

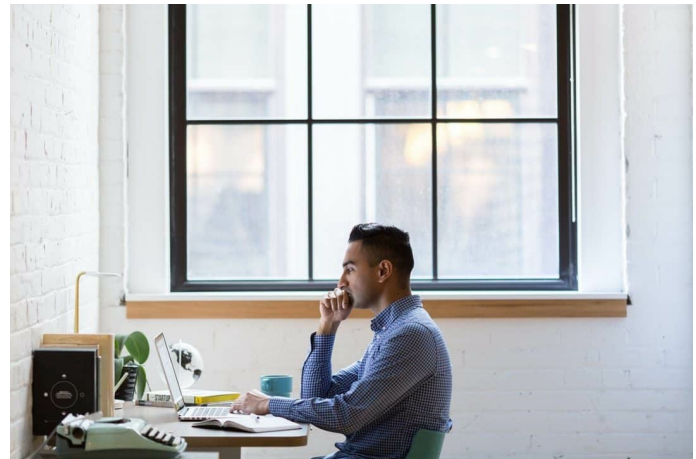


How To Get Ahead: Self-Directed Learning

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Self-directed learners, or autodidacts, possess the capability to chart their futures in ways that can give them an advantage over their less ambitious contemporaries. I should know, I am one!

Back in the day, I didn't have the Internet to support me. Yes, I did it the old fashioned way — I bought books and read them. It's laughable by today's standards, but, back in 1988, I spent countless hours in the New York City Library doing the research needed to complete my first book... and, it was that first book that launched my career.



Needless to say, I remain an autodidact to this day. That said, I would like to offer you these 5 tips that can help you become a self-directed learner, too:

1. **Follow your passion:** The first thing you need to do when becoming an autodidact is to identify the subjects that turn you on and then dedicate yourself to expanding your knowledge of those subjects. You don't have to choose just one, either. In fact, I like to let one topic direct me to the next one. It provides a broader foundation and expands my knowledge in ways that a laser-like focus on only one subject may not.

2. **Consume vivaciously.** Once you know what you want to learn go after it! Your knowledge expansion can come from a variety of sources. Sure, the Web can be a terrific resource. But, it's not the only one. I like to attend seminars and seek out communities of like-minded people that allow me to share my knowledge with others and learn from those that I share with, too.

3. **Go wide:** If you're a regular reader of this column, you know that I cover a wide-range of subjects and often work to tie seemingly unrelated subjects together to form new insights and expand the point of view on a given topic. As a leadership and strategy consultant, I challenge myself to explore subjects that have nothing to do with business. I find that by learning about such things as science, art and architecture can give me fresh, new perspectives on my client's organizational challenges. So, "go wide" with your thirst for knowledge and you just may discover connections to your core interests that you never new existed.

4. **Practice what you've learned, as you learn it:** As mentioned, I like to seek out opportunities to discuss what I'm learning as I learn it. My friends will tell you that I'm a bit different in this way. It's not unusual for me to break-out a conversation on something I read in a psychology journal in the middle of a cook-out. Interestingly, though, it's by hearing how people react to the topic that helps me to form my opinion on what I'm learning, which becomes a valuable tool to informing how I may approach the subject over time.

5. **Connect the dots to extend your mastery.** Certainly, there is intrinsic value in everything that we learn. But, it's by combining this knowledge in new and interesting ways that can really lead to breakthrough thinking. Work to connect and combine the dots in insightful ways and you just may contribute to the evolution of your field of interest. As Peter Drucker, famous business guru, once said: *"innovation is nothing more that the re-application of existing technology."*

To close, becoming an autodidact is a lot of work. You have to be committed to do whatever it takes to learn what you want to learn. But, it's a lot of fun, too. The investment that you make in learning pays huge dividends in the horizons that you expand for yourself and the expertise that you develop and leverage as you advance your career.

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