

Lifetime Learning, The Ultimate Leverage

Archimedes, the greatest mathematician of ancient times (298 BC - 212 BC), is reported to have said that with a sufficiently long lever and a fulcrum strong enough he could lift the world. Learning may be the highest-leverage activity there is. Once we learn something new, the knowledge is ours forever. Every day of our remaining life is enhanced by our new knowledge, in a cumulative fashion. Even seemingly trivial facts can add color and substance to a conversation or make a friend of a stranger.

We live in the midst of an information explosion. Never has so much information been so readily available to so many for so little. Today, the speed at which we can access and share information is breathtaking. With a few simple tools and basic know-how, facts on almost any subject (information) are within the reach of the most modest seeker. No longer are a privileged few able to use strategic information to control the many (the best evidence of this change is the recent decline of communism). The miracles of the microchip and the internet have dramatically increased the power of the average person. This is because computers and the internet provide individual access to the exact information he or she needs, precisely when it is needed.

So, how will you build your learning lever for moving your world in the direction you would like to go? On what fulcrum will your lever rest to move your world forward? The answers to these questions may be critical to the advancement of your personal and professional life.

How to create a learning lever. Those who make learning a life-long practice have a distinct advantage over those who don't learn something new every day. A wise person once said "in this we were all created equally, we were each given 24 hours a day to use as we choose". Benjamin Franklin said "time is the stuff life is made of". Are you living the life you desire most? Are you fulfilling your dreams or is there a nagging sense deep inside you that there is more? Here are twelve ideas for increasing the leverage available to you through learning, together with a blueprint for building a strong fulcrum:

1. Develop a passion for learning. The more you learn, the more passionate you will become. Learn all there is to know about your chosen field. This may be an elusive goal but you will be better off for having set your sights so high. People tend to trust and do business with those who truly know the most. Seriously consider these questions:

- What are the trends in your industry, where is it headed in the next year, five years, ten years?
- Who are the industry leaders, movers and shakers?
- Who are the most successful people in your business?
- What makes them successful?
- What can you learn from them, what are they doing differently than you?
- What tools, technologies and/or systems are making a difference in your industry?
- Do you use these? If not, how can you prepare to do so?
- Which authors/experts are most respected in your area of endeavor?
- What have they written or recorded?
- Have you read or listened to this material?
- Have you met these people? If not, when and how will you do so?
- What are the three most important books a person in your line of work should read?
- Have you read them? If not, when and how will you get them and do so?

- What is the most important meeting or convention in your industry each year?
- Do you attend? If not, will you be at the next one?

If in answering these questions you do not experience a burning desire to do whatever is necessary to be successful in your chosen field, perhaps you should consider a change. Intense passion is a mandatory element in any truly successful person. If you don't feel such passion for learning all there is to know about your vocational path, find something about which you can be totally passionate.

2. Find creative ways to turn idle moments into valuable hours of personal growth. What do you do when you are caught waiting...in line, at someone else's office, in traffic, at a restaurant, in an elevator, on a bus, in a taxi, on an airplane, or even in the restroom? By carrying reading material with you, these otherwise-frustrating times can be filled with rewarding self-improvement. Just as pennies in a jar turn into dollars, these minutes add up to hours of extra learning each year. Over a lifetime, this practice of incremental learning will put you way ahead of the pack in your chosen field.

3. Become computer literate, ASAP. Almost everything we do is now dependent upon a computer in some way. This is good news. Computers are probably the best tools ever invented. They allow us to access and process information in amazing ways. Nothing enhances our ability to learn and to use our new knowledge like a computer. Anyone who is not functionally literate with computers will soon be left behind. You cannot learn fast enough, nor can you compete in today's marketplace without computers. If you do not have computer experience, get it now! Take a class, read a book or hang out with a friend who is willing to teach you about computers. Whatever you do, get started. The world of computing changes so rapidly, even those of us who use techno-tools every day have a difficult time keeping up. Don't be left in the dust. Technology can provide us with the ultimate form of leveraged learning. Computers make everything we do faster, easier and more accurate.

4. Read on a broad range of subjects. A broad knowledge base will allow you to relate to a diversity of people. This will help you build a powerful network of strong and fruitful relationships. Behind every decision which could improve your standing, there is a person with a heart. If you learn how to get into the hearts of the people you meet, you will find it easy to ask for and receive what you want. It is said "love makes the world go 'round'" but the people who feel the love are the ones who truly make it happen. Well-honed people skills will do more than anything else to insure your success. Learn all you can about people. The time you spend on this subject will pay big dividends.

5. Learn to think, speak and write clearly. The more you read, the easier this will be for you. The work of the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation has shown there is a direct correlation between vocabulary and success. Much of what you get out of life depends on your ability to clearly communicate to others the advantage they will receive by cooperating with you. Reading is the single best way to increase vocabulary. Keep a dictionary handy. Don't let a word get by you without taking time to understand what it means and how it is used in conversation. Then, make a point to use the word at least three times a day for the next three or four days. This will improve your chances of retaining the word as a permanent part of your vocabulary. Take a writing or speech class at a local college, night school, or by correspondence. Constant effort to improve your ability to communicate with others will place you head and shoulders above the crowd.

6. Listen to audio CD's or .mp3's while you do something else. Many routine tasks require little mental concentration. For example: driving, exercising, cleaning, gardening, most manual labor and certain recreational activities such as fishing and sunbathing allow us to listen without distraction.

Another way to squeeze in a few minutes of study is to mute the TV during commercials. These are only a few examples of times you can easily leverage into precious learning moments. For a relatively small price you can buy a good quality portable CD or .mp3 player with headphones. A model with Fast Forward and Rewind is recommended, to save time locating specific segments for your re-listening. Remember this, if you will invest in a good audio system for the car you have and use it, it could soon pay for the car you want!

7. Learn about the community, country and world in which you live. Know how each works; scientifically, politically, economically, socially and spiritually. This, too, will increase your ability to relate to a variety of people. An increase in your business is an inevitable side benefit of this knowledge.

8. Take time every day to read, watch or listen to something that touches your heart (i.e. scripture, poetry, or true stories about human heroes). Your greatest success will come from following your heart (acting from the deepest, truest part of yourself) in all things. Find out how others do this successfully.

9. Limit TV time. Most TV programming, including network news, is of little educational value. Ask yourself “does watching this program enhance my ability to reach my goals?” If not, decide what you want most and act accordingly.

10. Avoid the “Guru” syndrome. Make it a habit to learn something from everyone you meet. Don’t become colloquial in your knowledge. Learn from everyone in your industry. Study all of the experts in a given field. Sample a wide variety of thought and theory, then experiment with it before you decide what works best for you. Read as many books and attend as many seminars as possible. Intentionally seek out opinions contrary to those you or someone you respect may hold. There is a popular saying “our minds are like parachutes, they work best when they are open”. Maintain an open mind.

11. Become your own expert. Decide for yourself what you believe, what you feel strongest about and what works for you. Interdependence is a way of life in our society, but self-reliance is the cornerstone of an interdependent system. True freedom is never to be found in unhealthy dependence on another. Knowledge and tempered wisdom are treasures of learning you can possess yourself and share with others.

12. Seek to understand principles instead of the prosaic practices of the day. By seeing deeper into the “why” and the “how”, you will develop keen instincts and the gift of foresight. Foresight is the uncanny ability to anticipate events based on knowledge of principles invisible to most other people. If you seek wealth and abundance in life, become familiar with the principles upon which these things depend. With principle-based knowledge, you will make better decisions and steer your ship securely through troubled waters.

The ethics fulcrum. How many movies have you watched where some brilliant bad guy uses his knowledge to terrorize the world? All of the best learning will ultimately work to our own destruction if we don’t apply it from a strong ethical base. There is much to learn from the mistakes of the past. During the Industrial Revolution, we believed we could violate and conquer nature, with impunity, in the name of progress. In our carelessness, blindness and greed, we nearly destroyed our own planet. Even now, grave environmental challenges remain to be resolved. What can we learn from these lessons? Under the new “Information Age” model, the slogan of “buyer beware” has been replaced by

a devout commitment to excellent customer service. The old adage of “every man for himself” is, thankfully, being outmoded by mottoes of “win-win”, where each of us is learning to protect our own interest by watching out for the benefit of every other man, woman or child with whom we have any relationship. We soon learn we have a relationship of some kind with everyone. For one thing, we all breathe the same air. Integrity, dependability, service to others, hard work, precision, excellence, commitment, kindness and gentleness are just a few of the values the world almost lost, but found it couldn’t live without. Good, sound judgment (the wisdom of the ages) performs the alchemist miracle of turning raw information into valuable “know how”. When we “know how” to apply what we “know”, what was once a struggle becomes effortless, and the best of life is ours for the asking.

When we as human beings expand our innate abilities through life-long learning (the lever) and apply our learning from a base of time-honored principles (the fulcrum), we find Archimedes was right. We do have the ability to lift our world and everyone in it to new levels of success, joy and happiness.

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I would love to hear your comments on this article, which originally appeared in the Continuing Education column of The American Cash Flow Journal. You can find my most current contact information on my website, www.waynelpalmer.com. Please take a minute to let me know what you think!

Sincerely,



Wayne