

Do you know someone who is quirky - who has peculiar aspects of their appearance thinking or behaviour that are unique to them? To be honest, I think we all have our own personal quirks - things that make us who we are, that give us personality, and make us special. My wife, Christy, tells me I am very special.

If we are sufficiently odd or different, we start entering the world of the eccentric. I believe eccentrics add much colour to the world and are very much underappreciated.

To be honest, I admire eccentrics for the diversity they bring to the world and for being truly themselves. When I told Christy that I aspire to become an eccentric, she replied that I am well on my way.

Here are a few of my personal quirks that she may have been thinking of.

- I am quite tidy, but am slightly OCD about things left on floors.
- I say I am not superstitious but I will not buy a home where people have been unhappy.
- I am very polite and diplomatic but I get myself into trouble when I speak too quickly.
- I buy multiples of clothes that I like— my wardrobe is full of black t-shirts.
- I can recall 20 unrelated facts in order and reverse order but have difficulty remembering names.

I am not eccentric. It's just that I am more alive than most people. I am an unpopular electric eel set in a pond of catfish.

Edith Sitwell, British Poet

Some of you have diagnosed me already. Or have considerable compassion for my loved ones and colleagues. I hope a few of you can relate. One interesting thing about quirks is that they tend to be more noticeable to others, than to ourselves. For us, they seem normal and I hope, for me at least, they are amusing or charming in some way.

But for other people, our quirks are not so endearing. So, what can we do to respond well to other people's idiosyncrasies, particularly those that frustrate us in some way?

Here are a few ideas:

1. **Find a kinder perspective:** We all have our own quirks - some charming or amusing and others that can be frustrating. If we are allowed to have our own quirks, so are others.
2. **Learn to accommodate their quirks:** Yes, some idiosyncrasies of others we can simply learn to live with. Christy doesn't understand why I don't like things left on floors. I don't understand why the kitchen benches always need to be left clean and tidy. Although we don't understand, we at least try to show consideration. Of course, it is always nice when our efforts to be flexible, tolerant and considerate are reciprocated.
3. **Value difference:** It would certainly be a boring world if we all looked, thought and acted the same way. In workplaces, good teams are built around individuals with complementary strengths - often the flip side of their personal quirks. So, we need to appreciate that behind an individual's frustrating behaviour there is often an underappreciated personal strength. Some of the geniuses throughout history have also been quite eccentric.
4. **Influence change when needed:** Yes, some quirks are easier to live with than others and sometimes there are behaviours we cannot reasonably tolerate. But having said that, I think we spend too much time trying to change other people when we could simply be more patient and tolerant. The challenge here is getting the balance right.

Remember that it is OK to be different, odd or eccentric. But it's not ok to be inconsiderate, disrespectful or offensive. Consideration, tolerance and flexibility need to work both ways.

Key points

Eccentrics bring colour to our world

Quirks tend to be more noticeable to others, than to ourselves

We all have our own quirks

If we are allowed to have our own quirks, so are others

Learn to accommodate the quirks of others

Good teams are built around individuals with complementary strengths

Ken Warren BA, M Soc Sc, CSP

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