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**Don't teach me
to fish, ask why
I'm in the boat**

Steven de Lira July 2025

Introduction

Before you start that project

Every year, countless people board planes to the Caribbean part of the Kingdom full of good intentions, big plans, and warm hearts.

Caribbean Dutch. European Dutch.

All want to help. To contribute. To make an impact.

And yet... too often, I see the same pattern:
frustration, misalignment, disappointment.

This isn't criticism.

It's love.

It's my way of offering what I've learned
on the ground, in the work, in the tension.

These are five reflections.

Five honest questions.

I share them with love,
so we can grow stronger together.

Because I believe:

if we really want to build something lasting,
we need to start by asking the right questions.

Why Are You in This Boat?

Part 1

There's a popular saying in the world of development work:
"Don't give people fish. Teach them how to fish." It sounds empowering.
But I want to share a deeper, more painful truth I've come to learn.
Especially here, in Curaçao.

Maybe real help...is not about giving people fish.
And not even about teaching them how to fish.

Maybe real help is daring to ask,
"Why are you here with me in the boat?"

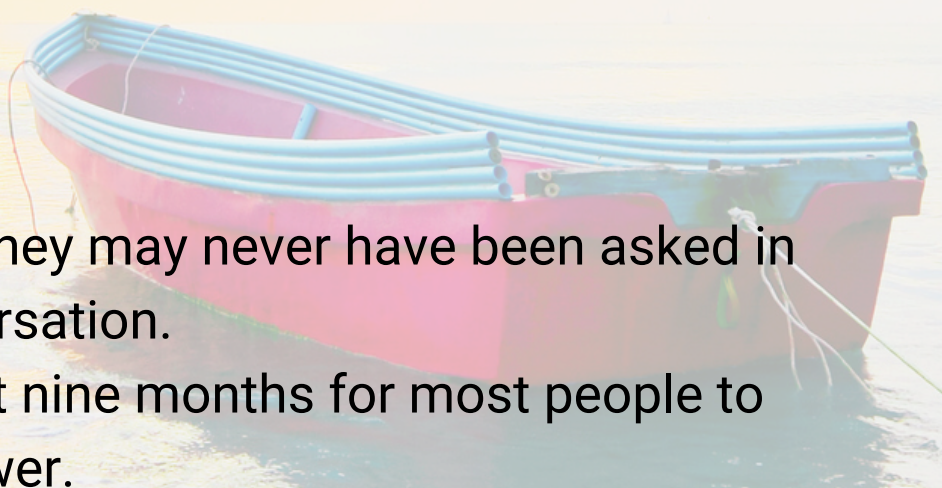
That question, asked with radical trust, with no judgment, with real presence.
That's the shift. Because here's what I've seen, again and again:

- **People don't just want techniques.**
- **They don't just want training.**
- **They want to be SEEN AND HEARD.**

Held in a space safe enough to explore a question they may never have been asked in their life. That question isn't answered in one conversation.
It's not a quick fix. In my experience, it takes at least nine months for most people to even formulate the first honest version of their answer.

So what do we do?

We ask the question. We stay in the boat. We make sure we catch just enough fish to keep them fed, safe, and strong enough to come back next time. Because you might be the first person in their life to ask that question and mean it.
And maybe, just maybe, that's where real development begins.



Why Are You in This Boat?

Part 2

As I said in the previous post, this is the most powerful question I know.
Not because of the words,
but because of what happens when someone dares to ask it with honesty and care.

“Why are you in this boat?”
Isn’t just a question, it’s an invitation to uncover your **Anhelo di Kurason**:
your heart’s deepest desire.

But here’s the truth:
You can’t find the answer to that question alone.
And more importantly, you can’t live that answer alone.

Freedom of thought. Freedom of choice. Freedom of being. These don’t exist in isolation. They’re tested and strengthened in relationship with others.

Can you stay true to yourself in the face of judgment, rejection, or approval?

That’s why we need spaces to practice this.
To develop real mental freedom.
To choose, not please.
To act, not hide.

That’s Social Deep Learning.
That’s the work.

What is your heart’s desire?
Why are you in this boat?



Why Are You in This Boat?

Part 3

Here's the real question:

Can the one asking "Why are you in this boat?" do so with complete honesty and zero judgment?

I dare to say often not.

Because true listening requires de-centering yourself.

And most people can't.

It's not how we were raised. It's not how we were educated.

Social emotional development, learning how to relate to others, how to bring our emotions, fears, and needs into the room with care was never part of our upbringing. With a few exceptions, we never learned how.

I've been on both sides of this.

I've worked in Europe.

I've returned with the best intentions.

I've said, "I'm here to help."

But the help we offer

isn't always the help that's needed.

And worse we often carry opinions we've never questioned.

Because for most people, those opinions are their identity. Dressed up as purpose.

That's why I believe:

Sometimes, it's not the student who needs to learn how to listen.

It's the so-called teacher.



Why Are You in This Boat?

Part 4

Here's the paradox:

We are both teacher and student at the same time.
That's the beauty, but also the challenge.

**Because if I'm both,
I have to listen while I speak.
Stay open while I lead.
Learn even when I think I know.**

But many systems and even well-meaning helpers still cling to one identity: the expert, the giver, the guide. We forget: the moment we fix our role, we stop growing.

We carry many roles within us.
But only in real connection in the presence of another does it become clear who we are meant to be in that split second.

And yes, I mean split second.

Social Deep Learning is learning to switch roles in real time.
From speaker to listener.
From knowing to not-knowing.
From ego to humility.

That's not a theory.
That's a practice.
And that's the work.

Everyone is a mentor.



Why Are You in This Boat?

Part 5

This is the final part of this series.

And I know for some, this may sound a bit too abstract or “soft.”

But let's be honest:

Real, lasting change doesn't happen without pausing here critically and with care.

If you're serious about shifting something fundamental, this is where the real work begins.

To truly switch roles from teacher to student, you need humility.

And humility often starts with one question:

When did life show you you're not in control?

What need in you drives that urge to teach, to guide, to fix?

We rarely ask ourselves that.

But it matters. Because without that awareness, helping becomes a projection.

And then come the islands of the Dutch Caribbean.

These islands don't create problems, they expose what's already there.

In systems. In relationships. In yourself.

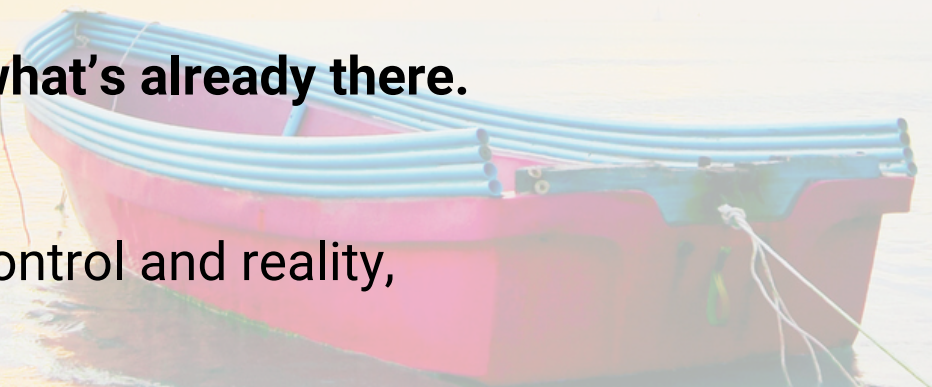
It acts like a lens, magnifying the tension between control and reality,
between what we think we bring
and what we're actually part of.

And that's confronting.

Because if you really see it,
you can't unsee it.

So before we talk about impact, efficiency, or solutions, ask yourself:

Why are you really in this boat? And what part of yourself is asking to be seen?



How To Contribute Wisely

Before you start your next project on these islands...

1 Choose your boat wisely.

Not every leak needs your urgency.

These islands have been afloat — despite everything — for a long time.

So ask yourself: “Is this boat really sinking?” Or are we just too quick to grab a bucket? Start where there’s space to build, not just pressure to fix.

2 Prioritize social-emotional development.

Real change begins with inner growth.

Freedom of thought creates stronger people and stronger people shape better futures.

3 Fund the learning, not just the doing.

No funds = No reflection = No evolution.

Most projects are underfunded not because of lack of money, but lack of vision bold enough to uplift people to new levels of thinking and being.

Most funds go to the what and how. The who gets ignored

4 Check your own intentions.

Ask yourself:

“Why am I really in this boat?”

Help is only real when it comes from self-awareness.

Let's Connect

If these reflections inspired you or challenged you, I'd love to hear from you.

Let's connect.

Let's think together.

Let's build something real.

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Because Everyone is a mentor.
Including you.

