But outside of that space, I find myself jumping to conclusions sometimes, assuming things, and generally being "judgy" more often than I would like.

Don't get me wrong - I can justify anyone's behavior, good or bad. I can suppose the bad behavior is due to childhood issues, or being treated unfairly, or any number of reasons. In therapy, I truly "seek first to understand" before jumping in to solutions and changes.

Also, I've written in this column how helpful it is to make up an excuse for people who are doing things you find irritating. That man is driving so slowly because he is having car trouble. The lady at the restaurant counter was so rude because she has problems at home. And I really do use this tool . . . AFTER I've been judgmental for a brief period.

My goal is to be curious instead of judgmental as a first response. To skip over the initial irritated, "REALLY?!" and move straight into, "There is a reason this person is doing this, and I'm curious about what that reason might be."

How often have you jumped to conclusions, or been frustrated with someone, only to find out there was actually a good reason for their behavior? Yeah, me too. Sigh.

I read a story recently that I think illustrates this point beautifully:

There was a young man who got angry so often, and caused so much conflict, that he was mandated to counseling. One day, after several sessions, where he was taught anger management and mindfulness techniques, he stopped by the grocery store. It was crowded, the checkout lines were long, and he was tired. To make matters worse, there was no express lane open, and he had only a few items. His irritation really started to bubble up when the cashier stopped checking out the person in front of him to coo over the baby the customer held. Then, the cashier actually took the baby from the customer and held him! The nerve! We're

all trying to get home! What is this crazy cashier doing???

He could feel the anger rising, and because he had been training in mindfulness, he also felt the stress and tension that came along with the anger. So, as he'd learned to do, he took some breaths, acknowledged what he was feeling, and let it subside. By the time it was his turn, he was calmer, so he said to the clerk, "That was a cute kid you were holding." And she said, "Oh, he's my boy. You see, my husband was in the military. He was killed in combat last year, so now I have to work full-time. My mom brings my son in once a day so I can see him."

Whoa. I can see me having the same response as him, can't you? And wouldn't we feel put in our places?! As well we should, too.

Won't you join me in the "curious zone?" Let's stop making assumptions, let's stop looking down our noses at people who are not acting as WE think they should. Let's remember there are generally pretty good reasons to explain the behavior of others. And, if we are curious instead of judgmental, we just might achieve a greater level of understanding along with some serenity.