

## Don't wait to be taught

Ask questions and keep asking until you understand. Don't take no - or I don't know - for an answer.

Learning is the first essential skill to achieve any change. Learn to ask more pertinent questions, not only of other people and situations, but also of yourself. Learn how to seek out, hunt down and dig deeper for even better answers. There are rarely right and wrong answers to life's bigger questions, there are only ideas and solutions that are more useful, helpful than the others.

Be highly inquisitive, with a passion to know, to understand, to make sense of things. A mind should always look beneath the surface of things, to challenge what it's being fed.

You've got to take responsibility for your learning. Then the sky's the limit.

Learning how to learn effectively is a key skill in itself, and it doesn't come about by accident. Once you know how you personally learn best, you can take responsibility for what you learn and how fast.

Much of the learning that matters to success in real-world pursuits happens in the absence of formal instruction.

People still talk about 'inherited intelligence,' as if it's an unsurpassable ceiling on someone's performance. This isn't the case, learning how to make best use of your abilities will carry you way beyond any presumed limits.

*Learning how to find out for yourself* may be the only sort of know-how a person needs. This sounds like common-sense, but there is still far too much emphasis in our education system on teaching and lecturing which may be less and less appropriate now that our demand for knowledge so outstrips the ability of the educational system to provide it.

The best thing someone can do is learn to stand on their own two feet - so if you have a coach or a mentor, he or she mustn't be like a crutch. Their job is to build your confidence in making your own decisions and to help you become independent.

Making lists in a notebook that you carry with you constantly, can be a great way to capture your ideas and feelings. This way, you can consider them more carefully at a better time.

Learning to listen well is a hugely useful skill. And we shouldn't forget that it is very closely connected with bothering to ask people their opinions in the first place, and giving them the feeling that they can tell you everything, *uninhibited*. Give them the feeling that you won't be shocked or offended and that you can be trusted to handle the truth.

Read and keep reading. Amongst other things, it will help you express yourself.

Voracious reading characterises many accomplished lives. Books introduce you to useful vocabulary, other people's points of view, and unknown worlds of opportunity. As long as you're willing to apply what you learn from them, it's a hard education to beat.

The best students challenge everything around them, but in an articulate and positive way - aiming to improve, not simply criticise.

Don't let school be your only source of education. Make sure you learn just as much, if not more, outside of school.

The more criticism you positively invite, the more opinions you're gutsy enough to ask for, the faster you will learn.

Look at people whose opinions and achievements you respect and try to match their essential qualities.

Make time to build a good relationship with the people you hope to learn from: parents, tutors, and mentors. The more you invest in another person, the more they're likely to invest in you.

Whoever your advisers are, you've got to help them help *you*. Help them by giving them as much honest information as possible.

You're best to find out as much as possible about your problems and your hopes: from reference books and autobiographies, from the internet, from career counselors, from other professionals, by making phone calls and writing off for information and asking time and again until you really know your stuff.

Consider what to ask, how to ask it, and of whom. Bear in mind that your friends and the people around you may not know the answers, choose to give limited answers, or give what they think are full or accurate answers, but which aren't. This means you have to hunt out good sources of trustworthy information.

The better your search for insights, ideas and experiences, the better your solutions will be. And the likelihood is that the more you find out about the world, the more your goals will change. It's unlikely you'll find such things on your own doorstep, otherwise you would have already stumbled across them by now. This means that you will have to search in unknown territory, talk to strangers, and interrogate unfamiliar ideas and possibilities.

Learning facts isn't enough, you have to learn the 'doing' skills; how to think, how to plan, and how to put plans into action.

Your family and present friends may not be very helpful when it comes to you designing and making major changes in your life. You can ask of course, *and should*, but don't expect too much. If they could have helped before now, they probably would have. They've been busy running their own lives. *It's going to have to come from you.*

You need to learn how to navigate through all the various systems that are out there to inform and advise you. Make yourself an expert scout and explorer.

The speed and quality of your progress in life will be directly related to how inventive you can be about finding new places, new people, and new situations to learn from.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these :

- **Overcoming shyness & building confidence**
- **Developing through new experiences**
- **Making the most of college**

## Effective learning techniques

Learn things as if you would have to teach them to somebody else. This will help you aspire to a real understanding and familiarity with the subject, and will help you to ask yourself searching questions of the things to be learnt.

To reach a professional standard, you should be practicing at least a couple of hours a day on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Don't kid yourself that you'll not improve at anything doing it once a week. You can't get any continuity.

The enthusiastic amateur practices for enjoyment two or three times a week. If you want to be a top professional, that has to become every day, and two or three times a day at that - not only for enjoyment, but for the enjoyment of seeing how far you can take it, how far you can push yourself, how far you can transform your specialism.

Music can keep you company and keep you awake while you're working alone. But un-plug the TV, the radio, the phone and even the doorbell when you need to invest time in your subject.

Starting anything new, like an exercise or sleep regime or an evening class, generally means temporary discomfort caused by the change of routine. You have to be prepared for this, and to bank on the fact that this initial discomfort will past fairly soon, and lead to much greater rewards.

Regimes and routines, any sort of patterns in the days and weeks, can be highly effective: offering security, and a sense of order and steady progression.

Whenever you are successful in achieving an important goal, no matter what, make a written note of how you achieved it.

Don't make learning any more isolating and lonely than it need be. Try to form study-teams and actively encourage each other through the difficult times.

Before training at something, take time out to prepare mentally so you will get the most out of yourself during each session.

During training, be prepared to take 5 minutes out to improve your mood or attitude. You need to be 100% committed. You may not be successful in turning around every wrong mood right away, but you'll increasingly get the hang of it.

While training, experiment with focusing on different kinds of feelings or thoughts. Which of them gets the best from you?

Even in training, commit yourself to the highest quality of effort, otherwise you will unwittingly be learning to give only 75% of yourself.

Work on holding total focus for short periods and try to gradually increase the time. The ultimate goal is to have total concentration and connection throughout your entire performance. Leading athletes achieve their best results when they focus completely on their performance rather than on the outcome.

Thorough preparation is the key. Make sure practice is as realistic as possible.

The really good doers are really good thinkers, too. The best people spend as much time on more planning and mentally rehearsing their game plan before putting it into operation. That's very true even in something as apparently physical and action-oriented such as sports and athletics.

Your mental-imagery should be viewing your world and your performance from the inside, not the out. i.e. Imagine you are actually performing the skill and feeling the action. It might take a year's daily practice of such imagery before you can go through your whole routine in your mind without losing a beat.

You've got to be prepared to invest in yourself and what you're aiming for. This requires you saying *No* to the 3rd pint of beer because you've got stuff to do the next day that's more important than that beer.

Self-motivation is the key to the development of talent. What would motivate you to learn what you need to?

If you practice a new habit twice a day, by the end of the year you will have put that habit into practice more than 700 times. The cumulative effects of such positive action can be awesome. The Japanese call this approach 'kaisen': the effort to improve a little each day.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these :

- **Training, teaching & coaching**
- **Different thinking techniques**
- **Avoiding unhelpful habits**