

Get Smart & Stay Smart in 15 Minutes Per Day

Add continuous learning to your routine.

By: *Nancy A. Shenker*

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Doing business in a knowledge saturated society requires us to stay sharp and keep up with all the latest information shaping our world and our industries. Unfortunately, the discipline of regularly exercising our brains and growing our capabilities often wanes right after we throw our mortarboards in the air and enter the real world.

And yet, we lament our cerebral shortcomings. “Who has time to read?” “I can’t keep up.” “I don’t learn as fast as I used to.” “My memory is shot.” Many of these are common complaints of busy business people. Without the threat of a failing grade or detention, we have no significant incentive to learn and stretch. While busy business owners may not have much time to devote to their own continuing education, there are ways to stay smart in less than 15 minutes per day. Many local business people have made a concerted effort to get smart and stay smart, building continuous learning into their hectic routines. We spoke with a few who directly attribute their business success to their ongoing commitment to “homework.”

Book Groups, Book Bags, and Notebooks

Marilyn Volpe, president and CEO of The Madison Consulting Group, Inc., says, “I’m in a book club, and we have selected both business books, (e.g., *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell) and non-business books, (e.g., a biography of Katherine Graham), to discuss and apply to our own businesses and lives.” She also picks up magazines that are targeted to completely different industries, and always looks for stories of business success or consumer trends to apply to her own business and clients. Interview, Rolling Stone, and Architectural Digest are just a few of the magazines on Volpe’s regular reading list. Volpe developed several new business ideas by reading *New York Magazine*. She created programs for female attorneys after seeing a special feature about that target group. She also picked up interesting facts about the Yankees to help with her prospecting in Major League Baseball.

Finding time to read can be as easy as learning to pack properly before heading out of your home or office. Lisa Jacobson, founder and CEO of Inspirica, a Manhattan-based global tutoring and test preparation company, is a strong believer in the concept of “self-tutoring” for entrepreneurs. Although Jacobson does occasionally attend formal conferences, she views every hour of her day as a potential learning opportunity. “I always keep reading for the week - a pile about six inches thick of articles, inspiration, and other relevant and provocative information - in my bag,” she says. “If I have to wait for an appointment or in a long line, I use that time to read.” Jacobson read an article about college graduates who are having difficulty finding employment. Realizing that more people would probably be applying to graduate school, she built a tutoring program for graduate admission exams.

Classrooms, Conferences, Conversations, and Communities

While a quick dose of information is useful, it is also worth the time investment to get yourself some more formal training. The most obvious place of learning is the classroom or auditorium (or hotel ballroom, via events and conferences). Many individuals and business owners still learn best in these types of environments, and find the time to register for classes and join peer advisory groups.

Tony Corretto, Co-CEO of PNT Marketing Services is a member of the Entrepreneurs Organization (EO), and has taken advantage of some of the formal coursework the group offers. What were his favorite classes? “I’d have to say it’s a tossup between EO/MIT’s “Birthing of Giants” (BOG) entrepreneurial education program, from which I graduated in 1999, and Dan Sullivan’s Strategic Coach program, in which I’m currently enrolled and in the third year. Both have helped me increase my nuts-and-bolts knowledge of how to run a business, increased my free time, helped me to delegate more effectively, and boosted our sales and net income. Our sales are up over four-fold since I graduated from BOG in ‘99, and up more than 33% since I started the Strategic Coach program, so they’ve been very effective programs for me.” So, while you’re planning your summer vacation, consider all the options for continuous learning. Pack some reading materials in your bag, start up some interesting conversations, join a group, and get to work on growing some new brain cells and your bottom line!

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