

Knowing and Not Knowing - Lean Project Consulting

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When I was in school, I loved being the one who knew the answer. I still get hooked when someone asks me a question. I am so eager to give an answer that I sometimes forget that it's better to leave a person with a question, to put them in the mood of inquiry. I want to be the one who knows.

In my Aikido classes, after the instructor demonstrates a technique, we have to choose a partner. We can choose a senior student, who can help us with our learning, or a junior student, someone we can help to learn. It is always a dilemma for me, whether to be in the safe, secure role of the one who knows more, or the uncertain role of the one who wants to learn. We call this beginner's mind

We cannot function as adults if we don't know anything. On a daily basis, we need to exercise our skills to be effective in our work. But to be a part of a learning organization, we also need to open ourselves to not knowing. I need to realize that in addition to my areas of expertise, I have my areas of ignorance. In order to learn in these areas, I need to give up my image as the one who knows, the one who always has the answer. Even to move from expertise toward mastery, I need to practice not knowing.