

# EDUCATION IS FREEDOM

The Future Is in Your Hands



JAMES W. KEYES

# **EDUCATION IS FREEDOM**

The Future Is in Your Hands

(Summary)

**JAMES W. KEYES**

*To my father, who taught me to fish.*

**Mankind must *Live to Learn...***  
**Before we will *Learn to Live***






**This is a summary of the book *EDUCATION IS FREEDOM: The Future Is In Your Hands*. While this summary does contain key points from the book, the ideas found herein are expanded on in greater detail in the book's complete version.**

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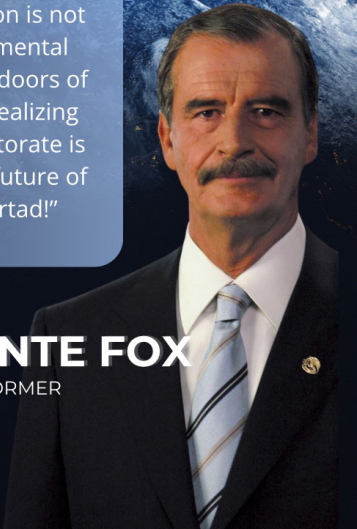
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"My 2005 Horatio Alger Classmate, Jim Keyes, is a living example of the American Dream. His roadmap to success through lifelong learning will take you to infinity and beyond!"

# BUZZ ALDRIN

BRIGADIER GENERAL, APOLLO 11

A portrait of President Vicente Fox Quesada, a man with a mustache wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a striped tie. He is positioned in the lower right of the frame, with the Earth's horizon and blue atmosphere visible in the background.

"Jim Keyes' book, Education is Freedom, reinforces the idea that education is not merely a privilege but a fundamental human right, a key to unlocking doors of opportunity and a pathway to realizing one's dreams. An educated electorate is an absolute prerequisite to the future of democracy. Educación es Libertad!"

## **PRESIDENT VICENTE FOX**

PRESIDENT VICENTE QUESADA FOX, FORMER  
PRESIDENT OF MEXICO

## FOREWORD

By Stedman Graham

*Bestselling Author, Businessman, and Speaker*

Sitting at a dinner, over twenty years ago, I found that the gentlemen seated next to me shared a common interest in education. The words he shared with me during that dinner caught my attention. He boldly proclaimed: “*Education is Freedom!*” Here was this CEO, the leader of one of the world’s most recognizable brands, 7-Eleven, acknowledging the power of education to change the world. That day, Jim Keyes and I became fast friends. We shared a love for education and a belief that everyone, armed with a good education, can accomplish anything in this wonderful world in which we live.

Jim is, and always has been, committed to the belief that every person deserves an education. Armed with that education, anything is possible. That message is more important now than at any other time in our history. We have experienced the Industrial Age and the Machine Age. Now, we are in the Information Age. Today, we have so much access to this information. There has never been a better time for advancement. When we learn how to take such content and apply it to our talents, skills, and abilities—the things that make us who we are—we can achieve amazing results.

We can all be reminded of the power of learning to transform lives...even our own.

This is why I am very excited about Jim’s work and commitment to empowering people to recognize that *education* really is *freedom*. It is an honor and a pleasure to be part of this movement.

## INTRODUCTION

# EDUCATION IS FREEDOM: A HANDBOOK FOR HUMANITY

Whatever the circumstances of your birth, none of us are born free. As a child, we could not survive alone in the jungle or on the streets. We need to learn to have the necessities of survival. That reality doesn't change as we age. We must *learn* to be free. This doesn't mean merely learning the basics. Yes, we all must learn to read, write, and do basic arithmetic. True freedom requires that we continue to learn and grow our knowledge. Knowledge alone isn't enough. We must develop wisdom for our personal growth and for the future of mankind.

The pages ahead will trace the pathway for education to develop our individual and collective *wisdom*. We will address the *what*, *how*, and *why* of learning. You may know much of what you might discover in these pages, but it is intended to serve as a reminder or an awakening of the critical success factors that help us learn. The objective is to inspire us all to keep learning because *wisdom* (a higher degree of knowledge) is the lifeblood of a civil society and the oxygen that fuels our personal enlightenment.

To my young readers: the future is yours. I encourage you to fuel your dreams with learning.

There is much debate about the importance of college or advanced education. Don't be fooled. The more you learn, the more

you can do. Whether a trade that requires vocational training or a professional career that requires a graduate degree, continued learning is essential to be the best at what you do. The more you learn, the more freedom you will enjoy to pursue your dreams.

From the first moments of putting pen on paper, I hoped to make this book an extension of my dream in building the Education is Freedom Foundation. That dream is a lifelong mission to help each of us recognize our full potential by taking advantage of the power of education to improve our lives and that of those around us. My mission is to inspire readers to believe in themselves and address the *what, how, and why* of education.



# SECTION I

# **LIVING TO LEARN**

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**A**s infants, we first learned to crawl and then to walk. Through knowledge, humans learned to drive and even to fly. We only learn to soar through wisdom. Learning powers our journey through life. The wisdom from that learning allows us to soar as free as an eagle above the rest. We can choose to live a simple life, learning only what we need to survive. Or, we can pursue a path of lifelong learning and enjoy all that this wonderful life has to offer. The choice is yours.

In your flight through life, education is the wind beneath your wings. Each of us is blessed with a beautiful mind that can elevate us beyond our imagination. Learning is a lifelong endeavor. But it comes with a choice—to be passive observers and allow knowledge to be influenced by what we see and hear alone or to be active learners that seek knowledge to help us grow.

Our environment and upbringing may influence this choice. Our socioeconomic reality, family circumstances, or any number of factors can impact our potential, but rarely defines it. The obstacles are many and the excuses are easy. To some, it may seem impossible because there is always someone or something in the way, seemingly trying to take away what we have. No one can take away what you learn, what you know, and what you understand. It is, in many respects, the only true wealth that we have while on this earth. The simple truth is that education will provide more options and more choices in life.

If you *live to learn*...then you will be on your way toward *learning to live*.

## CHAPTER 1

# EDUCATION IS FREEDOM: FINDING THE SPARK

*“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.”*

George Washington Carver

Lifelong learning is a journey. It begins with putting your curiosity into high gear. During this one small segment of your lifelong journey, we will explore many tales of adventure, opportunity, and, most importantly, freedom. This freedom isn't exclusive to one person, one sex, one race, or even one country. It is a story of freedom and opportunity that we can share and replicate. It can be *your* story. It can be *our* story.

Let's begin with an example: the story of a young child whose experience many millions of children across the globe have endured. Growing up without running water with a wood-burning stove and little to eat, the child could be in the streets of Brazil, the outback of Australia, or the wilds of Africa. Instead, this little boy grew up in a small town in central Massachusetts in a family with too little money and too many children to feed. The child's father and grandfather built the family's simple frame house on a humble plot of land. They didn't get around to installing plumbing or central heat but hoped to afford it one day. The challenges of that life were too much for the young boy's mother, who left for another man and the “luxury” of

a mobile home. The little boy struggled to understand his mother's unhappiness. The place wasn't fancy, but it was home.

There were no expectations of the child beyond staying out of trouble or one day securing a job at the local factory. His brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and pretty much everyone in this small mill town had followed a similar career trajectory. Many of the boy's friends and family quit school, married early, and worked in the factory. His siblings all encouraged their younger brother to pursue a different path. His parents didn't know how or why, but they too agreed that education would change his life. It did. We all have a story, but this one was mine.

I was that little boy, and somehow managed to beat the odds. My father often said, "Get an education, son. It's the only thing they can't take away from you." I always wondered about this fatalistic advice but have heard many others echo it over the years. Why was my father so negative about those who would try to take something away? Why was he frustrated with his life? In my young eyes, he had it all—a home, a great kid to have as his sidekick, a car, a job in the local factory, all the food and drink he needed. What more could one want?

True, we lacked running water in the house, but the pump outside delivered some of the coldest, freshest water I've ever tasted. True, we lacked a few creature comforts like central heat or air conditioning, but the wood-burning stove made it quite toasty during winter and the screens on our windows allowed for a nice breeze in the summer. What, I wondered, did my dad feel we were missing?

I remember asking him this once while fishing for lake trout at a local pond: "What more do you want, Dad? Is it money or things that we need to make us happy?"

He paused, surprised I had asked such a deep question. "No, son," he said. "It is freedom. I want the freedom to travel, the freedom to show you the world and to open your eyes to new opportunities and new adventures. The world is a glorious place, and I feel

that we are trapped in part by my job and by the need to focus on necessities to live. I don't need money to be happy, but I do need freedom. I want that freedom for you, son. I wish I could show you the path, but I don't know how. All I know is that education seems to be the one common denominator that separates those who are free from those who are trapped in their own reality. Someone can take your money, your things, or your job, but they can't take away what you know. With that knowledge, you can replace anything lost, you can be free to explore the world, and you will be beholden to no one. It is freedom, son, that you should seek, and the absolute key to freedom is to learn as much as you can, every day of your life."

I didn't understand this advice, but I did take to heart the importance of education. I knew that I wanted more for my own life and developed a thirst for knowledge. As I saw it, the more I knew, the more I *could* do. My father taught me to fish, literally. While other parents gave their child fish on a plate, my father taught me to catch them. And catch them I did. If I had a rod and a body of water, no one was going hungry on my watch.

It took many years to realize that adversity was an advantage. It gave me strength and a higher sense of awareness of the world around me. In many ways, it gave me freedom. My freedom came from within. I was free from the inside out. I was free in my mind, and that sense of freedom turned into a life of learning. That life of learning turned into a life of adventure and the foundation for this book.

Despite the hostile environment or constant challenges of a broken home, quickly I learned that success breeds success. As my grades improved due to my obsession with books, so did the encouragement. Any academic success I enjoyed did not materialize because of natural ability but because of my commitment to hard work. I may not have been smarter than anyone else in class, but I was determined to outwork them. This academic determination led to success throughout my educational journey, which included degrees

from the College of the Holy Cross and the Columbia School of Business and a year abroad at the University of London. The combination of this academic journey and a commitment to hard work created career opportunities.

In less than twenty years post-graduation, I had the privilege of leading two iconic brands. The first: as CEO of 7-Eleven, I oversaw a global public company and iconic brand with more than forty thousand stores. Then, I served as Chairman and CEO of Blockbuster. Education clearly fueled this odds-defying journey. Looking back, I realized that if I could do this, then anyone could. I've spent much of my life sharing the message that education combined with lifelong learning is the pathway to freedom. Despite obstacles, hurdles, and challenges, learning is at our fingertips and available to us all.

This awakening to the power of learning is certainly not new. Nelson Mandela called education "the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I had heard these words of wisdom, but they didn't sink in until a fateful encounter occurred one day on the Columbia University campus. I had been invited back to the business school to guest lecture for a course on leadership. Walking across campus in a suit and tie, briefcase in hand, a sense of pride and accomplishment welled up in me. Feeling a bit full of myself, I encountered a young man as he left the business school. The young African-American student, arms full of books, sported a T-shirt that stopped me in my tracks.

Three simple words blared from his shirt: "Education Is Freedom." The brilliance of these three words was the spark that ignited my awakening. I caught his attention, shook his hand, and introduced myself. I explained that his T-shirt had made an impression. I told him: "That's me! *I* am a product of education. Education is my freedom and has changed my life...so I'm grateful to you for proudly wearing that shirt and opening my eyes to this reality...that I am who I am, what I am, and where I am because of education, and I will be forever grateful for that awareness."

I realized, for the first time, that my learning journey was still very much ahead of me. I realized that my degree was a license to learn and that I needed to use that license to continue to learn. I realized that the responsibility for that continued learning commitment was mine.

Since the beginning of time, both education and freedom began with the individual. That then leads to three extremely important questions to address:

1. *Why must we learn?* Learning is life and growth. We must learn to collaborate to be productive members of society. To understand and appreciate cultural diversity; and to recognize that our character or identity is what we become to the world we face.
2. *How do we learn?* As humans, our mind is capable of critical thinking. But that skill often goes unexercised. Driving critical thinking is our native curiosity that makes us look around and wonder “why.” Sprinkle in some creativity, and we are ready to have fun while learning.
3. *What must we learn?* Before beginning to learn, we must discard the obstacles of our own development. The ability to adapt to change, the confidence to do something about it, and the clarity to see through the darkness to the light and beyond are all things we must learn to do before we can begin our true learning journey.

## **CREATING YOUR DESTINY: THE “LIVE TO LEARN C-SUITE”**

It took many years for my own road map to freedom to come into focus. During this journey, I developed a road map to self-determination and to freedom. I wanted to help others find their own path

to academic, professional and even personal success. The path offers nine critical success factors that are the heart of this book and a valuable road map to help you, the reader, form your own learning journey.

# LIVE TO LEARN C-SUITE

WHAT TO LEARN	CHANGE	CONFIDENCE	CLARITY
HOW TO LEARN	CRITICAL THINKING	CURIOSITY	CREATIVITY
WHY TO LEARN	COLLABORATION	CULTURAL LITERACY	CHARACTER

The Live to Learn C-Suite includes:

### What to Learn

1. **Change:** embracing change and growing from adversity.
2. **Confidence:** the inner strength that makes us believe in ourselves.
3. **Clarity:** making the complex simple through communication.



## How to Learn

1. **Critical Thinking:** the algebra of thought.
2. **Curiosity:** discovering the joy of wonder.
3. **Creativity:** enabling our inner child; this is intelligence at play.

## Why We Learn

1. **Collaboration:** leveraging the power of others working together.
2. **Cultural Literacy:** growing from the richness of diversity around us.
3. **Character:** establishing trust in ourselves and integrity among all.

This simple road map, while easy to outline, is challenging to navigate. It requires a spark to ignite the determination and persistence we need to overcome our own mental obstacles that hold us back. Perhaps this book will be that spark!

*Education Is Freedom* hopes to awaken the awareness that your personal freedom is directly related to your knowledge and learning; highlight already available technological resources that can enhance our education and knowledge; and provide a road map for us to take personal responsibility for our own learning and self-determination. The freedom to learn is in your hands. Your own future is in your hands.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE STATE OF EDUCATION: MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK FOR YOU

*“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”*

*Alvin Toffler*

**A**cross the globe, education has expanded the knowledge base of the world, yet we still face a learning crisis both domestic and international. While many countries have significantly increased access to education, attending school isn't the same thing as learning. Millions of children reach young adulthood without even the most basic skills, like proficient reading, calculating correct change from a sale, or understanding a transportation schedule.

In an age where young people are the fastest growing segment of the world's population, data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) reveals that an estimated 263 million children are out of school, overwhelmingly so in the least developed countries.<sup>1</sup> The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity reported that a far larger number, 825 million young people worldwide, will not have basic literacy, numerical, and digi-

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<sup>1</sup> “263 Million Children and Youth Are Out of School,” UNESCO UIS, July 15, 2016, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/263-million-children-and-youth-are-out-school>.

tal knowledge to satisfy the jobs needed by the year 2030. Without some form of government or financial intervention, we face a serious risk of global instability and a constraint on worldwide economic growth.

Addressing today's massive global education crisis will require the development of a more modern approach to aid delivery built on public-private partnership and a results-based financing model that rewards political and financial leadership. Business is the ultimate source of demand for an educated workforce and there is an important role for corporations to be more proactive in support for public education. Through proactive intervention will we overcome obstacles to equitable access to learning. Equitable access must also address the realities of gender inequities. There is much more work to do.

Our society and its needs have changed. We've moved from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, and while today's educated workforce requires a very different kind of education, the system is unlikely to respond quickly enough to address these needs in the future. Our education system and even the fundamental methods of teaching and learning have not kept pace with the necessary changes of today's society. Change is hard...and change is slow.

## **THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN EDUCATION**

With the many challenges confronting public education today, many simply give up. We've all heard their reasons:

"I can't afford school."

"The man is keeping me down."

"My teachers are incompetent."

"The dog ate my homework."

Urban America has been struggling for years, and public education has not been the requisite antidote for poverty. Persevering in education is not about waiting for miracle solutions. Many promis-

ing innovations are on the horizon, but it will take generations to transform the system. We must acknowledge the many forces pushing against fundamentally improved education systems around the world, but as individuals we must also never give up.

The power is in the individual. The student will face decisions regarding the time, effort, and investment to gain the desired degree of learning. Many have questioned the value of education and suggest there may not be a reasonable return on investment. Going to college, seeking vocational training, or choosing to become an entrepreneur are all personal decisions. When speaking with young people contemplating one of those paths, I often break it down into the following advice.

First, I advise them to pursue what they enjoy. Whether serving as a plumber or a brain surgeon, the successful individual must strive to have a career that they love. Otherwise, their work will become tedious despite the potential remuneration. Continued learning is fundamental to their success.

Second, I advise them to consider the odds of success in achieving any career goal. Some point to Michael Dell or Steve Jobs, both of whom dropped out of school to build billion-dollar enterprises. LeBron James didn't attend college but beat the odds to make professional basketball a career. These individuals were highly successful but also were the anomalies. With advanced educational degrees, the probability of success is higher for most people.

The third piece of advice I offer is to give yourself a chance. Most of us have no idea what we want to be when we are in high school. College provides the time and broadens the awareness necessary for a young person to make informed choices about the rest of their life. The community college network or availability of state-funded universities can significantly reduce the cost while providing the additional runway that young people often need to determine their true passion. We must avoid being intimidated by the "sticker price" because of the increasing availability of scholarship support.

Strive for the best with confidence that the fallback options will always be available.

Many vocations do not require a college degree yet provide significant economic reward and personal gratification. Becoming a builder, a plumber, a welder, or even a pilot are all essential roles in our society. While none of those jobs require a college diploma, they require a high degree of education and hands-on training. The most important consideration for any occupational or academic endeavor is that we *do not quit*. Stay the course and keep learning.

## CHAPTER 3

# LIVING THE DREAM: UNLOCKING YOUR FUTURE

*“In America, with education and hard work, it really does not matter where you came from; it matters only where you are going.”*

*Condoleezza Rice*

The concept of the American dream is a crucial part of the ethos of American culture. It has been the beacon of hope for immigrants near and far, providing equal opportunity for those willing to take a chance, work hard, and command their own destiny. James Truslow Adams, in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*, first introduced the phrase “American dream.” During the darkest hours of the Depression, he provided hope for America, saying, “It is a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”<sup>2</sup> Neither education, nor freedom, nor the American dream are free; but if the currency is hard work and determination, then each of us has the resources needed for success. Even those on the other side of the world.

The idea of individual self-improvement is paramount to the American dream. That is why we tie this dream to educa-

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2 Thomas W. Adams, *The Epic of America* (New York, NY: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931).

tion and knowledge. No one will give us personal freedom or the American dream. Rather, it comes from within, through knowledge, education, and continued learning. The Chinese may never adopt the true principles of the American dream, but they have focused on self-improvement, its most critical element.

## **WHO LIVES THE AMERICAN DREAM?**

Let's explore some examples of those who embody the principles and live the American dream, as they are everywhere around us.

Indra Nooyi, former chair and CEO of PepsiCo, is another living example of the American dream. Growing up in India, she lived in a communal house with her parents and grandparents. Her grandfather would wake her up at dawn and feign poor vision, asking young Indra to read to him. This was his way of encouraging her to read.

Education became Nooyi's path to freedom. Growing up in Madras, her family expected she wed by the young age of nineteen and immediately start to build a family. When her sister enrolled in school, her mother threatened to starve herself unless she dropped out. Thankfully, she gave up after a few days. Nooyi's dedication to her studies landed her an opportunity to attend Yale School of Management. In 1994, she began her career and ended up at PepsiCo, rising through the ranks by demonstrating her dedication and profound knowledge of the business. She became the CEO in 2006 and was named chairman of PepsiCo in 2007, leading the giant beverage company to success over the next twelve years.

Though wealthy, Nooyi's freedom stems from her knowledge, which empowers her to pursue whatever path her heart desires. Nooyi is yet another example of how the American dream is not a race to accumulate wealth but rather a journey to find freedom.

So much of one's opportunity comes down to the way we see ourselves. Stedman Graham is a successful author, businessman, leader, and a close friend. He is also an inspirational force in edu-



cation. In his book *Identity: Your Passport to Success*, he speaks about his own journey of self-discovery. “I was a young 6-foot-6 black guy. What did everyone say I was? A basketball player. So, I was that,” he said, “I lived the label.”

Graham said he was angry at the system and had to hold in his fear, feeling like a victim in his own right. Then he experienced an awakening. “It wasn’t about race,” he said, “it was about me not knowing who I was and not having a process for becoming successful... I’d been told it was about race, but I suddenly realized that somebody had fed me a bill of goods, and I had bought into it. If I’d bought into the notion that it was about race, there was no way out—I would be trying to solve what the problem wasn’t.” I have had the pleasure of sitting in an audience, hearing Graham deliver his message of identity to an auditorium full of inner-city students of many ethnicities. From the wide eyes and nodding heads in the audience, it was clear that they too felt that life was acting upon them instead of feeling like they were in control. Graham emphasizes that *this* is the value of education—to let anyone establish their own identity through learning to become the person they want to be, not the person they are told they are.

While there are numerous ways to become shining examples of the American dream like Stedman Graham, education is the common denominator and the most foundational of options. You don’t have to rely upon others to gain knowledge. Our own personal initiative to gain knowledge is, arguably, the most powerful antidote for poverty.

As we dive deeper into the concepts and structure that fashion the complicated quilt of the American dream, we should look carefully at the many obstacles that stand in the way. It sounds so simple: provide better education for all and encourage individuals to learn. So, what’s stopping us, both society at large and the individual, from accessing the American dream? Let’s explore one of the greatest obstacles for society *and* for the individual—the influence of fear.

## CHAPTER 4

# NOTHING TO FEAR: LIGHT THE DARKNESS WITH KNOWLEDGE

*“Timendi causa est nescire.”*

*“Ignorance is the cause of fear.”*

*Seneca*

**W**e have all experienced fear at some point. It is an all-too-common emotion that can threaten our ability to experience happiness or joy. The good news is that we can manage fear, a wholly internal emotion that resides only in our minds. Each of us has a responsibility to ourselves and to our fellow citizens to disallow fear from becoming the reason we do not progress.

Fear comes in many forms, residing on both the macro and micro levels. We can fear as a person, as a family, or as a country. Our inability to manage fear on the personal level can be our greatest obstacle to fully experiencing the American dream. Sometimes, fear is contagious, quickly spreading to influence one person after the other in monumental ways. This collective fear can represent a grave threat to our freedom and democracy. During WWII, Winston Churchill recognized that fear was the tool of our enemies: “Your greatest fears are created by your imagination. Don’t give in to them.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt brought hope to the American people in his inaugural address. He is famous for his quote that remains a powerful admonishment even today. The president, hoping to psychologically boost the American people during the worst of the Great Depression, powerfully asserted, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Freedom itself, whether one’s personal freedom or that of a nation, depends on our ability to overcome fear. Roosevelt was addressing the negative cycle that gripped America at the time, but fear remains a continued challenge both individually and collectively.

We see the power of fear in our lives every day. War, crime, disease, and the economy are all topics that can generate fear and concern. In the hands of those with a motive or agenda, fear can be weaponized. It is a powerful tool to motivate or manipulate. What makes a child fear the dark? The unknown. Turn on the light, and their fear disappears once they realize no monster is in the room. Knowledge is that shining light. With knowledge we can manage our fear or eliminate it completely.

Shining a light on any issue is the best way to eliminate fear or diagnose the validity or urgency of any given threat. A politician appealing to a broad electorate has a choice: they can build a platform on a foundation of hope or they can use fear to encourage their constituents to rally around their cause. Historically, we’ve seen that hope will generally prevail in a democratic electorate, but we must recognize that fear can sway an electorate in surprising ways. Fear can cause inertia and leave the status quo in place. Our objective must be to reverse this cycle of fear using knowledge to create hope.

To extinguish fear, or at least prevent it from influencing our lives, we must first understand it.

## **THE CRIPPLING FUNCTION OF “CAVEMAN” FEAR**

Many types of fear exist through a variety of different influences. The better we are at recognizing them, the more adept we can be

to shield ourselves from their impact. However, one type of fear appears to influence us the most. The “caveman” fear, a practical fear born of self-preservation that generates a fight or flight response in all mammals. This type of fear can cause our instinctual brain to react in a way that is meant to help us survive the threat.

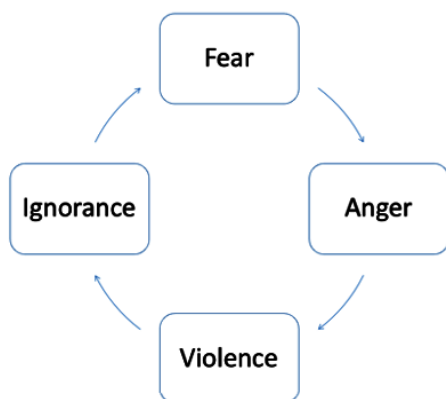
Fight or flight, in today’s world, is less necessary and could be self-destructive when dealing with the fear of an upcoming test or a boardroom presentation. When doubtful of our own knowledge, the instinctive “fight” may be manifested in irrational behaviors, defensiveness, or anger. Alternatively, that fear could trigger an instinctive “flight,” causing avoidance or denial of the challenge before us.

## **DEVELOPING YOUR AVIATOR BRAIN**

A pilot is trained to respond to in-flight emergencies. Every commercial pilot must undergo training to practice responses to emergency situations. They replace fear with knowledge and a conditioned response that evokes confidence. That confidence enhances our ability to excel in challenging times. When certain experiences or potential opportunities come along, our ability to manage fear becomes an asset rather than a liability.

The lesson here is that preparation leads to familiarity, shielding each of us from the adverse consequences of fear. The unknown will always cause anxiety and could potentially trigger a negative response. But the antidote to that anxiety is knowledge and preparation. Increasing one’s knowledge of the circumstance can generate calm and expel worries. Once we understand the unknown, we can replace fear with familiarity, allowing confidence to prevail.

Perhaps the advice of Yoda in *Star Wars* will ring true. “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.” The cycle looks something like this:



The human ego protects the illusion of right and wrong. It will sometimes default to militant ignorance, blocking our willingness to accept new information and triggering an emotional fight instinct that causes us to defend rather than to learn. When operating through ego, we care less about facts and instead we care more about what preserves the illusion of knowing what is true and real. The ego protects us from our own dark side, our fear of inadequacy or ignorance.

Throughout history, ignorance has produced the evil we do to ourselves, to others, and to our world. As a civilization we are at a critical juncture on the course of human evolution. The quality of life and the future of humanity will be determined by our ability to foster self-knowledge and wisdom. This premise is at the heart of our belief that education is freedom.

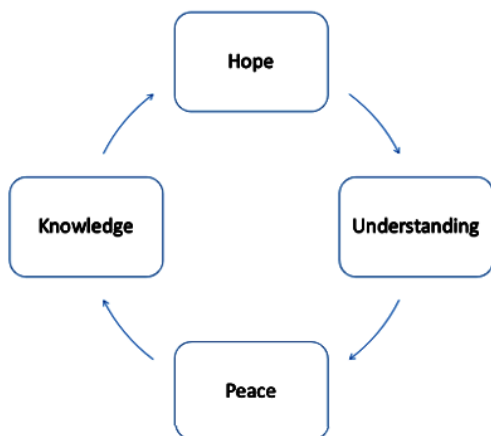
In a famous interview in 1987, Margaret Thatcher said, “There is no such thing as society. There is [a] living tapestry of men and women...and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves.” Our collective desire for the greater good becomes the bright light that will take away our fear.

*We can replace ignorance with knowledge...*

*We can replace despair with hope...*

*We can replace fear with understanding...*

*We can replace aggression with peace...*



Do these things, and the cycle will look more like this:

Self-determination of a people, must begin with “self.” We can take responsibility for our own destiny by doing our best to live our fullest lives and make our greatest contributions to the world around us.

In the words of Aristotle, “He who has overcome his fears will truly be free.” That is not to say it will be easy or come naturally. Fear is real, but as we begin to better understand ourselves and the forces that influence our decisions, we can replace fear with a shining light of opportunity.

# SECTION II

# **WHAT TO LEARN**

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**B**elow I will offer a formula to obliterate fear in its many manifestations. Overcoming fear is a prerequisite to a successful life. These first three critical success factors may help you chart the journey. They are *what* you must learn to be *able* to learn. They include:

- **Change:** I have a favorite expression, appropriate for anyone who wants to be CEO of their own life. *Change Equals Opportunity*. Acceptance of change and the ability to respond in a positive, proactive fashion is the biggest challenge; yet this is the single biggest opportunity for either an individual or an organization. Adversity does not define the individual, but one's response to adversity does. That response can separate winners from losers.
- **Confidence:** We all suffer from insecurity, making us weak and often unable to achieve our highest potential. Fear and insecurity lead to ignorance and failure. Knowledge is the best antidote because armed with information, confidence can prevail within anyone. To overcome the pervasive fear of failure that holds many of us back, I have adopted a favorite quote from Nelson Mandela: "I never lose. I either win or learn."
- **Clarity:** The ability to turn complex problems into understandable parts that can lead to simple solutions is the art of "clarity." Achieving simplicity is a difficult task, but it is essential to moving forward. The fundamental prerequisite for clarity is effective communication, both inbound communication (listening) and outbound communication (speaking). Clarity in both giving and receiving information is an essential element of learning and a prerequisite to our ultimate success.

These critical success factors define *what* we need to learn before progressing on our journey of lifelong learning. Each of the following chapters will increase your awareness, and that's where the learning begins.

## CHAPTER 5

# CHANGE: CHANGE EQUALS OPPORTUNITY

*“Ad Astra Per Aspera”*

*Latin for “To the stars through difficulties”*

*John James Ingalls*

**W**e have all experienced the pain of change. We have also likely experienced the joy that can accompany a positive change. It is easy to see how change, a constant in life, is a double-sided coin that can sometimes land your way and other times not. Regardless of how the coin falls, understanding change and responding to it in a healthy way can be a tremendous resource. I learned to embrace change and to recognize that change does equal opportunity. I decided to become the CEO of my own life by recognizing that it was my destiny to seize. No one, and I mean no one, was going to write my story but me.

As Albert Einstein was known to say, “The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” Change would become the driver of my personal and professional opportunity. Rather than being afraid of change, I was able to embrace it and see it for what it is—an opportunity to move forward. While seldom clear at the time, it is with hindsight that we can understand that change worked out to

our benefit and that there was nothing to fear. Much of this comes down to our attitude, as it is our response to change rather than the change itself that often matters most.

## **CHANGE BEGINS WITH YOUR ATTITUDE**

How do we learn to navigate and manage what can only be described as unexpected, unintended, or painful change? Oprah Winfrey once said, “The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.” Attitude comes from within. It is not how the world perceives you, but rather, how you perceive the world. Do we feel mistreated, abused, and unable to succeed? Often our victim mentality is grounded in fear. It is not the change itself, but rather how you choose to react or respond to change is what defines you. To many, across all religions or none, this can be a matter of “faith.”

This simple concept from a novel (*The Alchemist*) is a thread that runs through every religion. In the book, Paulo Coelho captures the spirit of faith in a non-denominational way, stating, “When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you achieve it.” Faith is the cornerstone for many religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism. Each of us may place our faith in God, Buddha, or the Universe, but it all starts from within. For a prayer to be fulfilled, a change may be required; but if you’re unwilling to change, then the fulfillment of prayer may not come to pass. Manifestation without action often leads to nothing other than maintaining the status quo. It was largely the combination of mindset and action that helped me navigate my own life journey and can also help yours. My faith, not just a belief in God but also belief in myself, was essential to that journey.

## **CHANGE IS NOT AN EXCUSE, IT IS A WAY OF LIFE**

We sometimes use change as an excuse. It gives us permission to quit or to blame others for our misfortunes. If we can see adversity as a spark to give us strength or to fuel a change in ourselves, then we *can* turn that adversity into opportunity.

Consider the challenges faced by Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Imprisoned for his beliefs and his fight against apartheid, Mandela could have withered away in despair behind bars. Instead, he turned adversity into opportunity and studied law while in prison. A new prison warden discovered Mandela and his fellow inmates surrounded by law books and engaged in a case study of international law. From unthinkable adversity, Mandela created opportunity for himself and others, emerging from prison more knowledgeable and competent to serve as South Africa's president. He chose opportunity over adversity.

It is time for each of us to embrace change and take personal responsibility for our learning. It is time to turn change into opportunity.

## **RESPONDING TO CHANGE: THE ANSWER IS WITHIN**

Fear is real. So is adversity. The pain that you may experience with both is real. However, none of these things define us. The key to embracing change and becoming the CEO of your own life begins from within. You must begin with a belief in yourself.

President Barack Obama said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we are waiting for. We are the change we seek." So, why is change the focus of the first chapter in this road map? Because if you cannot navigate change, there isn't much else to discuss.

Believe in yourself, and others will believe in you. Believe in your ability to turn change into opportunity, and you will find a better path. If you want something, you must be proactive in making

it happen. To change, to embrace change, and to turn change into opportunity comes down to one's confidence.

Be confident to win. Be confident to overcome. Be confident to succeed.

## CHAPTER 6

# CONFIDENCE: KNOW YOU CAN

*“The moment you doubt whether you can fly,  
you cease for ever to be able to do it.”*

*J. M. Barrie*

**W**e all know that one person, the one who walks into a room and radiates a transcendental type of energy. You can feel it, and it pierces through everyone they touch and draws those people to them. As you look to describe the experience, only one word comes to mind: confidence.

Confidence can open doors. It can help you stay the course in troubled waters and can give you the strength to lead. It can also be difficult to maintain your confidence during the storm. If you do your homework, assemble the best information available and proceed with confidence even then you may fall short of your target. In this situation, your self-esteem becomes important to preserve. Learn from your mistakes and move on knowing that you'll live to fight another day. You never really lose...you either win or you learn from the experience.

## **BUILD SELF-ESTEEM**

We all suffer from insecurity that weakens us and prevents us from achieving our highest potential. This is a normal human trait, fueled by fear, which can often lead to failure. While knowledge is the best antidote, it is important to understand why. When you are armed with information, you'll find yourself well positioned to feel a sense of confidence in all that you do. It can propel you even closer to your dreams. Likely, you can think of many people who portray confidence in all that they do. But they are the best because they are confident, not the other way around.

The word "confidence" comes from the Latin word *fidere*, which means to trust. Having confidence is to trust yourself to succeed. The more confident we are, the greater likelihood that we will successfully execute our goals. Lacking confidence will make you hold back and avoid risk for fear of failure. Inner confidence begins with self-esteem, a prerequisite to having confidence. Both self-esteem and self-confidence have a high correlation to academic performance and overall positive mental health. People will treat you the way you treat yourself. Perception, therefore, becomes reality.

It has been said that how you do anything is how you do everything. If you apply confidence to your everyday behavior, you will certainly achieve something special in your life. This will produce a virtuous cycle of hope, replacing the negative cycle of despair. Rarely will we accept anything less than the best we must give. In doing so, we are not just confident, we are ready. We are ready to "win."

## **PREPARE TO WIN**

Harvey Mackay is a business guru and author of *Swim with the Shark Without Being Eaten Alive*.. Riding together to an event in Washington, DC, I told Harvey about my plans to write this book. He said that it would be easy for him to distill all the advice he's provided in his seven *New York Times* bestselling books in just three words. "This



is my gift to you,” he said with a smile. “Prepare to win. Share that advice with your readers, and they will come away richer for this simple but powerful truth.”

He continued, “Preparation will give you the confidence to accomplish anything you set your mind to. Self-confidence is highly correlated to academic success, but it is equally important in all aspects of life. Self-confidence is not just a state of mind, it requires proactive behavior. Specifically, it requires preparation. Preparation breeds confidence, and confidence breeds success.” I hadn’t expected such a pivotal conversation to have occurred in that car, but I was grateful for the advice.

## **BEWARE OF THE CONFIDENCE KILLERS**

Much of what happens to us is out of our immediate control. There are times when it may feel as though everyone is working against us. Negativity is one of the worst enemies of confidence. What happens to the child who raises his hand in class? Often, his peers tease or ridicule him. Perhaps he is called a teacher’s pet or even bullied, resulting in a hit to his self-confidence that could be a one-time thing or a lasting blow to his self-esteem. A debilitating herd mentality can occur in groups. Others may see our hard work as a threat. This is rooted in fear. Since human nature may cause many to look for the easy path, they may have an inclination or desire to work as little as possible. As a result, each of us may be pressured to retreat to the middle of the pack.

American Red Cross chairman and Horatio Alger recipient Bonnie McElveen-Hunter tells the story of her mother, Madeline, making her and her sister write “can’t” on a piece of paper and then burying that word in a box underground...never to be used again. It worked. McElveen-Hunter rose from childhood adversity to become a successful entrepreneur, owner of Pace Communications, ambassador to Finland, and the longest-tenured chairman of the American

Red Cross. She became CEO of her own life at an early age, recognizing that change equals opportunity. McElveen-Hunter, while wealthy, is rich in character. She enjoys the freedom to move in any circle, from handing out blankets and water in a natural disaster to hosting the elegant International Red Cross Ball in Palm Beach. She is rich in freedom!

To McElveen-Hunter, and others who have become the CEOs of their lives, this is not “work,” it is an expression of freedom to do what they enjoy doing most. She could spend the years that most would define as a time of retirement by enjoying the fruits of her labor. Freedom, to her, is about doing those things that give her enjoyment, whether “working” or relaxing at a cafe in Paris. She is free to control her own destiny. She has made change a constant in her life. She is not alone. People like McElveen-Hunter appear to rise to the top and succeed despite great challenges and change through knowledge, determination, and education.

You too can become a winner and a lifelong learner. The more you know the more confident you will be. The more confidence you have, the more freedom you will enjoy. The more you believe in yourself, the more adept you will be at reaching your goals. Once you bury “can’t” in a box in the backyard, develop your self-confidence, and use it in a humble way, your trajectory will be to “infinity and beyond”!

## CHAPTER 7

# CLARITY: KEEP IT SIMPLE...SMART!

*“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”*

*Leonardo da Vinci*

**I**t is not always easy to see the road ahead. At times, you will be navigating in darkness without certainty of direction. A pilot must learn to fly in the clouds without visual reference, relying only on instrumentation and data to fly safely. This data provides guidance. It is the light shining in the darkness. Even with uncertainty, we still have control over our actions and outcomes. It is our search for understanding that leads to clarity. With clarity, we become empowered to see and shine the light, two qualities that offer tremendous insight into the future. We can fly in the dark.

Defined as the quality of being coherent and intelligible, clarity is fundamental to communication. Communication is fundamental to both teaching and learning. Sometimes we lack complete understanding of a concept, inevitably causing confusion. Other times, we may be acquiring too much knowledge resulting in an overload of information. Clarity is an art form grounded in simplicity. We’ve all heard the expression K.I.S.S. (Keep it Simple, Stupid). I prefer to use a small variation...Keep it Simple, Smart!

## CLARITY STARTS WITH LISTENING

Listening is a crucial practice to gain clarity and “hear” the information you’re receiving. It may sound simple to do, but how often does someone speak to us and we realize, after the fact, that we didn’t understand a word? Too often we listen but we don’t hear. We are unconsciously framing a response and are sometimes more worried about what we will say.

Mark Cuban has shared an anecdote about clarity and listening. He said, “This guy who was trying to be my mentor [said], ‘I’m going to give you a tool that you can use: Every time you go into a meeting, I want you to have a notepad, and the minute you sit down, I want you to write the word ‘Listen’ right there on your notepad. You need this because you do not listen.’” Since then, this is a habit that has stuck with Cuban. “No lie,” Cuban said, “if you go back over the last forty years now that I have been going into meetings and taking notes, I write, ‘Listen,’ first thing.” The ability to listen helped him learn, a skill that he attributes to his continued success. “I recognized that learning was truly a skill,” Cuban told Men’s Health in 2020, “and that by continuing to learn, to this day, I’m able to compete and keep up and get ahead of most people.”<sup>3</sup>

This simple but valuable advice allowed him to focus and bring great clarity to understanding the situation by listening. As Mark Cuban admits, effective listening is the key to learning.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR “WHY”

Nearly as important as listening to information is to also understand why we are listening to it. Consider algebra. Many of us make it through one or two years of high school algebra and perhaps a year or two in college without ever asking (or being told) the practical

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3 Taylor Locke, “Mark Cuban: The Advice I Got from a Mentor at 22 Years Old That I Still Use Today,” CNBC, April 17, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/17/mark-cuban-advice-i-got-from-a-mentor-at-22-years-old-that-i-use.html>.

application of this tool and how it will affect us day to day. Without understanding the why, it is difficult to have clarity around the subject at all or recognize the value of it. Learning becomes rote memorization of principles or rules rather than the application of them with clarity of purpose.

Have you ever explored the “why” behind learning mathematics? Neil deGrasse Tyson, physicist and mathematician, puts the importance of learning math in simple terms in a National Geographic podcast called StarTalk where he talks about Debunking the “Pointless” Education Myth.

“People think that when they take math in school,” he observes, “there’s the common response like, ‘I will never need to use this for the rest of my life,’ as they learn trig identities, or the Pythagorean theorem, or whatever it is that we all remember learning, feeling pretty sure that it’s never going to show up again.” We are missing something important with that way of thinking. “It misses the fact,” he says, “that learning how to do the math establishes a new kind of brain wiring in your mind, a kind of problem-solving brain wiring. It’s not about what you’ve learned, it’s about what methods, tools, and tactics you had to develop in order to solve the problem that you may never see again for the rest of your life. But you will see other problems where these methods and tools will become immensely valuable to you.” Neil deGrasse Tyson has a very practical approach to education. He worries less about how much information you pour into your head, and more about how equipped you are to use it to explore the world around you.

## **COMMUNICATION CLARITY: INBOUND AND OUTBOUND CLARITY**

How a speaker or leader delivers a message is just as important as the message they impart. Two types of clarity impact the overall effectiveness of your message: inbound clarity and outbound clarity. Inbound clarity is a process of listening, comprehending, validating,

and evaluating. Outbound clarity is communicating, teaching, persuading, and presenting facts.

Inbound clarity may be exemplified in the use of the Socratic method, a form of learning dialogue between individuals. The Greek philosopher Socrates used this approach to improve understanding. The method searches for commonly held truths that make up one's beliefs and challenges them to determine their consistency with one's other beliefs. It is the process of asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thought and draw out ideas in simple form.

Next is outbound clarity, or the art of communicating our findings and conclusions to others. Clear communication involves efficient and streamlined messaging. If an organization doesn't understand a strategy or specific tactics, it will not properly execute it and will likely fail in its endeavors. Execution requires effective communication.

The more knowledge we have about what we want to communicate and how we choose to communicate it, the better. Then, it is crucial that we carefully curate the message and deliver it to our intended audience. Knowledge is at the center of our institutional learning and education process. A classroom teacher will be successful because of his or her vast familiarity of the topic and how they deliver it to the students. Keep it simple, *smart*!

# SECTION III

# **HOW TO LEARN**

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Now that we know *what* to learn, as in the importance of embracing change, having confidence, and demonstrating the ability to have clarity of thought and communications, we can focus on *how* to learn.

- **Critical Thinking:** The ability to discern fact from fiction is a fundamental part of our learning process. Consider critical thinking as the algebra of thought. It is the fundamental process of breaking down problems into their components and solving them based on the available data. Only then can we determine what is true or false, enabling us to make the best decision with the information available.
- **Curiosity:** Intellectual curiosity is the root of all knowledge. There are two kinds of learners; the curious ones, who are proactive and always asking questions, and those that are reactive, remember only information they find relevant. An essential element to developing solutions is the ability to understand all sides of an issue. The more curious we are, the more we will traverse life in a meaningful and connected way.
- **Creativity:** We are all born creative. For success, it is essential to nurture that creativity and to stimulate the right brain. We can all develop our own creative side, if only given the chance and encouraged to do so. The creative mind also allows for greater freedom to think without being encumbered by predisposed rules and boundaries to have fun!

These three tools, *critical thinking*, *curiosity*, and *creativity*, will help you realize “How” to learn, an essential step for your educational journey.



## CHAPTER 8

# CRITICAL THINKING: UNDERSTANDING YOUR “WHY”

*“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to  
entertain a thought without accepting it.”*

*Aristotle*

Critical thinking is one of the more essential skills needed to navigate the modern world and make informed decisions. With an abundance of information and media surrounding us twenty-four seven, we may allow others to form our opinions, determine our allegiances and even shape our character. It is essential that we understand the importance of thinking for ourselves, asking the right questions, and doing the research necessary to determine truth from conjecture.

Critical thinking is the process of analyzing information, evaluating evidence, and making reasoned judgments. It is the intellectual embodiment of the scientific method itself. We establish a hypothesis or a point of view. We then gather information or perform research and determine our course of action. We can then take a specific action and measure the success of that action against our expected results.

Then, we can remain open to new information that may cause us to modify our hypothesis and create a new action or conclusion. This iterative process is proactive in nature, one that requires

focus, discipline, and a willingness to challenge one's own beliefs and assumptions.

## **DEVELOPING GOOD "JUDGMENT"**

The basic definition of critical thinking is to analyze facts, data, and observations to form judgement. Distinguished scientist and astronomer Carl Sagan once noted that "knowing a great deal is not the same as being smart; intelligence is not information alone but also judgement, the manner in which information is collected and used."

Good judgement is a difficult concept to define because it involves collecting input from many sources. Situational awareness will influence any information we may have. Cognitive ability, or the ability to analyze data effectively to determine an accurate result, is another an essential element. Finally, emotional intelligence is needed to avoid a "reactive" response that puts feelings over objectivity.

As we begin to understand our "why" and become more effective listeners, it is of great value to determine what might otherwise impact our clarity. Discernment, or determining the accuracy of the information we are receiving, is one obstacle that impacts our ability to listen. This is where critical thinking and intellectual curiosity become indispensable.

We can use five simple questions to facilitate critical thinking and ultimately make better, more informed decisions:

*Who:* Who is involved in this decision? Who is providing the information? Who should be consulted? Who will be affected?

*What:* What are the facts available? What are the potential outcomes? What are the other perspectives?

*Where:* Where is the information sourced? Where can we get further data? Where are the areas of improvement?

*When:* When will the cost or benefit occur? When can we expect actions to be taken? When do we know we have succeeded?

*Why:* Why is this a problem or challenge to begin with? Why is it relevant to me or others? Why should we allow this to happen and why does it matter?

Armed with these simple questions, we can delve into any problem-solving scenario and use the combination of deduction, induction, and abduction to determine the best possible answer or outcome with the information available. Driving this process requires diligence, but it has one other prerequisite need—curiosity.

## CHAPTER 9

# CURIOSITY: JET FUEL FOR LEARNING

*“Non scholæ sed vitæ.”*

*“We do not learn for school, but for life.”*

*Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

Curiosity is the spark that ignites our desire to learn. Curiosity is one of the most fundamental elements of learning. It represents the difference between rote memorization and understanding. It is the difference between receiving information versus a proactive giving and taking of knowledge.

In today’s world, driven by rapid technological advancement and constant change, curiosity is an essential catalyst for personal growth. It represents the relentless pursuit of understanding that will contribute to progress for the individual and for society. It is only through curiosity that we can generate new ideas, challenge the assumptions of existing ideas, and ignite innovation. It is only thorough curiosity that humanity can progress while creating change for good.

There are countless examples of curiosity-driven innovation and change for the ultimate good of humanity. Going back thousands of years, early man demonstrated curiosity in solving fundamental practical problems of the day. Experimenting with materials and techniques, they crafted practical tools needed for survival. The ancient

cave paintings demonstrate early man's curiosity and creativity in capturing the beauty of nature, animals, and the world around them.

Curiosity drives our desire to learn. The more curious we are, the greater understanding we will have of the world. The greater understanding we have of the world, the more opportunities we can seize and endeavors we can pursue. It is a remarkable cycle, one that elevates each of us.

## **THE CURIOUS VERSUS THE COMPLACENT**

There are two kinds of learners. The first is a curious, proactive individual who is always asking questions of the world around them. The second type of learner, a far cry from the first, is complacent and reactive; they allow information to flow over them, remembering only the things they find relevant. Those who are curious will drive understanding and progress. They will be the natural leaders of our world, while the masses often remain content to follow like sheep.

The great differentiator between those who lead versus those who merely follow is the desire to learn. This is also the difference between those who experience the richness of life versus those who merely exist. Historically, we have witnessed the distinction between these individuals. Those who thirst for knowledge and fill their minds with a broad range of information have the power to change their own lives and the world in which they live.

## **THE POWER OF WHY**

Simon Sinek is an author and inspirational speaker who became famous for his book entitled *Start with Why*. In this book, he shows that leaders with the greatest influence across the globe share a common denominator. He describes a powerful idea that he calls the Golden Circle. This idea frames the three important questions that must be addressed in any endeavor...*why, how, and what*. The framework for *Education Is Freedom* is based on this same approach to

encourage each of us to understand *why we learn, how to learn, and what to learn*. The idea of starting with *why* is grounded in the importance of curiosity. We must be able to explain why.

Simon Sinek describes *Start with Why* as being born out of pain. He lost passion for the occupation he had pursued for years. He had lost his “why” and began to let his curiosity pursue the reasons. He recognized that leaders and organizations were muddling along in the absence of their own understanding of why. This was a spark that led him to teach the elements of curiosity to leaders around the world.

In the course of writing *Education Is Freedom*, I too had to begin with why. With all of the confusion and debate about education today, the fundamentals of why, how, and what to learn have become obscured. I believed that it was timely and relevant to step back from the immediate challenges of society today and to explore the importance of education to our individual and collective freedom. I believe that each of us has unlimited potential that can be unlocked through knowledge. *THIS* is the *WHY* behind *Education Is Freedom*.

## **OUR RETURN TO CHILDHOOD**

As children, we feel free to ask “why.” Our curiosity is innate and fuels our ability to absorb critical information. As we grow older and develop more self-confidence, often we become more reluctant to ask questions for fear of being judged for not already knowing the answers. Our native curiosity is suppressed to our developmental detriment.

Reawakening the inner child’s sense of wonder is essential for creativity to flourish. By embracing our innate curiosity, we will uncover nuggets of unexplored information and new adventure. This sense of wonderment will be the impetus for your continued growth and evolution.

## CHAPTER 10

# CREATIVITY: INTELLIGENCE AT PLAY

*“Creativity is intelligence having fun.”*

*Albert Einstein*

If curiosity will cause us to ask *why*, then creativity will cause us to ask *why not?* Without creativity, there would be no innovation, no appreciation for beauty, no emotion in daily activities, and stunted progress. It is our creative muscles that forge us ahead to new frontiers. If curiosity is what makes us wonder, then creativity is what helps us execute.

Creativity is intelligence having fun, with a huge emphasis on the word “fun.” Once we overcome our fear of failure, we can explore and familiarize ourselves with a whole new world of creativity. Many of us are shamed out of such impulses as dancing or singing or painting at an early age. How often does a parent hush their child when the little boy or girl is singing at the top of their lungs or dancing with reckless abandon? Are they encouraged to continue being creative, or are they told to be quiet? It is, at least in part, our fault as adults for extinguishing the growth and evolution of our younger generation’s artistic spirit.

Long ago, science discovered that the human brain has two sides. One side of the brain controls the other side of one’s body. The left side of the brain is thought to be more analytical, focused on

logical thought, mathematics, and linear thinking. The right side of the brain is more visual and intuitive. This is where the imagination holds court and is why the right side of the brain is thought of as the artistic or creative side.

Today, art plays an immeasurable role in our lives. From pure enjoyment of the arts to new product development, creativity is an amazing outlet for release and expression. To learn about the world and our role in it, we must recognize and celebrate art. That begins with building our creative muscles and celebrating their remarkable benefits.

## **CREATIVITY IS INSPIRING**

The opportunity to nurture creativity surrounds us in everyday life. Art, music, literature, architecture, even the design or packaging of consumer products is an expression of creativity. One must open themselves up to the creative sources in our midst:

*Museums* are the amphitheaters of public education. Within the walls of a museum are the stories of history and the creative product of artists from around the world. Taking in the riches offered there can inspire and educate us.

*Music* is everywhere. The depth and range of musical alternatives, from classical to jazz to hip-hop, are all forms of expression that stimulate our hearts and minds. From the great concert halls of the world to earbuds on a flight, music can awaken our senses and open our hearts.

*Architecture* is a form of art often taken for granted because of its ubiquity. In Washington, DC, alone, we have a range of offerings, from the classic Roman influence of the US Capitol to the Egyptian-inspired Washington Monument to the modern National Museum of African American History and Culture.

*Street Art* is a form of expression too. What may appear to be graffiti is sometimes cherished by locals who see it as a creative



expression. Some of the most celebrated and special artists of the modern-day generation take great inspiration and style from these street artists who are creating on every corner in America.

*Nature* is possibly the most powerful expression of creativity. A breathtaking sunset, a rainbow appearing after the rain, and a beautiful white cumulus cloud on a summer day are all forms of nature's art. From the photography of Ansel Adams to the paintings of Georgia O' Keeffe, artists have captured the beauty of nature all over the world. The best part of nature, however, is the abundance of free art before our eyes every day. As a pilot, I have my camera always handy in the cockpit. The images of nature from the air are awe inspiring and always evoke gratitude for the power of learning to give me the opportunity to see such beauty from the air.

Creativity is a form of expression, a way for people to connect to one another and the world around them. Perhaps one of the earliest art forms, pictures etched into rock walls not only told our story but did so in a manner we can comprehend today. Some may even argue that art was the earliest method of communicating. That shows the power of art. Go to any country in the world and, whether you can speak the native tongue or not, you can look at a piece of art and learn something about the culture, the people, or the message the artist tried to relay.

Creativity surrounds us and is there for the taking every single day, in everything we do and in everywhere that we go. We must do is open our eyes, open our hearts, and allow ourselves to be inspired and shaped by these omnipresent forces around us.

## **GETTING CREATIVE: A HOW-TO GUIDE**

We are all born to be creative. It is in the very fabric of our being. In some of us, the skill has remained inactive for years. Each of us can benefit from expanding our creative horizons.

The first step is to get out of your comfort zone. Pick a form of creativity that you think you're not good at, then do it. Don't think you can sing? Try karaoke. Don't think you can dance? Sign up for free dance classes. If you're of age, a glass of wine may accompany this exercise and help with a little liquid courage. Try something new. The result will surprise you.

The second step is to practice. One advantage of practicing any form of artistic expression is that feedback is nearly instantaneous. When taking a sculpting class in Italy at the Florence Academy of Art, I had spent days perfecting the nose and mouth on a bust I was creating out of clay. I was crushed when my teacher came by to inspect it, then hacked off the face of my sculpture, telling me to start over. He was right. My second effort was greatly improved, and the lesson stayed with me. Practice builds muscle memory and skill and ultimately builds confidence.

The third step is to make time for creativity. Exercise your creative instincts no matter where you are or what you're doing. This could be as simple as doodling while listening to a lecture or humming or singing while performing tasks like washing the dishes.

The last step is to always try something new. An unlimited array of art forms is waiting to be enjoyed. If you've mastered one form, try another. I will never be a professional-level musician, but I can pick up several instruments and play with some modest degree of proficiency. Learning something new can be as enjoyable as perfecting something you know.

Creativity is truly, intelligence at play!

# SECTION IV

# **WHY WE LEARN**

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**N**ow that we have determined WHAT to Learn and HOW to Learn, we should return to the starting question of WHY We Learn. Knowing the WHY will inspire our ability to keep learning. The *what* and *how* of learning are internally focused, based on “self” and our ability to manage our internal motivations. The *why* causes us to turn outwards to consider the way we look at others and the way they perceive us.

- **Collaboration:** The key to collaboration is the ability to share a common goal or objective. Collaboration and cooperation require putting one’s individual interest second to the interests of the group.
- **Cultural Literacy:** The ability to understand, respect, and learn from other cultures will contribute to the cumulative learning that makes us “who” we are. We have a choice as individuals to become a reflection of the cultural influences that contribute to the collective character of humanity.
- **Character:** Integrity, the ability to develop intellectual honesty, is integral to the learning process. Honesty requires an open mind, a willingness to accept divergent points of view, and enough humility to know that we always have more to learn. Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged us all to judge each other by our character, not by the color of our skin. Our character is the identity that we hold out for ourselves and for the world to see.

By seeking collaboration, cultural literacy, and character we come full circle to the original *why*. We are not in this world alone but share it with others and the more we learn from others, then the more we will learn for ourselves.

## CHAPTER 11

# COLLABORATION: BIGGER THAN THYSELF

*“If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.”*

*Booker T. Washington*

We have all heard the expression, “Two minds are better than one,” Leadership expert and fellow Horatio Alger member, John C. Maxwell, introduced another way to express the act of working together toward a common goal. “Collaboration is multiplication,” he says. The origin of the word *collaboration* comes from the Latin words *com* (with) + *laborare* (to labor, to work). Plainly said, it is the process of two or more people, entities, or organizations working together to achieve a goal. This shared outcome produces a superior effort, a product of multiplied energy. Collaboration is a team sport.

My first introduction to the power of collaboration came through the wonders of music. Beginning my musical journey at a very young age, I learned to play the flutophone, a small plastic flute that would make a miraculous sound to the ears of the player while squawking like a duck to any nearby listeners. This led to the opportunity to learn the trumpet, a beautiful brass thing of wonder. The trumpet was an excellent vehicle to realize the fundamentals of music as I practiced scales and tried to choke out the occasional Beatles song.

But, as I would soon recognize, “Hey Jude” just doesn’t sound the same on a solo trumpet.

Eventually, I progressed enough to join the grammar school band in Grafton, Massachusetts. Our little group produced the magic of orchestral music, and I quickly discovered the power of collaboration. My solo trumpet was brassy and loud, but the unison of our orchestra produced a harmony that made us all sound like musicians! It was a lesson. Two instruments are better than one. Twenty instruments are better than two.

Collaboration is the power of many acting as one. It causes businesses to excel, artists to create, scientists to discover, and sports teams to win championships. It has been said that star athletes can win games but only teamwork can win championships. Technology today makes it even more possible to collaborate, even when groups (or teams) are separated by time and distance.

## **COLLABORATION BUILDS CULTURE/IDENTITY**

Whether we are referencing the workplace, home life, or anywhere else, collaboration builds culture. We often take on the identity of a group and wear it proudly. This may be a physical symbol such as wearing our team’s logo on game day or flying the flag outside of our home.

This collective culture is a concerted effort that builds through the individuals within the group who take on a collective identity. This happens through the decision to create an environment that gives team members the opportunity to communicate openly and honestly. From forming these meaningful bonds, they are more likely to take positive actions that benefit the whole.

These behaviors result in a group, a company, a team, or a classroom as a dynamic unit that can accomplish any task. The culture of collaboration will create a culture of success. Everyone must share

the common attitude “don’t quit.” We will prevail must be the winning attitude of the day.

## **COLLABORATIVE CONFLICT**

Just as some of us are born into wealth while others are born into poverty, some of us will have the benefit of education in a culture of collaborative success and others will find themselves in a dysfunctional academic environment where politics prevails over academic preparation. In the latter environment, we must still take individual responsibility to create our own success culture. In a culture of failure, create your own identity and build your personal culture of success.

You have a choice when the culture of your school, your work, or your team begins to crack. The dark side of collaboration is when it results in “sides” that end up pitting one team against another. Take a leadership role within the group and foster a collaborative approach for the whole to create a new cultural identity for the group. Rise above the group’s cultural shortcomings to create your own success. Leadership is about uniting rather than dividing.

## **NOW BACK TO EDUCATION: TIME TO COLLABORATE**

Most of us see education as an individual activity. We take part in classes but are generally graded on individual performance. In business school subgroups of students, often from diverse backgrounds, are asked to come together to solve a business problem outlined in a case study. At Columbia Business School, I remember a case that called for the analysis of two companies in the same industry but with two vastly different balance sheets. I was not accustomed to solving problems in a team setting and did not know how or where to begin. We had a professional accountant in our group, so I felt confident in his technical skills.

The solution required the knowledge from our CPA-trained group member but also an element of creativity. Working late into the night, I stumbled upon an innovative way to factor the balance sheets, putting them both on par so that we could make a simple line-by-line comparison. Our team scored an A on the project, but the greatest reward was seeing how our collective teamwork created a higher level of performance and a greater chance for success.

Professor Peter Drucker was one of the most famous business academics. *BusinessWeek* magazine described him as “the man who invented management.” I had the privilege of visiting Professor Drucker at his home, just weeks before he passed away in 2005.

Always curious, he wanted to learn about 7-Eleven and the elements of our success. As we discussed the company’s achievements, he was complimentary about my use of “we” when describing the collective success of my team. “Leaders who work most effectively,” he reflected, “never say ‘I.’ And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say ‘I.’ They do not think ‘I.’ They think ‘we’; they think ‘team.’ They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and do not sidestep it, but ‘we’ gets the credit.... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.” Leadership requires the belief that your recognition will come from the success of the team.

## **CREATING A BETTER SOCIETY**

How does one individually work toward accomplishing this multiplier effect? As with most steps toward a better “me” or a better “we,” our success or failure will rest with the execution. Here are three steps you can take toward improved collaboration.

The *first step* is awareness of the opportunity, a fundamental belief in the power of many coming together as one. The *second step* is the ability to put our fear and our egos aside to recognize that we have much to learn from others. The *third step* is to establish trust.



We must trust others on the team and move forward with the integrity and transparency that will inspire others to trust us. Only then will we be a society of collaborators that places the collective good of us all above the need for individual gain or recognition.

## CHAPTER 12

# CULTURAL LITERACY: WEAVING YOUR QUILT OF DIVERSITY

*"We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."*

*Jimmy Carter*

Much of the learning journey outlined to this point has called for us to look inward. Even if we commit to learn from others, we may still fall short of truly understanding different people. We live in a patchwork quilt of diversity, which requires us to have an understanding of others I call cultural literacy. This literacy is about understanding the differences that make us one human race. We must prevent the spread of ethnocentrism, the belief that one culture is superior to another. Our truth should be a relentless desire to learn more about other people, cultures, and practices. In the words of Rosa Parks, "I believe there is only one race—the human race."

We are what we experience. We are the cumulative being of those who have influenced us in both good and bad ways. The more diversity of thought and culture we experience, the more complex and colorful the intellectual quilt that we weave. The ability to interact

freely with people from all over this planet exponentially increases our freedom as people of it.

When traveling for business to Japan for many years, I was surprised by the cultural differences seen in the boardroom. There was often misunderstanding and sometimes distrust between the American management team and their Japanese counterparts. Learning the Japanese language and becoming immersed in the Japanese culture helped me understand that our “differences” weren’t really differences as much as they were points of uniqueness.

## **DEFINING OUR CULTURE**

From as early as preschool to when you’re in graduate school, you spend years in a classroom filled with children, young adults, and then full-fledged adults. Most of us fail to realize that our classmates are walking gold mines, holding one of our country’s most valuable assets: our distinct and undeniable differences. Our differences are treasures that we can share.

## **CULTURAL CURRENCY: MORE IMPORTANT THAN WEALTH**

To build our cultural literacy, we must have an openness to learning about the unique culture of others that share our community, our nation, or our planet. As we learn about others, we build a currency of knowledge about their uniqueness. Cultural currency is just a fancy term for accepting and discovering how all human beings can add value to who you are as a person. You come into this world a tabula rasa, or blank slate, yearning to be filled with positive cultural influences that expand your critical thinking, your ability to relate to others, your decision-making, and your ideas about what can make you and your community happy. Surround yourself with those of other cultures and backgrounds and you too will develop a breadth of experience that reflects the cumulative strengths of each.

This gets us to the second part of our cultural currency equation. Being aware of this knowledge isn't enough unless it's tied to action. To act with your cultural currency and to be effective, you need to do three specific things:

The *first step* is to fight ignorance. Let's say that you decide that after the spark, reflection, and deep dive, to organize a Filipino Day at your school. Expect opposition. What people without cultural literacy fear most is the unknown. Your goal is to not allow that opposition to stop you but instead aim to move them toward the yes versus the no.

The *second step* is to embrace diversity. Diversity can be a word that means everything and nothing to people. Embrace all the cultural currency you can; allow everyone to be seen and heard. Listen to those loud and wrong ignorant people who used fear to oppose your ideas. We can overcome cultural ignorance through exposure, education, and knowledge.

The *final step* is to be impactful, not performative. Too often, we as students, parents, and administrators go for the cheap expression of diversity versus the impactful. Saying that you respect Muslims is performative. Celebrating Eid al-Fitr (the festival at the end of Ramadan) with your Muslim students, teachers, and administrators is impactful. Even more impactful is learning about how you can support your Muslim friends three hundred sixty-five days a year. Your goal is to make sure that everyone is seen, heard, and respected.

What unifies us is much more important than what divides us. Building your own cultural literacy is how you contribute to the fabric of the American dream. You can reach out with the same thoughtful exploration to those in your own neighborhood. Unleash your curiosity. We are much more the same than we are different, but the unique gifts of others are often in those differences that we should celebrate.

## CHAPTER 13

# CHARACTER: YOU ARE WHAT YOU BELIEVE

*“Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”*

*Abraham Lincoln*

Often, we take the word *character* for granted. Most of us wish to have the word ascribed to us, but few of us can define it. We can trace its origin back to the Greek character meaning an “engraved mark” or a “symbol or imprint on the soul.” In ancient times, a character was the stamp or marking impressed into wax and clay. It was the signature or trademark thought to represent the individual and his identity. That is still the case today.

### **FORM YOUR CHARACTER, SHAPE YOUR LIFE**

Character mostly originates from within. This journey toward character development begins with a self-awareness a belief that we can shape our own identity. The Boy Scout Law, learned by every young boy and girl in scouting, is defined by a desire to be “*trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.*”

These lessons have played a strong role in shaping my own character during my formative years. I had little awareness of the impact

of these lessons until the Circle Ten Council in Texas asked me to deliver a speech on the topic of leadership to Scout leaders from across the country. While preparing, I pulled out my old *Boy Scout Handbook*. The Scout motto is “Be Prepared.” What better way to teach the importance of responding to change.

Several core principles shape our character. These range from trust to integrity to awareness to persistence. Something remarkable occurs when you hone in on the best of each, recognizing that they will be integral parts of who you are.

### **INTEGRITY: WHERE IT ALL BEGINS**

To build youth of strong character, it is only natural that we recognize the components that comprise character. Integrity is often the prerequisite for any person of good character. Trustworthiness is a cornerstone of good character. We must trust and be trusted to become effective in influencing others and leading an integrity-filled life.

### **HUMILITY: REMAIN HUMBLE AND WELCOME THE THOUGHTS OF OTHERS**

Humility is best defined as the state of understanding that one has more to learn. We can have confidence in our ability to learn and must always acknowledge that we don’t know it all.

The need to be thankful, goes hand in hand with the importance of humility. Michelle Obama said it well when she stated, “We learned about gratitude and humility—that so many people had a hand in our success, from the teachers who inspired us to the janitors who kept our school clean...and we were taught to value everyone’s contribution and treat everyone with respect.”

## **GRATITUDE: BE THANKFUL FOR LIFE'S GIFTS**

Being thankful for what we have is often undermined by negative feelings or dissatisfaction with our current situation. You may not know how to express or even feel gratitude. Practicing mindfulness is one way to do this. Once a day, sit quietly and think through a few things for which you are grateful. Create a mental image and let the feeling of gratitude permeate your mind and your body. Research has shown that it takes only a few weeks of gratitude practice for people to start showing different brain patterns that lead to greater empathy and happiness. Gratitude goes hand in hand with success.

## **COMPASSION: UNDERSTANDING OTHERS HELPS US UNDERSTAND OURSELVES.**

The antidote to social division of any type is for each of us to learn both acceptance and compassion. Compassion is the ability to understand others and to suppress our instinct to be judgmental. The person who disappoints us may have a horrible backstory that could be contributing to their negative behavior. They may have lost a family member or perhaps were recently diagnosed with a terminal illness. It is impossible to know their pain. Compassion can help us learn.

## **BUILD YOUR CHARACTER NOW!**

It is never too late to build good character. We can establish our own identity and strive to build character in a way that allows us to make a favorable mark on the world. Many things can shape your character for better and for worse—the circumstance into which you were born; the friends and family influences during your formative years; your religious and academic education, and so on. Tragedy, disease, or abuse can all impact your character. Such life-shaping influences may make you bitter and resentful or hopeful and grateful. Your

response to that change will determine your character and define your identity.

This makes it even more essential, therefore, for each of us to strive to improve our self-awareness and to initiate our own “self-study” in the lifelong journey of character development.

It takes a tremendous level of discipline to dedicate yourself to success in your educational journey. It is no coincidence that successful students often turn into men and women of high character. Those who continue to improve their character become the leaders of our society and the luminaries that shape our very future.



# SECTION V

# **LEARNING TO LIVE**

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As with any set of steps, the road map works best through the collective strength of the combination of all nine critical success factors. Let's see how they all come together to create a personal road map for successful navigation of one's learning and perhaps one's life.

*Change* happens. Most important is to remember that it's not about "what" happened to us, but rather the "way" we respond to any given change that will matter. My ability to manage change made me a better leader.

*Confidence* continues to be a driving force in my commitment to lifelong learning. I believe I can do anything, given enough time and effort. Can I paint a picture, write a song, erect a building, change career, learn a new language? The answer is yes to all. As my friend Adan Gonzalez says, "*Si, se puede.*" Though not a direct translation, the expression means "yes, it is possible."

The pursuit of *clarity* can often be most challenging because the most difficult task in the world is taking the highly complex and making it simple. It doesn't have to be that way. It is a matter of focus and discipline to simplify the process of both receiving and giving information.

*Critical thinking* is what helps us to learn. It causes us to question the "what," "why," and "how" of any situation and to build knowledge by constantly searching for more and better information to ultimately make the most informed decision.

*Curiosity* is a driving force in allowing us to deal with change. If we believe in the power of curiosity, it can make us anxious to see what was on the other side of any dark cloud. Unleash your inner child to ask "why."

But curiosity alone is useless without *creativity*. Finding creative solutions can occur only with a curious mind, and a curious mind is a creative mind. Creativity is knowledge having fun.

Working effectively with others happens only through *collaboration*. The benefits of collaboration occur when we realize that we have much to learn from others. Simply put, together is better!

If we reflect upon the many cultures and interests that make up this wonderful world in which we live, we will recognize that *cultural literacy* allows us to relate to any individual, anywhere in this world.

Acceptance and appreciation of others cannot occur without strong *character*. Our identity will follow us through life's journey and help others choose to be a part of our success or failure.

This is the road map. If you can dream it, you can achieve it with these nine qualities.

In this last section of the book, we will explore the role of technology as a great enabler, exponentially improving the accessibility and availability of learning tools. We will celebrate the joy of lifelong learning as a pathway to the richness of life. Finally, we will draw the distinction between knowledge and wisdom to show how our individual and collective wisdom can be the Rx for humanity.

Once we begin living to learn, only then can we learn to live!

## CHAPTER 14

# TECHNOLOGY: THE GREAT ENABLER

*“As technology breaks down the physical barriers of college campuses, the extraordinary intellectual capital of the educator community is becoming available to anyone committed to learning—regardless of age, income or location.”*

*Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen*

**T**echnology is changing the way we teach and learn. New inventions have always enabled education, but our innovations still required intervention to help us learn. A book made it possible to read about any given subject, but it could not answer questions. This required the intervention of a teacher or tutor to facilitate the exploration process of learning and to guide you to needed information.

The ability to Ask Siri, Google a question, or use Wikipedia are just the beginning of a coming revolution in technology. Consider the opportunity to improve your study of the Japanese language by using the translate feature on Facebook to communicate with a new friend from Tokyo. They learn English while you learn Japanese, and you both make a new friend and have fun learning a new language.

## ENABLING US ALL

If you believe that education *is* freedom, then the tools for access to knowledge and to shape your own destiny are available today. The power of tomorrow's technology is in your hands.

An example of this potential is the story of William Talley. Growing up in southern Illinois, William is as American as the soil his family shaped into a vocation. His mother, Sarah Frey, did it the hard way. Watching her family's humble farm about to be broken up and sold, she jumped in with her own version of the C-Suite. When the family farm was on the verge of failure, she stepped in and convinced a local bank to help her acquire it. She had the confidence to walk into a newly built Walmart distribution center and pitch her watermelon and pumpkin business.

The clarity of her plan sold the executives on the idea that she could do it. It took curiosity to learn the ropes of the complex Walmart system and creativity to find solutions that had her lining up trucks and product to fill their orders. It took collaboration for her to pull together the many growers and drivers needed to make this happen. Her cultural literacy enabled Sarah to move comfortably in all circles. The strength of Sarah Frey's character made people want to trust her and help her succeed. Today, Frey leads one of the largest privately held produce operations in the country. Would she say that education is freedom? Absolutely. While her formal education was carved out of an Illinois rural public school system and Frontier Community College, she is a Harvard case study in business acumen. Frey beat the odds.

William believed that he could do the same and that school was not a priority.

Then a transformation occurred. William discovered the secret weapon of Khan Academy math online to help him practice and make the difficult seem simple. He still need to pass his high school tests and prepare for the SAT, but he did it by unlocking the power

of technology to ignite his curiosity and supplement his formal classroom studies.

The result: William went from a B-/C+ student in grammar school to achieving more than a 4.0 in high school while completing more than forty hours of early college credits at the same time! William was recently accepted at Harvard for the class of 2027 and will begin his college journey there this fall.

The secret to unlocking the technology that is available today is to use the road map outlined in this book! Accept the *change*. Use the new tools to cut through the clutter of information to *clarify* and simplify.

The power of technology enables *critical thinking*. It takes a dose of *curiosity* and a little *creativity* to explore this universe of data. When it comes to *collaboration*, the World Wide Web is the ideal tool. *Wikipedia* is a research guide that provides a crowdsourced wealth of information available to anyone at no cost. From people of diverse culture, thought, or character we can develop our own *cultural literacy* using the power of technology to gain access to people from around the world. Finally, the use of technology requires *character* as we face near-term issues of free speech and the longer-term power of artificial intelligence.

Whether you are a student in high school or a college graduate trying to decide on your next academic or career move; the power of technology is in your hands as an enabler to learn.

## CHAPTER 15

# LIFELONG LEARNING: BECOMING A RENAISSANCE PERSON

*“I am still learning”*

*Michelangelo (at age 87)*

When you think of your educational journey, it is likely your experience in an institutionalized setting immediately comes to mind. This is when the pursuit of lifelong learning begins. While we garner much from a classroom, that is only one piece of the learning pie. The remainder of the pie is a combination of what we do outside of the classroom.

Leonardo da Vinci became the prototypical “Renaissance man” through his own drive for intellectual curiosity. It is not just knowledge but a passion for and competence in a few fields that makes one more talented, productive, and certainly more interesting. Self-taught in the arts and sciences, da Vinci was a painter, an architect, a mathematician, and a scientist, interested in learning anything about the universe, including our place in it. What set da Vinci apart was his curious mind. This was his most pronounced characteristic.

Think of the most interesting person you know. There is one common denominator. That person, driven by intellectual curiosity, likely has knowledge of a place, a people, a skill, or a topic that

you find intriguing. Intellectual curiosity drives some people to great achievements while leaving others to be entertained. Is it a thirst for knowledge, a curious mind, or the emotion of discovery that drives us?

Going back to that eureka moment I experienced while walking across the campus of Columbia University many years ago, I will never forget that chance encounter with the young man wearing a T-shirt that boldly proclaimed, “Education Is Freedom.” That was one of those “God winks” moments that stopped me cold. In that unexpected moment, I realized that my learning journey had just begun. While grateful that my formal education had given me the tools to learn, I realized that it was time to put those tools to work to continue to expand my horizons—my freedom—by pursuing a path of lifelong learning.

## **THE IMPACT OF LIFELONG LEARNING ON OUR SOCIETY**

We are surrounded with opportunities to learn and to take on new experiences. Ranging from music to art to literature, each of these art forms gives us a tremendous outlet to pursue knowledge. Even social media provides a vehicle to learn, but it is often a mindless journey. How many hours do we burn by scrolling through page after page of personal updates or videos that are carefully curated by an AI algorithm to keep our attention or to direct us to other mindless forms of entertainment? With a different approach, we can turn mindless entertainment into mindful learning.

Consider a documentary that will not only entertain but also teach. Instead of the romance novel that may provide mindless relaxation on a flight, consider a literary classic or perhaps a historical novel. Replace mindless scrolling on social media with a targeted search to find specific topics that provide an opportunity for mindful learning. It is all possible and at our fingertips. Lifelong learning is



everywhere around us; the only obstacle is our willingness to find it and partake of it. We all benefit from collective learning.

The more knowledge can shine a light on uncertainty, eliminate fear, and take away our doubts, the safer we will be and the more freedom we will have. Education is, indeed, our freedom.

## CHAPTER 16

# WISDOM: THE RX FOR HUMANITY

*“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.”*

*Ernest Hemingway*

If learning and knowledge are the antidote to many of society’s ills, then why does mankind still suffer from basic societal issues like poverty, crime, racism, bigotry, and other significant issues that still plague us? Even more surprising is the degree to which the most highly educated, developed countries still experience these problems. The more we learn, it seems, the less we know.

I have posed this question to many learned people and have received a consistent answer. What is lacking is wisdom. While *knowledge* is the accumulation of information and facts through learning, *wisdom* is the ability to apply that knowledge in a meaningful way. Wisdom can set us apart from others and substantially reduce the impact of those societal issues.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an eighteenth-century French philosopher, noted that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” Freedom is curtailed in many ways. Physical constraint is the most obvious. In the most freedom-focused societies, the power of the masses may limit our personal freedom. Rousseau went on

to describe three types of chains that inevitably limit our lives and ability to be free:

*Physical chains* are bonds that hold us captive. We can achieve freedom from physical chains by not letting thoughts or impressions hold our minds captive.

*Societal chains* are customs, mores, or laws that may restrict what we can physically do. This could also be the power of the majority that may impose rules or behaviors that are inconsistent with our personal desires or beliefs.

*Mental chains* are the most oppressive threats to our personal liberty and are the focus of this book. They are the unconscious bonds that restrict us and cause us to follow rather than to lead. These are the deep-seated and firmly established chains that social conditioning often creates. They tell us what we can or can't accomplish.

Each of these chains creates limitations on where you go, what you do, and your quality of life. However, you are armed with a remarkable ability to free yourself from these chains.

So, if these constraints to freedom are so pervasive, then what is the Rx for Humanity?

Where *does* humanity go to school?

## **OVERCOMING THE TYRANNY OF OUR MINDS**

Our peers, family, or environment can create our mental chains. We are often born into them, or the circumstances may establish them. This is the little voice in our heads telling us we “can’t” succeed. We *must* eliminate these self-imposed restrictions so that we can achieve freedom.

But how do we do this? How can we escape these mental chains that have caused so many problems throughout our lives? The chains that have limited us? That is where knowledge comes into play. These chains are powerful, but *wisdom* is the ultimate force of nature.

Education is the antidote, enabling us to learn that we are capable and that we can succeed despite any constraints, mental or otherwise. Human nature dictates that we move away from pain and toward pleasure. You will never escape chains if you settle for the status quo. Mental chains are the result of our own insecurity, our own fear. Ultimately, *fear* is the most pervasive threat to our collective or individual freedom. We must extinguish the fear to usher in the light. Knowledge helps us shine that light, and wisdom extinguishes the fear.

One of my favorite quotes is from Martin Luther King: “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” Hope and positivity go hand in hand. It is both the power and transformation of knowledge into wisdom that will make us individually and collectively most free. With wisdom, we can spread our wings and fly.

## TAKE FLIGHT

I believe that knowledge and ultimately our wisdom will allow us to enjoy whatever freedom and whatever adventure life has to offer. If this sounds like relentless or unbridled positivity, it is. It is a manifestation of the “gift.” This C-Suite of Learning, the cumulative benefit of these nine success factors, will bear the gift of *wisdom* and ultimately the gift of freedom.

*Change* does not define us but rather our response to change will establish who we are and how people see us. *Confidence*, of course, goes hand in hand with preparation. *Clarity* helps us communicate, listen, and learn. *Critical thinking* allows us to determine truth from fiction to make better choices. *Curiosity* will allow us to open new windows and doors to see what is on the other side. *Creativity* will allow our intellect to have fun and to explore, pushing our own boundaries in fearless fashion. Through *collaboration* we will see and feel the collective benefit of interaction. *Cultural literacy* will help us learn from and appreciate those who are different from us. Finally,

our *character* will clearly be shaped by the relentless positivity that stems from all the above. These are the elements of wisdom that can define you.

I hope you will make this *your* gift, a gift you can freely share with others. I am a product of the cumulative positivity of all those whom I have encountered in life, taking a little bit of their quality with me along the way and making it my own. If others see you in that fashion, they too will wish to take a part of you with them and to help you succeed. I believe you can do this, and collectively *we* can do this to make this world a better place.

*Wisdom...is in your hands! The choice is yours!* I hope you have enjoyed this journey and will choose to make education *your* freedom, knowing with confidence that freedom too is in your hands. With education *and* wisdom, we can spread our wings and *fly*!

*The future is in your hands!*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**G**ratITUDE is one of the learnings captured in this work. It is with gratitude and humility that I look to those who have guided this journey and made it possible. To the unsung heroes of this world—the teachers who believed in me, encouraged me and, yes, tolerated me—I am grateful for your tireless dedication to changing lives.

And to you, the reader, I am thankful for your trust in giving some small portion of your personal learning journey to share mine. My dream is that everyone who participates in this journey will want to share it with others by passing along their copy, adding additional copies as gifts, or—those friends who are able to do so—gifting thousands or even hundreds of thousands of copies to young people all over the world so that they too can learn to fly!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



James W. Keyes is a global business leader, philanthropist, educator, artist, musician, commercial rated pilot, and modern renaissance man. He is the former CEO of two internationally recognized Fortune 500 companies, 7-Eleven, Inc. and Blockbuster, Inc. His other business interests cover a broad range of industries from retail, consumer products, technology, healthcare, cyber security, new space, energy, and advanced nuclear. He sits on several public company boards and serves as a board adviser to a venture capital firm and a number of start-up companies. Keyes's philanthropic initiatives have an equally broad focus, including serving a three-term seat on the Board of Governors for the American Red Cross, acting as the former Chairman of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and serving on the board of directors for institutions such as UT Southwestern Medical School, Cooper Institute, St. Jude Children's

Research Hospital, Dallas Performing Arts Center, SMU Cox School of Business, Columbia Business School, and his alma mater, College of the Holy Cross. He has had a lifelong commitment to education, serving as a founding director of the Dallas Education Foundation and is the founder of the Education Is Freedom Foundation. Keyes is a personification of the American Dream, as he comes from humble beginnings. He was inducted in 2005 as a Member of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans.



## INVICTUS BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

It matters not how straight the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

**This is a summary of the book *EDUCATION IS FREEDOM: The Future Is In Your Hands*. While this summary does contain key points from the book, the ideas found herein are expanded on in greater detail in the book's complete version.**

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