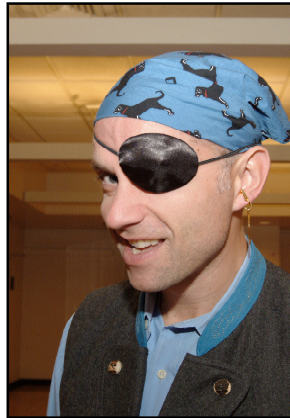


## The Curiosity of 'What Else'

"My curiosity, in a sense, was stronger than my fear; for I could not remain where I was, but crept back to the bank again, whence, sheltering my head behind a bush of a broom, I might command the road before our door." And there begins the first sentence of 'Last of the Blind Man,' Chapter 5 of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island." Moving to a better vantage point to see if the wicked Pew might come calling gave Jim Hawkins a sense of doing something about his situation. It was empowering. When I read this passage to my son, it dawned on me that curiosity might just get us out of the financial fear gripping the nation. I'm also very curious about the alternatives to simply repeating the 1930's. It is truly better to change our perspective through understanding and action than waiting for what we fear might come to pass.

I started reading "Treasure Island" to my son a few weeks ago. Since he loves to play pirate and keeps insisting that I am going to dress up like 'Jack Sparrow' from "Pirates of the Caribbean" for Halloween, I thought I would take a chance and bring out one of my favorite adventure books. While it might be slightly advanced for him, it certainly piques his curiosity! Depending upon the amount of questions, my ability to translate and the amount of times he wants to see the sparsely populated line drawings, one chapter can take anywhere from 30-40 minutes. At this point, I am getting pretty good at 'talking pirate' as I read the lines of Black Dog and Long John Sliver. Plus all of this practice should make me sound pretty authentic even if I don't have the make-up and costumes of Hollywood.

Curiosity and changing perspective has come up recently in my photography class. This semester I decided to accept an adjunct professor position at American University and teach Principles of Photography one night a week for 14 weeks. The dynamic of being in the same place at the same



The author, Mark Sincevich, playing pirate in preparation for Halloween, (c) Linda Petursdottir

time for so long is entirely different for me. I normally speak at one time for a few hours or even over several days. Being exposed to this different dynamic has allowed me to change my perspective and I continue to affect this shift on my students. I am also inspired to see the improvements of my students. This is in spite of getting bombarded by excuses ranging from "I can't take the quiz because of my medication," to "I'll be out of the country on vacation so I can't turn in the assignment," and finally to "I didn't know I had to be in class instead of out taking pictures."

Recently another instructor allowed her students to substitute a guest lecture down the hall in place of completing a photography gallery review. The students got wind of this 'watering down' of the syllabus. They asked me if they could do the same and my first thought was to acquiesce. However, it would really be a disservice for me to allow this change for my class. Lowering the bar in the short run might make me temporarily popular, but it does nothing to make them more curious, to challenge their perspective and to get them temporarily away from IM (instant messaging), cell phone games and social networking sites. In order to get my students to be more curious requires them to get out of their comfort zone and to explore their world.

The same is true of corporations. Even though these financial times require a lot

of belt tightening when it comes to business trips, some marketing programs and other items 'deemed' non-essential, it is actually a mistake for executives to disengage from their customers. Disengagement means less curiosity and there isn't any real way to change perspective by staying at the corporate offices either. As consumers tighten their belts, the times require knowing your customers and prospects better to find out exactly 'what else' you can do to be of service. All that it takes is politely asking. This 'what else' mentality has allowed Bering's Hardware store in Houston, Texas to transform itself from a traditional hardware store into a unique retail concept stocking exquisite gifts, everything for the kitchen and yard, and even gourmet coffee. The entire store is based around their commitment to customer service and the belief that one's customers will always tell you what to do next.

I have embraced the curious at our clothing store by initiating customer surveys. At first we weren't sure if prospects and customers would be interested and then we fretted with what gift to give for this piece of information. The reality was much more simple. Nearly everyone approached has been very interested in giving feedback for free. I believe surveys tap into our inherent desire to be heard and understood. We are hearing again and again that we have great customer service, good quality merchandise and an excellent selection. However, we need to stock more hats, necklaces and ready wear dresses, so this is exactly what our buyer is seeking. When you emerge from hiding behind 'the bush of a broom' and increase the marketing you are doing to your target customers, initiate customer survey's or offer new services, you will

obtain even more repeat business. And when the economy picks up, you will have secured loyal customers, because you have 'crept back to the bank' for a much better vantage point.



**Mark Sincevich** is an executive coach and the chief perspective officer of his company, Leading with Focus. He works with motivated and skilled executives to help them strengthen themselves, visualize their potential and influence their future. Mark also works with organizations to develop leaders with more focus and creativity. He does this through a unique photography angle in his speaking programs and writing. As a result of Mark's programs, his customers gain a fresh perspective, generate new ideas, sharpen the focus and create more business. Mark is a member of the International Coaches Federation (ICF), the National Speakers Association (NSA) and the executive director of the Digital Photography Institute. Mark is also the author of three books including *The Leadership Lens*, and he is frequently quoted in the media. He can be contacted at 301-654-3010 or [www.LeadingWithFocus.com](http://www.LeadingWithFocus.com).