

The Importance of Continuous Learning

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by Michelle Underwood

Growth is obtained by essential learning curves.

Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence." -Abigail Adams

Almost everyone has a day in their life where they think they don't have any more room in their brain to learn, or they think they have already learned everything there is to obtain. If you get to one of those moments, you either realize your ego is lying to you or you believe that your ego is telling you the truth. The healthy realization is the lesser.

There are two types of people in this world: (1) People who embrace change and enjoy learning new things, and (2) People who refuse to accept change (and are usually subconsciously scared of it) and get upset when put in a learning situation.

Person (1) sees learning as a life-long opportunity to expand their mental library, while Person (2) sees learning as an inconvenient waste of their time, holding them back from accomplishing tasks they know how to complete. Now, it is possible to be hovering somewhere in the middle, but from my research and observations, it is not as common as leaning towards extreme Person (1) or extreme Person (2).

"Open-Minded" = Receptive to arguments or ideas.

“Listening” = To hear something with thoughtful attention : give consideration.

“Barriers of Interest” = Allowing arrogance to interrupt the initial moment of intrigue in a conversation.

Be curious, not judgmental.” -Walt Whitman

You cannot project your POV (Point of View) without listening to others POV:

When it comes to listening, it honestly does not matter what religion or non-religion you do or do not believe in or follow. Listening is the key to learning; if you do not know how to retain information that has been gathered by another person’s life experiences and thought processes, then you will never be able to enhance your *own* experiences and thought processes. You also cannot expect anyone to listen to you if you do not also listen to them, and vice versa. The importance of this is proven later in life when you are working out a solution to a problem, having an uncomfortable conversation (may it be with a relative, coworker, friend, etc.), or figuring out why you are confounded with an internal conflict. Being open-minded to other people’s POV’s brings unity and understanding to a *real* conversation. Real conversations happen when there are no Barriers of Interest or judgmental attitudes between the people within the conversation. Being open-minded is difficult more times than not, especially when what the other person is saying sounds ridiculous and makes no practical sense *to you*. I have personally had many times where I had to force myself to listen and stay in the conversation, reminding myself that I could still learn something from this confusing person.

A life moment observation:

In 2019, I was having a discussion with an acquaintance (we shall call her Stacy) about our different views on the importance of learning. The conversation did not begin or end smoothly. I was surprised and interested in how vastly different our POV’s were, because in the past I had the assumption (based off of previous discussions, actions, and attitude) she was all for continuous learning. We disagreed on almost every bullet point we touched on, but that did not make me want to run the opposite direction from the conversation; instead I wanted to dive even further into our disagreement. I

had to figure out (and *listen*) why Stacy believed her negative opinion on learning. It turned out to be quite interesting:

First, we both shared what our thoughts on learning were. Second, Stacy suggested I go further into my thoughts before she went any further into her thoughts (which displayed a yearn for becoming a “learning-lover”). However, while I explained my view on the topic, she continuously interrupted me between every sentence as I explained my thought process. Third, Stacy unleashed her strong opinion to me using loud volume, irritated tones, and annoyed body language (which displayed an annoyance of her inability to successfully get to where I had gotten mentally) while I did my best to keep a calm expression and listen with intent and open-mindedness to her opinion.

The conversation ended with Stacy saying, *“This is a waste of time. I don’t know why I’m even using my energy to talk about this with you. Once you’re older like me, you will understand what a waste of time attempting to learn anything is. Once you’re old, it doesn’t matter because your memory fails you and no one else cares about the effort you put in.”* Maybe I should have said something (maybe not) to end the conversation, but I sensed she didn’t want to hear anything else come out of my mouth, especially if it was going to be positive words of encouragement (which is what I thought of attempting). Instead, I simply walked away and decided I would try to have a more pleasant conversation with Stacy the next time we met.

That interaction was extremely difficult for me to be a part of and understand. I honestly wanted to hit her for talking so rudely to me and I wanted to start screaming my opinion at her, but I knew that wasn’t the right thing to do and it wouldn’t be productive. I believe in killing rudeness with kindness (and not in the sarcastic way). It was difficult for me to understand this conversation, because in the past, Stacy showed obvious desires to learn new things, yet she had such a strong opinion on not wanting to continue to learn.

In a future conversation Stacy and I had she revealed the unintentionally explained her angry attitude. She had tried to learn and grow and be an open-minded person throughout her life, but *no one gave her the praise or appreciation* for her achievements in the way she pre-visualized it. That can

be a frustrating and hazardous place to be in. I know, because I have also been in that place many times.

The Dangers of Pre-Visualization:

“Pre-Visualization” = Creating outcome or feedback for something before it even happens or starts to happen.

To be blunt, pre-visualization is setting yourself up for guaranteed post-process disappointment. This is because we as humans tend to imagine the absolute best or worst possible outcome to any given situation or project. With things we are excited about, we think with positivity and a nothing-can-go-wrong mindset. With things we are not as excited about (*or are similar to things from the past that did not have good outcomes*), we think with negativity and despair. Whether the thing we are pre-visualizing outcomes for are positive or negative does not matter when it comes to disappointment, because we think in extremes, and the actual outcomes are typically mundane compared to what we created in our heads.

Here’s an example: I put many hours into creating a photograph I was really proud of, and as I was putting the final touches on it I was imagining the reactions I would get when I showed my friends. I was so sure that I was going to hear, “Fantastic image!”, “Wow, stunning!”, or “I would totally buy that print from you!”. Instead of the grand comments, I received, “That’s nice”, “Well-done”, and “Pretty”. All very lovely comments, but I felt that the amount of work I put into this photograph deserved much more enthusiasm. My actual feedback wasn’t by any means *bad*, it was just mediocre, which was a lower quality praise than I was expecting or hoping to get. If I had decided from the beginning (which is what I try to do now) that I wasn’t going to (1) create a photograph only to receive confidence boosting affirmations, and (2) I wasn’t going to create any type of feedback in my head at all, then I know I would have been much happier and less disappointed with the reactions I truthfully received.

In conclusion, the feedback on my photograph circles me back to the importance of being open-minded and the importance of continuous learning. At that time I was younger than I am today, and I now recognize

these pre-visualization hazards because I became open to learning about myself and how to overcome pre-visualization hazards. I also recognize that when you do not hear what you want to hear, it isn't the end of the world, and you should embrace those moments as *learning opportunities*. At the time of my "pretty" photograph, I did mope around for a few days thinking to myself, "I'll never be good at photography" (which is stupid because several people told me I was good, but my pre-visualizations prevented me from hearing the positive affirmations.), but I eventually pulled up my determination-britches and decided to write down my feedback whenever I got it, look at what was kind about it, what wasn't great about it, and *find what I could learn* from both types of opinions. Being open-minded brings you to a point of being able to take criticism to that healthy place of learning.

"Be stubborn about your goals and flexible about your methods." -Unknown

Learning Resources:

The importance of having resources for learning is unequivocal. A resource can be a person, thing, or experience that contains information pertaining to the subject you are striving to learn more about.

PEOPLE:

In order to embrace other people (could be family, friends, co-workers, or strangers) as an important learning resource we *need* to stay open-minded. If we don't, then why are we trying to learn anything new at all? People are one of my favorite resources for obtaining information, whether it's on something I don't know anything about, or something I know a few things about and want to dive into deeper. Every single person has experienced life in a completely different way than I have, and that means their POV and mental catalog is filled with how *they* received all of life's information. I do believe that we need to take advice with a grain of salt and be cautious of how others are projecting their information to us, but that doesn't have to stop us from engaging in the different ways of the world. If anything, it should make us better at it because we are keeping ourselves, our personal beliefs, and our morals safe while also keeping in mind that we could possibly be wrong. It sounds like a weird line to walk, but life is weird by itself, is it not?

FAILING AGAIN AND AGAIN:

The word “fail” in my opinion and experience means not getting the results you planned. Which I do not think is a bad thing at all; every person in the world fails, whether big or small, and that is what can turn us into extraordinary humans *if we let it*. Failing is a resource because when you fail you automatically learn from it, whether you realize it or not, you *always* (eventually) remember why and how you failed. Failing and learning go hand in hand because there are times when you cannot learn unless you fail and you cannot fail unless you learn, and repeat. If you allow it, learning from your failures creates determination, mental fire, and eventually the outcome you are striving towards. If you allow it, learning from your failures will help you become a strong and confident work horse. Not a workaholic, but an indestructible human who understands that things do not always go as planned. And you can become someone who knows that, if you hold onto determination and do your very best at every attempt... you *will* get to your goal.

Failing again and again and again will help you more than if you got it right the first time. If you refuse to sulk in defeat and despair about your failures, you will always have accomplishments come from failures, and even if the accomplishment is not the end goal, you can find a way to see how you mentally grew during that process, which to me is a win in and of itself!

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

“Enlightening” = Providing or tending to provide knowledge, understanding, or insight.

Personal reflection is important in all areas of life, not just with learning, but that is why it is one of the more important resources within learning. Personal reflection gives you opportunities to be completely honest with yourself. When on the road to learning about a project or task, you need to first figure out what you already know, decide what areas you need to know more about, and finally, figure out what resources will be best to assist you to the “final destination”. I say “final destination” only in regard to projects and tasks because when it comes to continuous learning, *there is not final destination*.

You can allow personal reflection to be enlightening, or you can allow it to be disruptive; the comfort of this process is determined by your honesty within your learning pilgrimage.

Have a lovely day!

Michelle