

Alice Meets Peter Drucker: Two Letters, Questions and Lessons for the Knowledge Worker in the Digital Wonderland

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Drucker Writes Alice¹

Dear Alice the Wonder kid,

How are you? What have you been up to lately? You are always up to something!

Since the last time that you were trapped in a wonderland in that book—sorry about that—the world has changed so much. Today, many people who enjoy your story live in a new wonderland, throwing up new things; to be explored, to be enjoyed. That is one thing that your story celebrates: the spirit of adventure. Since the last time that I was taken on a trip beyond the world as we know it, many things have changed. Let me tell you how.

Your sister—and many other children—are no longer reading the old kind of book. Books are on screens now. Your sister can read many books; slide through many stories; glide through many worlds. Many books now have as many colourful pictures as possible *happy face* (:D) That's a smiley! You never knew about that in your time. There are many things you never knew. One of them is the internet. It has changed many things today. It will change many things in the future.

The future is about adventure, about yearning for something different. Adventure is key for the knowledge worker in this new wonderland. More people now see what I saw many years ago. More organisations are coming to terms with how the digital world interacts with the real world—it is the real world. Many now know you cannot separate this world, from an individual, from their organization—that it has to be integrated. The question is: how will they deal with it? That's for the living to handle. I left my notes.

This new wonderland is an amazing world; you need new skills, new strategies to navigate its web. There is no space just to fit in; you have to stand out. My dear Alice, welcome to our wonderland of opportunities. Let's take a walk.

Yours Managerially,

Peter F. Drucker

The Digital Revolution: Connecting Lives...

It is the very nature of knowledge that it changes fast and that today's certainties will be tomorrow's absurdities."—Drucker²

The world is not smaller. In 1865³, it was 2,901 miles in circumference. In 2014, it is still the same size. In numerical size, it is bigger now: there are over 7 billion of us. Nigeria has over 174 million. Nigeria has about 48.4% of its population with access to the internet⁴.

However, the world is closer. The world is more connected now. Many people are connected, not by days of train rides, or months of ship trips, but by a stronger, faster force: the internet. People across cultures, across continents interact more easily. With the internet, they now cross miles with links. With the internet, many can now go beyond borders. Welcome to the new wonderland: the world of digital revolution.

According to Gator Crossing, "8 new people use the internet every second. 139, 344 websites go live each day. There are over 3 billion google searches every day. People spend a combined time of over 20,000 years on Facebook each day. Around 175 million tweets are sent every day."⁵

"How do you know that?" Alice asks me.

It is all over the internet. Google. Facebook. Twitter. Whatsapp. LinkedIn. Instagram. Amazon. With these applications—we call them apps—and more, many are throwing wide the doors of opportunity and knowledge workers are going in, in droves. Many are joining hands across continents with diverse cross-cultural projects. Many are constructing bridges of friendships—without big budgets. Every second, the internet connects lives, just with the click of a mouse. *And a mouse is no longer an animal running around.*

The Power of a Click

Here I am, typing away, writing about my experience as a knowledge worker in Nigeria. I read *Tales of Alice in the Wonderland* without going to a bookshop or a library. I have read so many essays from Peter Drucker as well. When I am done, I will send this article by pressing "Enter" on the computer. Immediately, the essay will be received by the Drucker Society in Vienna. Miles away. I do not need to go through the rigours of handwriting; then, handing it to the typist who would type; then, buying an

envelope; sealing; the walk to the post office; sending. Then...the wait. For the other end to confirm that they had received my essay. All that is gone. Thanks to a click.

A click can do more—online purchases; writing assignments; news updates. I can communicate with different people from different nations, at once. Sitting here, at my computer. I can be anywhere in the world at a click. That is the new world of the knowledge worker. This wonderland is more adventurous, more exciting to be in, as a human being, as a knowledge worker. More can be done. A click can bring together many more clicks—potentials for change, change that can transform the future.

Today is the present that holds the key with which the door of the future will be opened. Yet, the future belongs to only those who can see beyond today, to those who can do more than peep into the future through the keyhole—or window, according to Drucker—of today but those who will grab the keys of the future and open the door.

To unlock the key to the future, there are “key questions” to ask. This article is about questions, responses and many things in between. Questions that knowledge workers should ask themselves. Personal responses from this writer on her journey to a new terrain. Everything in between. From Alice. From Drucker. From other wise sources from the internet. Dive in!

First Question: *Who Are You?*

This comes first before any other thing. Before *what do you do?* Before *where are you headed?* In the digital age, you can do many things at once; you can be many characters at once but it is important to ask: who are you? At the core of every role is you.

In knowing yourself, maybe you will find the gifts that you are endowed with. Maybe you will learn where you belong. Maybe you will learn where your strengths lie—and maximize them. Maybe you will find your weak spots—and strengthen them. Maybe you will know your value. Maybe you will know where you truly fit in this whole maze. Maybe you will fit right in there: a square ball in a square hole. In this new world, a ball is not necessarily round.⁶

Drucker wrote *“The individual is the central, rarest, most precious capital resource of our society”*⁷ So, dear knowledge worker, whatever it is you are doing; you are the nucleus out of which everything in this new wonderland flows. More than ever, organisations also need to know what the core of their existence is. The creatures in this new wonderland will try to control you but when you know who you are, you will be able to take control of your life, of your future.

My response: *I am a lover of words. This is manifest in all that I do—as a freelance writer, editor who also loves to teach...beyond these, I find ways to interpret the realities around me; to make others make sense of them as well, in simple words, spoken or written.*

Second Question: *where am I?*

Picture this. Much would have changed by the time you finish reading this essay: many blogs would have been created; businesses would have been launched online; a hashtag may be trending. Thousands—or millions of transactions—would have been made.

Just like Alice in the wonderland, many of us are puzzled by the speed of change; many of us do not know what to do. “My dear (knowledge worker), here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. And if you wish to go anywhere you must run twice as fast as that.”⁸

In this digital world, every step leads somewhere. Imagine you are on a webpage; you click, it takes you somewhere. Then, somewhere, then endlessly to many other “somewheres” until you switch off the computer. These places that you have been to leave footprints on your mind so it is important to ask yourself: for what purpose am I here? Why am I on this website, on this timeline, on this Twitter profile? When you know where you are, you can innovate systematically; then, you will see change as an opportunity.⁹

Drucker predicted this world, this change; he told us to embrace it: *We do not see change as altering the order... We see change as being order itself--indeed the only order we can comprehend today is a dynamic, a moving, a changing one.*¹⁰ So, brace up for the wheezing feeling that speed brings. Brace up for delivering deadlines promptly. Brace up for a world that blurs time differences. Brace up for responding to the loads of comments on your website. Brace up organisations for the challenges of this new world, with its newness getting old, and then, renewed quite quickly before you are aware that anything changed.

My Response: *Having worked as a writer and editor all my life; these days, I am busy with something different. A new project. It is online: a website that connects Nigerian cities across with opportunities in their cities. We want to make the cities “smaller”; pull its people closer. That’s where I am.*

Third Question: *How Curious Are You?*

The core of the knowledge worker is knowledge. That is one of the benefits of the internet. It is a vast world of knowledge, waiting to be explored, waiting to be garnered by anyone curious enough.

*“Curioser, curioser..and curioser”*¹¹ Those words are from the wonderland yet they remind one of Drucker’s words: *Knowledge has to be improved, challenged, and increased constantly, or it vanishes.*¹² To remain relevant, it is important to stay curious. There is nothing like “curiousest” in this land. Your curiosity just needs to keep getting better, keep getting “curiouser.” In this new world, curiosity will not kill the cat, it will make it wiser.

Learn specific skills. You need to know what you do not know. And great that you can learn almost anything at a click. Classrooms don’t have to be physical again. You can teach yourself to develop apps. You can create websites. You are only as good as what you know. For that is what makes you the educated person in this new world. It is an adventure so, get curious about where you are, about the obstacles on the way, about the ways progress through the obstacles.

My Response: *Today, I am learning so many things about the best ways to share information online, about the best ways to connect city dwellers with the opportunities around. I am learning ways of making information presentable, accessible and digestible.*

What do you want?

Despite that fact that this world changes quickly, it is important for knowledge workers to know what they want. This does not necessarily mean what you want to do. This does not also have to be a long term plan. It could be from one passion—not jobs—to the other. *What do you want to achieve?*

If you don’t know what you want, you will latch on to the other peoples’ dreams. For instance, there are many Nigerian bloggers who want to be like the main gossip blog: Lindalkeji. So, they copy and paste everything she uploads. So, what do you want? If you do not know what you want, you may lose your individuality somewhere along the way, trying to be someone else. However, if you know what you want, your uniqueness remains, and like fine wine become better every day.

‘You mean you can’t take LESS,’ said the Hatter: ‘it’s very easy to take MORE than nothing. ¹³ This is key: there is so much you may try to “take in” and realize you are taking nothing; that you are just a mirror

image of someone else, that your business is a copy of another. This is important for organisations and individuals.

My Response: *My eyes are wide open. My ears are alert; searching for new trends, new opportunities, and new ways to reach a people thirsty for them.*

The Passion Puzzle: What do you love?

Passion is the ability to keep going despite all. How do you challenge yourself daily? It is not enough to carry around a business card that bears: Creative Director. It is not enough to stay online every day, browsing away. What keeps your passion aglow? What do you need to do to keep the flames alive? Find new challenges. A challenge that solves a problem. A challenge that changes lives.

John Legend said recently at a Commencement Ceremony: *The reason I'm here...is that I've found love. Yes, love. We were all made to love. And I've found that we live our best lives, we are at our most successful, not simply because we're smarter than everyone else, or because we hustle harder. Not because we become millionaires more quickly. The key to success, the key to happiness, is opening your mind and your heart to love. Spending your time doing things you love and with people you love.*¹⁴

My Response: *In every project, I look for something new; something different enough to be loved.*

What does your dream mean to you, to others?

Alice's dream inspired her sister to dream her own dreams. *She pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood: and how she would gather about her other little children, and make THEIR eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago...*¹⁵

Does your work inspire others so much that they begin to have the courage to dream their own dreams? Or is it just for the paycheck and you are fine with that? There is nothing wrong with the paycheck but paychecks only come monthly and end at a time; dreams fulfilled can generate a long chain of other dream fulfillers, a long chain of world changers, a long chain of people who live beyond their time, whose work will change worlds yet unborn. Like the inventors of the internet. Like many young people who create apps daily. Like many knowledge workers using their knowledge to impact others. And many others changing the world we work in today.

My Response: *I pour all the love that I've got in each project, hoping that like the light of a burning candle, it will give others the courage to shine through darkness, and to light other candles.*

From The Present to the Future

As I type this, my son sleeps. I wonder what the future holds for him. There are predictions. The "Future is Disapp"¹⁶ one writer predicted applications that will make everything will appear and disappear almost immediately. Lynda Gratton predicts longer years of work.¹⁷ CISCO predicts the "Internet of Everything— a network of networks where billions of connections create unprecedented opportunities as well as new risks."¹⁸ Only time will tell what the future holds.

However, if anyone wants to make a difference in your time, these five tips would likely be relevant: be sure of who you are; be sure of where you are; be sure of what you want; stay curious and remain passionate about what you do. The same tips that worked years before, for Alice, for Peter Drucker. They work for me today in the internet world. They may work for you. The internet may change but these values hardly do.

One more thing. Words from a popular singer in my time, John Legend: *love yourself, love your work, love the people around you. Dare to love those who are different from you, no matter where they're from, what they look like, and who they love. Pursue this life of love with focus and passion and ambition and courage. Give it your all. And that will be your path to true success.* This may be difficult in this your highly connected world of Internet of Everything. Yet, love. If you love enough, you will know who you are; you will know where you are; you will put all the passion in all that you are, in all that you do.

So, love.

References

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