



## Don't Outsource Your Knowledge

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Experts who track the world's body of knowledge claim that it took from 0 A.D. to 1500 A.D. for the world's prior knowledge to double. Now, with advances in technology and the proliferation of content on the Internet, they claim that the world's knowledge is doubling every year. They forecast that by 2020, the world's knowledge will double between every 10 hours to 10 weeks depending on whose forecast you read.

We are all experiencing this exponential increase in messages, postings, blogs, articles, websites, pictures, video, and other streams of data. With the imminent connection of data-capturing devices to every facet of our lives, including our bodies, there is clearly no end in sight for this information explosion. Yet is all this information really making us smarter? Is access to so much data purely good news?

I prefer to see the good in things, but I also like to confront reality. As the amount of information increases, so does the time required to take it all in. As a result, many people are experiencing lower levels of productivity. They repeatedly divert their attention to incoming messages, scanning postings, and updating their technology as their apps, devices, preferences, and profiles require daily maintenance. Some people have become so conditioned to communicating in short messages that allocating a long span of uninterrupted time to something like reading a book is unthinkable. Other casualties of shorter attention spans include shallower relationships, shorter-term thinking, less patience, lower quality, and greater acceptance of mediocre standards.

Yet the consequence I fear most is that our reliance on external information makes us dumber. Previous generations took time to read, learn, understand, and apply the knowledge they had access to. We don't as much. We take it for granted. We know we can find the answer to most any question we have on a moment's notice through a simple voice command or with a few keystrokes. But having access to information isn't the same as knowing and understanding it within ourselves.

Consider a couple of trends. The English language continues to grow, but studies find that our current generation has a lower vocabulary compared to previous generations by as much as 60 percent. Fewer and fewer people are able to repair their own car, dishwasher, or even a dripping faucet. People now pick up a mobile phone to call someone as their tool of choice to fix something rather than a wrench or screwdriver. Time that could be spent developing new skills and acquiring value-adding knowledge is now spent keeping up with current events, being entertained, and living through the experiences of others.

On the surface we may take pride in our increasingly sophisticated resources, but on closer inspection we are dumbing down in many ways. Whether you consider our diminishing vocabulary, trade skills, or intrinsic knowledge, we are outsourcing our knowledge to domains that are outside of us. We have embraced contemporary social norms that suggest we should work smarter, not harder. We have bought into focusing on our strengths rather than developing in our weaker areas. We have become entitled to doing that which is comfortable, convenient, and enjoyable at the expense of what could be more valuable. Perhaps we are making excuses for becoming lazy?

While I'm a huge fan of leveraging the benefits of technology, I'm wary of dumbing down. If you share my concern, follow these four guiding principles:



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- Realize that the less you personally know and are capable of doing, the less valuable you are. Don't outsource your knowledge or let your experiences be conceptual. Commit time to reading non-fiction books and articles. Attend educational seminars and training programs. Obtain your professional certification. Seek wise counsel from people who don't merely know what to do, but also how to do it. Put your knowledge into practice. Substitute being informed and entertained with being wise and experienced.
- Change your routine and get out of your comfort zone. Set new goals that require courage and action. Put yourself at risk of making a mistake or looking foolish. Try something different to gain new experiences. Take on a special assignment, drive a new initiative, formulate a new partnership, or start a new project. Build a new product or service. Be creative and grow in areas you never knew existed.
- Turn off your distractions. Give your email, social media, and messages prolonged breaks. Allocate your newly discovered free time to building your skills, performing value-adding work, and cultivating deeper relationships. Rather than turning your attention to your mobile device every time you get a free moment, strike up a meaningful face-to-face conversation. Help one of your colleagues. Reflect on what you are doing or could be doing that would be more valuable. Put more time into your work product to increase its reliability, quality, value, and meaning.
- Engage in the deeper details of your surroundings. Get into the specifics of what goes on in your work, home, and community. Learn how to use what you sell. Understand how to repair what you buy. Get involved in causes that are worth contributing to. Don't be put off by complex ideas. If a doctor can learn hundreds of treatments and engineers can learn hundreds of formulas, you can learn how things work, shape how people think, and add more value to whatever domain you choose to engage in. Your brain has tremendous capacity. Use it.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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