

Didn't We Almost Learn It All – Ourselves.



We live in an age where vast treasuries of knowledge are available to almost anyone at the click of a button. No one seems to have any monopoly on any particular body of knowledge anymore. Just Google or Youtube it, and you'll have tons of answers. Not to mention sites like "Ask", "Wikipedia", "Ehow" and so many others. Indeed, the challenge is not a lack of information, it's how to extract the *relevant* information. Even after we've extracted what's actually relevant, we might still have a hard time making sense of it simply because of the sheer volume that's available.

That being the situation, people are starting to have the attitude that "You can't teach me anything. I can find out all I need about any subject". Sounds familiar? Have you entertained such thoughts, or had such attitudes? Know of others who have? My guess is the answers are probably "Yes". Do you think that's true? We need to keep learning, growing and reproducing ourselves. Here are four pointers for how we can do that.

1. The need for an individual "storehouse" of knowledge.
2. The need for analysis and synthesis of that "storehouse" of knowledge.
3. The need to develop unconscious competence in a wide array of subjects and skills.
4. The advantages of having an external coach, consultant or mentor to assist in the process.

1. The need for an individual "storehouse" of knowledge.

There has been much emphasis placed on the need to elevate the level of creativity of most people. While this is of course welcome and necessary, it would augur well for us if we recognize that, unlike the Creator of the Universe, we do not have the ability to make something out of nothing. In other words, we need to have some basic material and tools before we



can start to "create" something. I need to say this because I have observed that a number of "creativity" thrusts are aimed even at preschool children! We don't need to teach children how to be creative, they are naturally creative, and they model their creativity on us, their models. There are times and seasons when we need to actually stock up a little on information, otherwise the kids would not have anything to be creative *with*! Even if you're a senior business leader, you do not know everything. Worse, you do not know what you do not know. Many of us fall into the trap, the subtle trap, of thinking that we already know all there is to know, or at least we know where to go if we need the "mundane" details. I recommend we stop that, and recognize that, in many areas, even in our so-called areas of expertise, there are probably many sectors where we would be just like preschool kids were we to venture into them.

As we mature, our “storehouse” of knowledge ought to be growing as well. In fact, I am somewhat amused whenever I hear the phrase “Think out of the box”. I don’t “think out of the box”, I just *grow* my box! Are you continuously growing your “storehouse” of information that you think is relevant and of interest to you? Alan Weiss calls this increasing your intellectual firepower. Don’t worry about your brains maxing out. Some scientists have estimated that if we learned a new thing every second, day and night, our “hard drives” would be full only after 3 million years! Leaders have no excuse not heaping up new knowledge by the day. It enriches your leadership experience by giving you a rich source of analogies to draw on, and allows you many options for creating illustrations in order to explain something else that might not exactly be related, but with which there are some similarities.

2. The need for analysis and synthesis of that “storehouse” of knowledge.



We are very good at analysis. Dividing large volumes of data into manageable chunks and figuring out what they mean, what the data is really telling us. What we may not be so good at is synthesis – putting two and three together to see the big picture. It so often happens that when we actually do that, we might discover that we have been building the road very efficiently, but the road is headed the wrong way! Fortunately, or unfortunately as the case may be, there are many resources out there that can actually

help to automate the analysis, and in some cases, the synthesis, of the data we possess. This of course makes it easier for us. Having said that, we still need to process the data on our own, so that we may draw our own conclusions. Here, I am not just referring to tons of business data, but also to the treasury of knowledge that lies within us.

There is also the large body of knowledge residing in our people, which we ought to draw on if we are worth our salt as business leaders. “Knowledge Management” seeks to do just that. In effect, “Knowledge Management” would be delighted if we could “wet-wire” our brains together in a grid and make knowledge-sharing, knowledge analysis and knowledge synthesis so much easier!

Pause here and reflect. Are you constantly analyzing and synthesizing the knowledge that already resides in you with new knowledge that comes in daily? Does that give you fresh insights into how to better your business? Again, to quote Alan Weiss, “I’m constantly surprised at how stupid I was two weeks ago”. Are we able to say the same thing? If not, it’s time for some input, digesting and reflecting!

3. The need to develop unconscious competence in a wide array of subjects and skills.

I know that there are many proponents for “Just-in-time”, “relevant” and other approaches where managing knowledge is concerned, and they are of course right in their own way. What do you think, can business leaders be like that? In fact, can anyone be like that? I have heard PhDs say things like “Outside my area of specialty,

I'm just a layman". How can that be possible? How could anyone lead such a boring life? Does that also mean that the "layman" is seriously lacking where his "storehouse" of knowledge is concerned? I hope not!



Developing unconscious competence in as many areas of the business you're in ought to be the number one priority for you as a business leader. How else can you focus on visioning, giving direction, formulating the best strategy, imparting a sense of common purpose? How do you do that when you're bogged down by the million-and-one things constantly seeking your attention?

We need to remember that unconscious competence takes time to be developed. The more iterations we do rightly, the firmer the connections in our brain become, and soon we no longer need to think about them. We need to become exponents in as many areas as possible so that we can do our real jobs. Remember to get external reviews to make sure you're not relearning the wrong things, though!

Ponder. How many things are you really good at in your business? Do you need to get really good at a few more?

4. The advantages of having an external coach, consultant or mentor to assist in the process.

Having a "Third-eye view" is essential if you are going to remain profitable for the long haul. This can easily be done by engaging someone who has no idea of what you are doing, but who is at the same time senior enough in his core business to be able to bring fresh insights into yours.

Is it important for you to engage one?

Conclusion.

I trust you do know that you do need to become good at many things, and great at a few. As you grow, aim to become great at more and more things, and move on to become a master at a few things, and so on. Realize that all knowledge is interconnected, and that you can always learn something useful from something seemingly totally and utterly unrelated, and use that to better your business. If you do need to switch tracks suddenly, at least you'll have a much shorter learning curve and you'll be able to hit the ground running.

