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DO YOU want a life worth living? Our skills and character make US who WE are. WE get to decide on which skills we have. But our character ... how does that happen?

Three character TRAITS have helped me enormously in my life. Later, I'll share the secret to how you might be able to identify and amplify these in yourself.

**The first trait is Curiosity** which meant I was taking risks. I hit bumps in the road, but also had great adventures.

As a freshman, I took a job washing dishes in an algal biology lab. The lab tech next door, took me to the SEM lab and let me watch as he looked at specimens. Shortly after, about 1972/3 I drove to Chicago for an upcoming three-day meeting, with international scientists gathering to talk about Scanning Electron Microscopy! My curiosity led me to meet the scientists in the room.

Despite wearing my very best clothes – jeans sewn into a skirt, The team from Oxford labs invited me to join them as an intern that summer, where I could work on one of three existing million-volt microscopes and help them build the first Scanning Transmission Electron Microscope, now known as a STEM instrument. And so, by **listening** to my curiosity, I got the priceless experience of working with top scientists, learning about a groundbreaking new technology, and participating in its development, and publishing at one of the most respected universities in the world.

### **Now, my second life trait.**

Some years ago, I received a letter from a US Presidential Science Advisor thanking me for a job well done as a consultant. He said, the one thing I should be sure to pass on to my children is my **PERSEVERANCE**. He thought it was a rare trait.

How did this trait show up? Soon after my undergrad program, I took a job at Johnson & Johnson, establishing an electron microscope lab in one of their subsidiaries. Moving to a for-profit organization was confusing for me. But then, I saw a notice, for an MBA “in pharmaceutical marketing.” Johnson & Johnson had a tuition reimbursement program for that MBA, but it did not extend to me as a non-exempt employee. I was told to wait until I was in a higher position to work toward the degree, when I could actually USE the degree. I fought that suggestion and took it up to the head of HR and lobbied for a change in policy. I ended up getting all my tuition reimbursed. In my six years at Johnson &

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Johnson, I continued to persevere, and went from Research & Development, to Regulatory Affairs, and then on to finance where I did sales forecasting

### **Curiosity + Perseverance naturally led to Innovation**

My innate curiosity and asking “what might appear to be dumb” questions to understand my environment would soon open-up more opportunities for me. In fourth grade, I wondered, WHY couldn't we have water fountains at our desks?

Later, while at a conference, I overheard a group of people chatting in the registration line. They worked on Wall Street, and I was fascinated by their conversation on industries and markets. After that chance encounter, I was inspired and started to look for a job on Wall Street. I quickly realized that my varied experiences were an asset in this new financial world.

As luck would have it, I ran into the Chairman of the Board from my company at a Wall Street Christmas party. It was awkward to answer the question, “Where do you work?” I confessed and over the next few days, he made some calls. Soon I had an interview at a venture capital firm with Alan Patricof, now known as APAX. After working in venture capital in the mid 1980's, I decided to move to be on the creative side of innovation. Over the years, I've founded seven companies, all of them with great teams of people. Some succeeded, and some didn't succeed.

### **FASHION**

After the dot.com bust, I wanted to improve my sewing and creative skills so that I could create my own Chanel jackets. I went back to school to earn my MFA in fashion design and spent five years running a fashion label. I was thrilled to be working in a woman's and gay man's world. It took me years to realize the ageism that began to creep into my life. Experience was not valued as much as I thought it would.

I was focused on the business and trying to understand the following. While it is hard for a consumer to shop e-commerce stores and find the right clothes that will look good on them, no-one teaches designers how to fix that problem. After spending several more years experimenting with my label I found I was driven to solve the bigger problem and eventually reversed course again. Six years ago, I started Savitude, an AI technology company, to solve the “fit” and “flatter” problem I experience in my eCommerce label.

### **Reflecting on traits to success**

Now in a reflective time of my life, I have wondered, “what has kept me going in this direction?” The **nature** of my reflection has changed, and I started to see new patterns.

Not long ago, I connected my attraction to early stage startups, inventions, and inventors to my early life. I realized that as a child I altered my own perception of my surroundings. How and when this started, I don't know...but I do know **why**.

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As a child, I created alternate narratives. I imagined how it could be/how other families lived. Eventually, I realized I had to write my own rule book.

If you resonate with even a small part of my story, you too can transfer the private energy you spend on questions like “why didn't I do?” or “why didn't I get?” into creative exploration and innovative contemplation. You can repurpose that energy into strength to navigate a **rewarding** path. The traits of curiosity, perseverance, and innovation have helped me enormously. Like everyone, I have had experiences that have made me feel small, and those memories are enduring. But in those times, I have imagined brightness in the dark, interest where was none, and the will to wake up every day, which in turn has given me the power to invent, to patent, to hire, to sell, to deposit money.

These traits have done one other thing. They gave me empathy.

Curiosity, naturally encourages me to see from another's perspective. As I researched to understand electron microscopy, I went to the conference, then to meet with the experts in Oxford, to see what made them tick. To walk in their shoes.

Going thru my MBA program at night while working full time was my introduction into perseverance. But what drove me? I was desperate to understand the environment I was in.

Using my curiosity and perseverance assures me that I can understand how and why others have needs and that gets to the core or root of the problem. It is a no-brainer that the third in the trio is innovation – to help others.