

# How to learn anything 3 times faster

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*Book one from the forbidden library series*

## **Foreword:**

The principles and guidance in this work will assist you in picking up almost any skill very fast. Extreme learning is fun, easy and can change your life. Make sure to put it in practice though. Mastering the techniques and mindsets from this book can only be truly done by using them.

The more you use the techniques and insights, the more they will become part of your life, the more you will see the results in every aspect of your life.

Though the name of this book references learning 3 times faster, quite often you may learn things much faster. Using the mindsets and techniques of extreme learning you will, at times, be able to pick things up in just a few days, where others might take months or years to achieve the same results.



## **2: The human ability to learn new skills and transform ourselves and our lives**

We are not very good at swimming compared to fish. We are not adept at flying compared to birds and we don't run or climb very fast compared to most other land-animals on our planet.

Whales can talk to each-other over distances of thousands of kilometers without the aid of phones...

Dolphins can see inside other bodies using their sonar-based vision...

A bald eagle can spot a tiny mouse on the ground from over a kilometer away...

Nearly every animal on our planet has some special ability. Often their ability is so unique and powerful that we can hardly imagine what it would be like if we had these ourselves. Can we really imagine what it would be like to see in the night the way a bat does? Or how it would feel to fly the way a bird does?

However, humans also have an ability that sets us apart from every other being on the planet.

## **What is our special thing?**

I believe that, when examined carefully, we can even go so far as to conclude that “our special thing” is very likely the single source of nearly all significant human achievement.

Just for a moment, let us consider the formula for creating fire at will. A skill attributed to Prometheus who, allegedly, stole it from the gods and gave it to man. Starting our ascent to becoming equals with the gods.

More likely of course, it was just some....dude... Some man (or woman) who figured out the formula many thousands of years ago. Perhaps it even happened by accident. No one really knows, but just think of the impact it must have made. How that one new skill must have changed everything. Suddenly one little human tribe among hundreds of others had light in the dark, warmth in winter. It must have been a bigger game changer for them back then, than the I-phone for us in its day.

But fire is not what makes us special, because humans didn't stop there. After fire came a million other discoveries. The question we must ask is: What is the one power responsible for all of our advancements?

If there is one human super-skill, it is:

## **Our extraordinary ability to learn!**

To be precise it is our ability to:

**1: observe other animals or processes in our environment**

**2: figure out the key parts to each specialization, skill and ability we see using our minds and then...**

**3: copy and adapt it and make it our own.**

Just to be clear, virtually all animals on our planet have the ability to learn. Scientists observe different species gaining new abilities all the time. Birds have been proven to learn and adopt new fishing strategies, tigers and polar bears adopt new hunting strategies.

Anybody who has ever owned and raised a cat or dog knows how these animals evolve over their lives. They learn new skills just like we do.

So learning new skills is by itself not a unique ability. YouTube proves there are at least a dozen domesticated animals that have somehow learned to use a toilet. That is a very specific skill and surely not something they would have picked up naturally.

A great many animals can learn things. However, the human ability for learning is factually FAR more advanced.

There is still not a single other animal able to start a fire at will. While presumably we have been doing this for at least 10.000 years now (probably much longer). Some animals can build and use rudimentary tools, but even these skills currently do not remotely approach the learning ability of a 3 years old human child.

So what is the difference? Simply put: the amount of new abilities and skills humans can learn + the speed at which we can pick them up is much, much, **much** higher than in other animals. No one has been able, so far, to put any scientific numbers to the difference in learning ability, but the amount of difference in specialization is likely similar to the difference in swimming ability between us and a dolphin. Or our ability to see a mouse at a kilometer distance compared to that of an eagle.

When it comes to “learning” we humans are the undisputed most specialized being on the planet.

We can honestly claim, without any boasting, that it is THE ONE ability in which we truly stand out from every other being on the planet.

We might say:

**To fly like a bird,**

**To see like an eagle**

**To swim like a fish**

**To learn like a man!**

Human learning is an exceedingly special ability. No other animal can (yet) do it the way we can. Essentially, our ability is so advanced that it enables us to gain (or steal) the skills of almost every other being around us. As a species it has enabled us to pretty much dominate every other being on our planet in every way.

We can now:

**1: fly airplanes, applying the principles learned from birds**

**2: communicate over vast distances just like whales do.**

**3: see into our own bodies using scanners etc like Dolphins do...**

**etc...**



Looking around us at nearly everything we humans can do, it usually started with some other animal evolving a special ability. Showing us something could be done and stimulating our curiosity.

Every day scientists discover new abilities. We find them in other animals in plants and in odd and unusual places and crazy experiments. And every day we gain more understanding through these observations.

Slowly, through: science-fiction-stories and movies, research, productizing and cultural adaptation, this new knowledge enters all of our lives in the different forms of: new medicines, technologies and cultural trends. Finally we master them ourselves as new personal skills and abilities on the level of the individual.

These willful transformations we keep going through as a species are the source of our greatest power as a group.

For us as individuals though, our personal ability to learn (to discover, analyze, experiment, refine and master almost anything we can observe) is also the source of our greatest individual power. The power to transform ourselves at will into a brand new human with completely new abilities.

When we realize this, it becomes obvious that the key to realizing our highest personal potential is...

## **Our ability to learn!**

Through personal evolution each and every one of us can take our current life and change it literally into almost anything we want.

To state it in the simplest way:

Whenever we as humans are somehow **stuck in life**, either in our jobs, our relationships or our personal lives... Whenever we are faced with some complex problem that we don't seem to be able to solve... The solution is essentially always the same:

## **We need to learn a new skill or multiple new skills!**

And the way we solve problems is always the same too:

First we need to figure out which skill it is we need to learn. This is often harder than it sounds. Yet, when we finally figure out what skill it is we need, then we can start. We find what information we can on it and then we try, we fail, we try again, we fail a little less. We analyze what we are doing wrong and then we try again and again and again. And then usually, at some point, we succeed. Not only have we finally solved our problem. We have learned something! And in the future, if we ever face a similar situation, we will be able to overcome it

quickly or even prevent the problem from arising again.

## **This is the unique power of human learning!**

As a group we are amazing at learning! But if we are completely honest. On a personal level, some of us may not always make the best use of this greatest strength of ours. Don't get me wrong. Every one of us learns a ton over the course of our lives! We learn what we need in our younger years: walking, talking, making jokes, eating, how to take a shower every morning, how to find our way in a city, how to be kind to those around us, wooing a member of the opposite sex etc. We pick up plenty more skills later in life and often have to keep updating our knowledge bit-by-bit in our jobs.

However many of us do not, and this is key, actively keep searching out **truly trans-formative skills** and knowledge throughout our lives. As far as our abilities go, we tend to arrive and then stay in a sort of comfort zone.

When we drastically change our lives, it is more often out of need than out of desire. We all get pushed into great transformations at various times during our lives, for example:

When our life changes from being a young free child, playing all day at home. And then the day

comes when we have to start going to school 5 days a week.

And our lives change again when we go from: living the life of a student for many years, to graduating and starting in our first full-time job.

Or for example, when we meet that special person and transit from, having been single all our short lives, to being in a first relationship with a partner.

It has been proven that humans react to negative stimuli 10 times stronger than positive ones. Meaning we tend to work 10 times harder to avoid pain or trouble, than we work for something great we really desire for ourselves. This also has its impact on how we learn over our lifetimes. We tend to learn and evolve more out of need, than out of desire.

Life is water, not stone. We all face serious challenges in our lives and we all depend on our adaptability and our skill at "learning whatever-we-need in the moment to get us through each day, week, month and year"!

Stand back for a second and just reflect on all of the challenges that we have faced together as a species... All the great problems we have solved... How much we have helped each-other out... The beautiful stories and epic mile-stones we have achieved together... It is amazing! The things we

take for granted today, are the most unimaginable epic dreams of generations past. The technology and skills we have today was literally beyond people's dreams less than 50 years ago.

As a species we have made a great leap forward.

For us on a personal level, there is also a great leap we can make. When we take this greatest strength of ours and start to use it more consciously to keep transforming our own lives. Not out of need, fear or to avoid trouble, but from a desire to simply improve our lives and the lives of those we love.

I believe it is time we take a next step. It's time to supercharge our learning ability and unlock even more of our great potential together.

This book is about using our most amazing ability more consciously and more frequently. Breaking the barriers that hold us back in life. I like to call the set of techniques and mindsets laid out in this book: the tools of "Extreme learning". As they consciously supercharge our natural learning abilities to achieve extreme learning results.

Once you unlock your own extreme learning ability, you may find your life starts to transform in ways you would not have imagined possible. The skill of extreme learning may provide you with new opportunities. It can bring you to new places, it may introduce you to awesome new people. And it is

very likely, you will see your joy and wealth increase simultaneously.

### 3: How do we get “smarter”?

It is an amazingly tricky question to answer: How does any person get smarter?

Some may answer: *By going to school.*

Another may say: *By reading books.*

Yet another may suggest: *If you solve a lot of cross-word-puzzles that is said to stimulate you brain activity.*

In some sense, all of these answers are true. Yet at the same time they all miss the point entirely. Why does a school make you smarter? Why does reading books make you smarter? Why can puzzles stimulate your brain activity?

How come some people who attended school don't seem to get smarter, while others make remarkable improvements in the same school? Do all books make you smarter? If you make the same puzzle every day, does that make you smarter?

The subject of “*learning*” and “*getting smarter*” is plagued by a million vagaries. How do you measure how smart your are now? How do you measure if you have gotten smarter? People say IQ is a good measure of intelligence, but it has been proven that we cannot improve IQ through exercise. So that

would mean it is impossible for any person to get smarter, no matter how much we try.

I believe it is possible though! I believe IQ actually measures something very different.

IQ is more akin to the amount of horsepower on an engine. And we all know the amount of horsepower on an engine is important, but it is certainly not a given that a car with more horsepower will accelerate faster or achieve a higher top speed than a car with less horsepower.

### **So how than can we measure how “smart” somebody is?**

For the purpose of this book and the tools of extreme learning, let us stick to one clear definition. To my mind, the more accurate and practical answer to the question of “How does any man or woman get smarter?” is this:

### **By learning new skills and getting new perspectives.**

Think about it. If you go to school but you don't gain any new skills or perspectives, has this activity made you smarter? If you read many books but you have not gained any new skills has it made you smarter? If you solve many puzzles but they are all similar puzzles for which you don't have to figure out anything new to solve them, have you become



smarter? Of-course not! Still, it is also true that books and schools and puzzles generally DO make us smarter because they often DO provide us with new, actionable skills and perspectives.

So I want to define quite clearly that getting smarter is achieved by one way and one way only.

### **By the acquiring of new skills.**

In other words: by transforming us from a human who has X amount of skills and perspectives into a human who has X+1 amount of skills and perspectives.

Learning new perspectives (seeing things from a different angle) is also important but it only makes us smarter if it actually enables us to DO something we couldn't do before.

So we are left with a simple, practical and usable way to measure how smart we are. We simple have to ask ourselves one question: What skills do we master currently?

### **Make a list and you will know exactly how 'smart' you are.**

The smartest human is not the one that has read the most books or has attended the best schools. It is not the one who has solved the most crossword puzzles or has the highest IQ. It is the one who, by

whatever means, acquired the most skills and who is most proficient in mastering all of them.

Naturally it follows that: The speed at which we can personally pick up new skills is of huge importance. Anything we can do to make ourselves faster and better learners is of profound value. Because it strengthens the root of our greatest power.

Learning to learn faster and more effectively is likely the greatest lever we each have to keep improving our lives.

It is the one and only real way we “**GET SMARTER**” faster.

I believe this definition of 'smart' (how many skills do you master?) even solves the age old question of the mystery of the dumb-smart person. We all know one don't we? It's the guy or girl we know who, when you talk to them, truly doesn't seem very bright or smart. Yet, somehow they are surprisingly good at lots of stuff.

The reason is (I believe) that a lower IQ does not prohibit people from learning new skills. Once you learn one new skill, it becomes easier to learn another and another, etc. So you can have a person with a relatively low IQ but with lots of skills. And also a person with a very high IQ with very few skills.

**It's not your IQ that ultimately determines how smart you are. It's the number of skills you master.**

This is not to say that people with a higher IQ may not have a much easier time with learning. They often do, but it does not prevent those with lower IQ's to learn as well. And that is the key!

I would even venture one step further in saying that perhaps, one could even extend this analogy to wealth. As there is no treasure as valuable as skills. Once learned, no-one can ever take them from you and you can use them almost anywhere. So the smartest man may well also be the richest man.

In our society in general I think this holds true. Though there are a few people who acquire great wealth through luck, by far the majority of truly wealthy people and families have one thing in common. They are smart! In the sense that they possess more skills than the average person. I believe this is at the root of their success.

So make a mental note of it. From now on, when I speak of “smart” or “smarter” I am not using some vague definition that has something to do with IQ. I am instead talking specifically about the amount of skills a person has. The “smarter” you are simply means: “the more skills you master”.

## So what is extreme learning?

The difference between regular learning and extreme learning is that: a person with an extreme learning ability will acquire any new skills he/she wants, between 3 and perhaps 25 times faster than the average person. So once you master the principles, you may have to get used to people around you being surprised all the time with you and saying that one phrase:

*"How the heck did you learn that so fast?"*

The essence is this: **Extreme learning can make you extremely good at picking up new skills. Supercharging your ability to get smarter faster and faster!**

Now I'm not going to bore you with the long history of how I learned, experimented-with and intellectualized all this. We all have a few special gifts that we are born with, and I guess mine has always been to learn and teach things a little quicker than most.

I started teaching others how to play the saxophone when I played the instrument myself for 3 weeks. I started teaching ocean sailing when I had only 6 hours of sailing experience myself. I was riding shallow reef waves with advanced surfers 14 days after my first day of surfing. The first time I ever went snowboarding I was with a group of seasoned

veterans with years of experience - none of them noticed It was my first time on a snowboard. I have started multiple successful businesses in fields where I had very little experience. If you ask my wife what she hates and loves about me the most, she will say: "It's intimidating to learn something new together with him. He gets good at stuff so fast it just feels unfair".

But the best and only evidence you need that extreme learning is real and that it can work for almost anybody, is you. I urge you simply to try the techniques I lay out in this book. Within a short time, you will prove to yourself that you can learn things far faster then you every imagined before. I encourage you to think of it as an experiment. Just try the techniques in this book and see what happens!

## **4: We can all learn extremely complex tasks very quickly**

How we look at things and what we believe about ourselves is important. The first thing we should not-only understand, but also BELIEVE and celebrate is this:

**We humans can learn extremely complex things very quickly!**

And most of all:

**YOU can learn extremely complex things very quickly too!**

You can read this next part right?

It lirtelrlay tkaes olnyy sdeocnds fro yuor azamnig  
biarn to stiwh adn apadt to shoemitng lkie tihs!  
Nwo yuo cna raed ti ta nromal seepd rihgt?

Though it is admittedly a bit of a “cute” example, the speed with which we can adapt to something like the example above is a real clue to the baffling potential of the human learning ability.

I got my first inkling of the power of human extreme learning when I was maybe around six or seven years old. I stumbled upon a TV program on Dutch television which changed everything for me.

It had an interesting and fresh format and I have never seen a show like it elsewhere or since. In those days, the TV was still somewhat in development as a media. And I remember in that particular time, the TV programming was full of various game-shows which, in some form or other, explored the human potential through small challenges.

I forgot the name of the particular program and could never find it back, but the idea behind the show was this: the makers wished to examine and prove if it would be possible to train a random candidate to learn a highly complex job very quickly.

It was a nice and interesting straight-forward challenge of the human potential. To make it exciting for TV, the candidates would have to learn, whatever the chosen subject of that show was, in just one week!

Not only would the candidate have to learn this new skill from scratch. In every episode there was a specific challenge. The candidate would have to prove that he/she had truly learned the skill by passing this challenge so well, that a group of seasoned judges would not be able to tell the difference between them and a genuine professional.

For example. They would choose a job like: live TV show director (a job that takes many years of experience to get) or criminal defense lawyer, or captain on an oil-tanker or something like that. It would always be a complex sort of job, which a person normally would only be able to perform if they had a massive amount of experience and training.

At the start of the show they would bring in the random candidate and give him/her the challenge. Then they would have one week to train him/her to actually be able to do the job required.

So the candidate would have to, for example, actually direct a live TV show for an hour, or argue a real case in court, or park an oil tanker in a busy harbor or something else of a similar complexity.

Of course they would bring in professional coaches etc. and film the whole learning process. After a week of learning and intense practicing on this challenge they would have a real professional come in and join the program.

Now both the candidate and the “real” professional would receive the exact same challenge. They would have to perform while a group of judges (who were not told who the real professional was and who the candidate) would observe the two in action. Afterwards, this group would have to decide which



one of the two was the real lawyer or TV producer or oil tanker captain etc.

To my surprise and also that of the producers and host, in many of the episodes the group of judges would pick the candidate, believing he/she was the real professional. What was most stunning to me however, was that... It was never obvious who the real professional was! It was always very close and the candidates were always totally able to perform the challenge successfully.

This showed and taught me perhaps one of the most important lessons I ever learned. **That a random candidate, with only one week of training, can sometimes beat a professional with many years or sometimes even decades of experience.**

I truly believe that almost anybody can learn very, very complex tasks very fast. And when I say fast, I don't mean a few years or months. I mean it is often measured in days or weeks! And I have come to believe this applies widely to nearly every human ability.

You have to realize that at age 6/7, I was just in the first two years of school. Learning reading and writing + how to stay in an uncomfortable wooden chair for 5 hours a day without complaining. Given all the stories we were being told about how important it was to be in school and that it was

going to take the next 16 to 20 years of my life to get a degree etc. You can imagine my perspective as I viewed this show. Imagine being in that phase of your life and then you see someone on TV every weekend learning something super complex, interesting and cool in a week!

Something felt off to me. I learned some fundamental truth in those days. Every time I watched the program it proved it too me more and more: We can learn highly complex things very very fast. I openly questioned my parents and teachers about this. Why did I need 16 years of more schooling if people could clearly learn a job in about a week? Of course I received the usual answers: "*I didn't understand...my situation was different etc..*". Somehow though, the unconscious lessons of this TV show burned themselves inside my mind. In retrospect, I think this was the moment where I started experimenting with extreme learning and I have been doing it ever since.

Over my life I don't think I have ever spend more than a month or two to master the basics of anything. I have railed against any institution that tried to slow me down and I have bi-passed a great many as well.

I truly believe we all owe it to ourselves to ask:

How is it that in 2001, when the pilot of a small private plain became unwell and lost

consciousness, one of his passengers was able to land the plane safely? Having no prior experience and only the aid of some instructions by flight traffic control (through the inboard radio) to guide him. How could he learn and perform successfully in less than 2 hours, what real pilots-in-training only first attempt after days of simulations and many weeks of instruction?

How could one of the candidates, on the show I mentioned earlier, learn in just one week, to direct one full hour of live TV commanding the directors-room with confidence? Observing 12 live-camera-feeds while instructing a team of 4 assistant directors to cut and choose the order in which the various shots and angles are put together and streamed to the homes of millions. All live! A job considered to be one of the most complex and stressful on the planet. Where choices need to be made at a pace similar to the speed at which an air-traffic controller needs to make decisions. How is that possible?

How can it be that every bachelor or master degree in the world takes 4 to 6 years at minimum? Without a single exception? How can it possibly take a nurse, a car mechanic, an economist and a lawyer exactly the same amount of time to get a degree?

Watch YouTube for an hour and search for topics like “people are awesome” and you will find a

plethora of folks, some of them very young, doing things we would consider nearly impossible a few years ago. Things we would estimate as requiring many years of practice. However, many of the things we see are not the result of decades of careful practice. They are in fact the results of extreme learning.

I think it is high time we re-adjust our view of our own human ingenuity and our capacity to learn. Extreme learning has secretly been going mainstream for a while. We are beginning to see it all around us. It is time now for us to embrace the idea that we can all learn extremely complex skills very quickly.

The times when: sailing around the world, flying airplanes, making TV shows, climbing mount Everest, doing mayor scientific inventions, influencing popular culture, speaking 5 languages fluently etc. were reserved only for a select few is over. The age of the super-human is here and it is possible for all of us to be part of this evolution!

## **5: About talent, effort & handicaps**

To be clear:

Now before we discuss the tools of extreme learning, it is important to state a few things very clearly so we avoid any confusion later on.

When I speak about “us” or “humans in general”, I am talking about an average, healthy, sound-of-mind-and-body human. Though there are a few tasks that can only be performed by people with extraordinary innate abilities - like: being very tall or having a super-high IQ - this constitutes an exceedingly small percentage of human skills. The vast majority of abilities in existence are attainable by nearly all of us, but in our modern world of ultra-relativism combined with the strange cultural cult of “equality” (in which some try to promote the belief that all humans are somehow born equal). I believe it is important to state up-front that: Talent and handicaps are real factors! We are not all born equal in this regard, we are instead all born extremely diverse and different, and this is great and also important! We must be honest and up-front about this.

So don't misunderstand me when I use the words “us” or “we”. When I use these terms I am speaking about the average human. Not any specific individual.

## Talent

Some of us are born with: a good singing voice or a sense (or no sense) of rhythm, a good mind for numbers, an extra nimble body, a great mind for words, etc. But a lack of extra talent doesn't mean you can't learn something on at least a semi-professional level, provided you really put in the effort required. What is most important about talent is that it is, contrary to what some believe, not a random occurrence.

People who are born with great singing voices, great athletic bodies, great minds for words or numbers etc, are not random occurrences. That great singing voice is so nice because the voice of your great, great, great, great, great-grandfather or mother was (perhaps by random chance) just a tiny bit nicer than average. So it enhanced their attractiveness and they had children who also had this slightly nicer voice. So some became singers and had training and then gave their children in turn, not only a good voice ,but also good training at a young age. So this offspring improved on it again and the kids of the next generation received an even bigger advantage and so on, etc. This is how 95% of all the talent is consciously developed over many generations.

It is possible that the two, most out of shape people on the planet, give birth to an Olympic champion. But that would be a very rare exception. Most

Olympic champions are born from former champions. Talent grows and perpetuates, for the most part, through families. Look at most people who are exceedingly “talented” at anything and you will find they are usually second or third generation in a certain field. A great doctor is often the son or daughter of another doctor. Most of the great racing drivers of the world come from families that have been racing cars for generations. What a chance that the son of Bob Marley just happens to be a great singer as well... etc.

### **Effort:**

There are a lot of different numbers flying around, but I think we can agree that we are in the right ballpark when we say that: 20% of mastering any skill is talent, the other 80% is study and experience.

So even if we are naturally very talented at something, if we don't study hard and get a lot of experience, somebody who has no talent at all, but who puts lots of effort into his study and experience, will still be able to get about 4 times as good as us.

Vice versa, If we have no talent for something, but we put in the effort to study hard and gain experience, we can still get 4 times better at it than somebody with lots of talent-but who doesn't study or gain a lot of experience.

My point is: Never let, not having a specific talent, stop you from attempting to learn something. Talent is nice and can provide us a great help and bonus if we have it, but it's nowhere near as important as studying and gaining experience.

Also, many people don't know if they have a talent for something or not. To find out if we have a talent for something, we need to at least try it a few times first. Having been a teacher in a variety of very different subjects, I can tell from experience that some people are quite surprised when they discover they actually have a bit of talent for something. Never ever assume you are not talented at something until you try it at least a few times!

**Realize that effort ultimately always triumphs over talent.**

### **Handicaps:**

It's also vital that we discuss honestly and openly the subject of handicaps. Just as some of us are born with an extra talent in a certain area, some of us are born or, sometimes get through accidents, afflicted with a handicap. Obviously your ability to apply extreme learning or even basic learning abilities can be hugely affected. When it comes to handicaps, our greatest pitfall is that we often want to ignore our handicaps or want to pretend they do not affect us.



I'm no advocate of victim-hood or dwelling too much on handicaps, but I do advise this: If you have a handicap, either subtle or large, either because of natural evolution or through some adversity, be honest and get an accurate sense for yourself of what you can-and cannot do. As long as you are realistic a handicap needs be no hindrance at all. For the honest person there is nearly always some way to compensate for your handicaps and enable a good performance.

However, if you are not honest about your handicaps and you overestimate your own abilities, it can (and often does) create disasters. You may take on too much risk and put yourself in a tough spot. You may endanger others who need to count on you in a team effort. So be honest and forthright with yourself and others.

Just like talent, many handicaps are cultivated and perpetuated through families. Bad health is one, which has its impact on everything we try and do. Just as there are a million different talents in the world, there are also a million different handicaps out there.

## **Know yourself!**

When we take a good look at ourselves through the lens of these three aspects together (talent, effort, handicaps) we get a very powerful perspective.

In the movie The Matrix it is mentioned several times by a character called: the Oracle. She keeps repeating: “Know yourself” emphasizing that only a person who truly knows him/herself is able to consciously change and evolve.

When we embark on an adventure to learn a new skill. Our first step should always be to make a realistic estimation of our own starting point. To do this, we can ask ourselves three simple questions:

**1: Are we especially talented for the skill we are about to start learning?**

**2: Are we willing and inspired to put in the study-time + effort and get the needed experience?**

**3: Do we have any obvious handicaps which will impede us from learning the skill?**

Having a realistic idea of our own starting-position based on these 3 questions helps us to have a realistic expectation and it aids us in planning our personal development strategies more effectively. Also it makes and keeps us responsible towards

others who may depend on us for their safety or success.

**Let's bring all this together for now:**

**1: Know that you can learn almost anything in a relatively short time.**

**2: Be very realistic and honest with yourself on what your starting position is as far as talent or handicaps.**

**3: Talent is a great bonus, but a lack of talent is no problem.**

**4: A handicap can be a real issue. Most handicaps are not an insurmountable obstacle, but they can sometimes make it risky for you to learn something using extreme learning techniques. Both for yourself and others. So be upfront and honest with yourself and others about any handicaps you might have.**

**5: Know yourself!**

**I hope this is clear. Now that we have the same starting position, it is time to get to some broader perspectives on the human learning ability and get clear on some important definitions!**

## **6: The difference between learning a skill VS earning a “Place” in life.**

**(How our educational culture unconsciously constricts and slows down personal human development)**

The one thing, which I believe, causes the most slow-down of learning in general, is a phenomenon I like to call: “Place politics’ which we see in every corner of the education field. Though it is mostly an unconscious process, it is evident that it needs to be addressed in society widely if we ever want to break the invisible barrier on learning speeds.

**The principle of it is this:**

In our economy/our jobs market there are only a limited number of places (slots) for each profession. It's not that there aren't more people who would like to become doctors or pilots or astronauts or police detectives, etc. But in our market place, if more people occupy a profession, the skill becomes less rare and the price for it goes down in the market. People in every profession intuitively understand this and feel this and so we have, as a species, a behavior I like to call place-earning and place-protecting.

## **Place protecting:**

Basically the story is always more-or-less the same. Once a few people have found a skill that makes them a nice living, they will immediately start building a sort of wall around it. And this wall always consists of the same parts:

### **1: Creating a public image that the job is at least twice harder than it actually is.**

I think we can all acknowledge that there exist some truly stupendously hard jobs in the world.

Having said that, have you ever heard of anybody saying their job is really easy...? Nope...? No matter what job or skill you pick, virtually no one will ever admit that the job they do every day is actually pretty easy. Now I'm not talking about what some of us had to do, or all the trouble we may have had to go through, in order to get our job. I'm also not talking about the amount of time and over-time it may demand and how stressful it can be. I'm just talking about doing the job itself.

Why do almost none of us ever acknowledge how easy some of our jobs can be?

We have a good reason. If anybody would tell us: *"Hey if you do my type of job, it is easy and comfortable and you are going to make lots of good money"*. If anybody was to say something like that

about their profession and it was true, they would be swamped with new practitioners in days and the job would no longer be easy or profitable because you would have to suddenly face massive competition.

We all instinctively know this, and so all of us are naturally pretty good at projecting an image that: whatever our profession is, it's serious and hard and anybody else would need to study at least years to have any chance at doing it at a reasonable professional level. In other words... We all pretend our jobs are AT LEAST twice harder than they actually are.

This mechanism helps us as a group to subtly, but actively discourage people from entering our fields. We know there is only a limited amount of “places” for us in our market, and this is one easy way we all like to use to protect them. By simply discouraging others with an image that it is a lot harder than it actually is.

## **2: Setting up legal boundaries for access to the market.**

As soon as any new market, product or skill is discovered, those who are in this new market first, will immediately start to work with governments to setup legal boundaries-to-entry for their (soon to follow) competitors. Usually in the form of official

diploma's or permits that you will need if you want to legally sell or use a skill to make money.

For example, let us imagine we are a child from the Canadian mountains who grows up climbing and hiking and (as we grow up) we eventually pick up the occupation of guiding groups of tourists through the woods and mountains. For years we do this and we become a highly skilled and routinized mountaineer.

Now imagine we would like to move and resettle to the Austrian mountain region in Europe. With a plan to make our living, organizing and marketing hiking tours in our new home as well. Arriving in the new area and informing the local government of our plans, we will surely be told that we cannot do this! Not until we first acquire all the essential Austrian diplomas and permits from the official local mountaineering center.

Soon we would discover that despite our vast experience, we must start with a beginners-course (just like anybody else) that will cost €750,- . It will include one weekend in the woods with an instructor and this will make us a level 1 assistant mountain guide. It will allow us to be employed only when in a group with a level 3 instructor present.

Then we find out that the second course we need, which will make us an instructor level 2, is also one week long, costs €2500,- and is only given twice a



year in the off-season in a location 300 miles from where we currently live.

To make level 3 after that, we will have to first be employed as a level 2 guide for a minimum 2 of years (and we need to be able to prove that). Then we have to complete yet another course for level three which costs €2000,- and includes a practical exam where we have to guide a group, while under the supervision of another level 3 guide.

Through the grapevine we hear that only 2 out of 10 pass this exam every year because they use a system by which only two new permits are given each year.

All in all, we may have the skill and experience to do something. In fact we might well be a more experienced hiking guide than half the certified level 3 guides in the Austrian area. Still, because of the legal hoops it would take us at least 3 to 4 years and a lot of money and time to be able to use and market our skill in our new home.

Now actually this is a completely fictional example, but it still very clearly illustrates what any of us will find when wanting to use almost any skill we have, in almost any market.

Whether you can actually do the task required, matters little. Whether you have gone through the hoops of getting permits and diploma's matters

much more. In virtually every market in the world. The local people have influenced their governments to set up plenty of hoops in order to prevent easy access to their market by outside competition.

Indeed. If we look at it purely factually, this is one of the main functions of all governments in the world... To prevent and delay as much competition from outsiders and newcomers as possible for those already established in the local markets.

Many professions are filled with people who have many permits, diplomas and accolades, but while some are good professionals, a good amount of those people objectively suck at their jobs.

At the same time, there are also many unemployed men and woman who have great practical experience and ability and who would be great in certain jobs, but who cannot get these positions unless they first jump through every legal hoop to get the permits or diploma's to be afforded that opportunity.

Place-protection is understandable. We all do it to some degree, but the world is changing fast in this respect as a result of extreme learning. And it is why you too will need extreme learning in the decades to come! With illuminated thinkers and entrepreneurs like Elon Musk (of Tesla) leading in the field of practical competency.

Big business can simply no longer afford to wait for universities and schools to: develop new courses from scratch, enroll students, have them go through years of courses (most of which are outdated by the time they hit the classroom) and then finally graduate them and send them onto the workforce.

Businesses today often need to adapt to new market realities within days or weeks. The result is that the market is turning on mass to practical ability. With almost every top CEO in the world stating in the last few years that, *“if you can prove that you can do the job, they could care less where or how you learned it or what degrees you have”*. Many companies have hundreds of hard-to-fill vacancies. They have hundreds or sometimes even thousands of applicants for each position. Most of the applicants have many degrees and come from good schools, but they often lack the one thing that actually matters: Can they actually do the job? Even major firms like PryceWaterhouseCoopers are actively scrapping the demands for degrees from many of their job applications. Instead they build games designed to test candidates purely on their competency.

Governments love degrees and permits because their voters love to protect their markets through the legal hoops that degrees provide. However, with governments actively sponsoring degrees through all sorts of “access to education” programs, the number of available degrees and permits has

exploded over the last 20 years. As a result, the value of formal education is plummeting all over the western world. At the same time, the value of extreme learning abilities is skyrocketing. The west is flush with out-of-a-job academics of every type, but it is also heavily under-supplied when it comes to people that can actually do things. This way, governments have created a nose around the neck of formal education. By artificially stimulating it and by being too slow to adapt to the new time-constraints of modern business, they have eroded much of the value of formal education.

Despite this great change over recent years, the instinct to throw up legal boundaries will always exist in us all and it's good to take note of this.

Most importantly because we often conflate this political process with learning and study.

So we might say something like. "It takes 4 years to learn X". But it would be more accurate to say. "It takes only a few weeks to be able to actually do most of ....X...., but to get your diploma takes at least 4 years". See the difference?

To cite a rather stunning example. In my home country of the Netherlands there is permit needed to be allowed to operate a marine radio on board of any sailing vessel. To get this permit you have to travel to one of 5 examination locations in the

country and do a test which takes about two hours and costs about €120,-

I was shocked to read this (and I quote) in the first chapter of the official book for the exam and I quote:

*“The practices and rules laid out in this book depict the official way all radio traffic on the water is regulated in the Netherlands. However the reader should realize that in practice, many of the rules are not strictly followed and in some instances it is not practical to follow them”.*

If you needed a clearer example of how “place protection through regulation” has very little to do with actual education. You couldn't wish for a better one. So in this instance they actually just plainly tell the reader: you must learn everything in this book to pass the exam, but as soon as you go into the real world and use your radio, it will be very different and you will have to learn it all over again.

To give another example to show the true scope of the wall that government can put up around almost anything:

If I invite some friends to my house and serve them fresh strawberries and some wine, that is perfectly fine. If I do exactly the same but wish to charge them 5,- for this legally. I would have to first go through the trouble of becoming a legal restaurant

and acquire a license to serve alcohol. This would cost any person at least a year of his/her time, perhaps 20.000,- Euro in fees and I would very likely have to completely rebuild my kitchen to conform to the government code for restaurant kitchens. Those who make us do all this will always argue that it finally will improve the quality of my strawberries and my wine... Does it really?

Jumping legal hoops and doing all kinds of activities to secure a permit, is often marketed as education or educational. Restaurant codes exist supposedly to help restaurant-owners provide safer food. Any courses you may have to follow will always be marketed as “increasing your knowledge and making you and your potential clients safer”. Yet, it may often not be educational at all. Helping us in no way to get better at the actual doing of the thing we are learning.

So be aware whenever you encounter a lot of legal hoops or demands for permits. Most of this process is not educational. It is simply a protective legal wall around a market.

Let's move on to the third way we employ place protection.

### **3: Selecting new members into the profession mostly by virtue of adherence to the current practices in the skill-group.**

Innovators are generally not wanted anywhere. People who have a skill and make their living of it don't want their professions to change too much. Because it means extra effort for all.

So as a group, we always resist major changes. Even if those changes are for the greater good. There is not a monumental scientist, artist or inventor in history that was not scorned, prosecuted or hindered in every possible way by his colleagues and contemporaries. For the simple reason that, if we invent anything new, some people will lose their jobs and others might have to change their jobs to stay competitive in the market.

Change is very hard and so, as a group, humans strongly resist change in every possible way. Schools and courses that provide entry into the market therefore have a very strong incentive to not reward the inventive or creative student (who will clearly become an innovator and thus trouble-maker for his future colleagues). Instead they tend to reward complacency and adherence to the rules. This way, innovation is slowed down or even halted and the power of innovation is placed in the hands of those already long established in the market. Which are the exact people who have the least to gain from innovative changes.

When we add these three phenomena together:

**1: creating a public image that the job is at least twice harder than it actually is.**

**2: Setting up legal boundaries to entry**

**3: Selecting new members into the profession by virtue of adherence to the current practices.**

We see the process I like to call "Place politics" or "Place earning" in all its glory and we can appreciate how it is by nature in direct opposition to the process of education and innovation.

This is not entirely a bad thing. Some stability in markets is preferable to the chaos of constant innovation. So these two forces are always battling each-other in opposition. Yet, Place-politics tends to be a very hard process to curtail. Like weeds in a garden it tends to spread everywhere if not actively checked.

As an entrepreneur I have always felt strongly that to keep my businesses inventive and evolving fast. It is paramount to keep my people "real" as far as the complexity of their jobs. To keep legal boundaries to entry on every level to a minimum (so that practical skill always trumps the amount of degrees somebody has) and also to make sure that my teams don't select others based on their likelihood to be a comfortable fit. Instead I look for



“trouble-makers” and “innovators” who I know will stir the pot!

### **Let's define the difference clearly.**

**Education** is about learning new skills and getting new perspectives on things. It is mental and physical activities aimed solely at enabling a human to do something or understand something he/she could not do or understand before.

**Place politics** (breaking into protected places) is a political process. It has very little to do with education. Instead it is a series of political/regulatory hoops one has to jump through in order to be allowed to legally use a skill one is learning. It is a waiting queue, set up by those already inside the club for those wanting to enter. While you are kept waiting, you are tested to see if you will fit the group in a way that pleases the already established leadership. If you please successfully, you will someday, usually after a few years of proving yourself, be afforded a slot. The entire process often cloaks itself as pretending to: “increase safety” or “protect standards” but these are generally cheap foils. There is (for example) not a shred of empirical proof that driving licenses for cars increase safety or reduce accidents in any way. Yet the global “learning to drive” industry makes billions a year from lessons and exams.

The problem with our current education systems is very visible. Almost anywhere in the world, it is generally very heavy on slot earning activities and very light on actual education. The first skill we all need to cultivate, if we wish to become an extreme learner, is to see the difference between education and slot earning and appreciate that they both require completely different strategies for success. To succeed in education you need dedicated practice, active curiosity, good mentors, conscious experimentation, evaluation and more practice. For slot earning you need to do basically only one thing: Simply obey the rules of the system and pretend you will not be a trouble maker or innovator.

To state it bluntly: When you are learning in order to get a diploma or permit of some type which is given by some institution, your best strategy is usually to simply do whatever you are told by the school. Even if you don't agree or if it feels like a complete waste of time and seems to add nothing to your learning process.

Because this is exactly the point. Perhaps as high as 75% of what we do in most schools doesn't help us get smarter. There are no new perspectives offered, no new skills learned. Place earning activities are not meant to help you with your education. They are hoops and barriers that were put up specifically to slow you down and test your complacency to the leadership.

I believe that 95% of the people who drop out of higher education schools and universities, do so because they are not good at coping with Place-politics. They are often smart, creative and may be very fast practical-learners as far as real education goes. But put them in a school-setting and they don't perform well because everything simply moves to slow and is heavy with Place-earning.

The slow daily grind of endless medial tasks, which clearly don't help them in getting smarter quickly become unbearable. Almost every educational institution in the world has a drop-out rate somewhere between 40 to 60%.

Meaning if you take any 4 or 5-year university course, you will find that if 80 people applied in year one. Maybe only 20 to 30 will graduate 4 years later.

That is an enormous success for Place politics. It means schools succeed in eliminating 40 to 60% of the potential competition for almost any type of job. Now one could argue that only the truly motivated remain and that this is a good thing, but sadly this is not the case.

The honest answer is: those who succeed in formal schools tend to be quite equal in IQ and general intelligence to those who drop out. They are simply a little better at the Place-politics part of school. The great tragedy though is that many drop-outs see

themselves as less smart or believe they are not good at learning because they dropped out. This is also reflected in popular culture and society as a whole. If you finish school you are “smart”.

This is not true. If you left a school or education program, chances are it wasn't the educational aspect that was the problem at all. You probably love getting new perspectives and learning new skills. It may instead very well have been the Place-earning that got you!

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that university's or teachers don't mean well or don't want to teach us. I think the vast majority of teachers mean well, but it doesn't change the fact that all of us who teach for a living, have a pressure to develop place-protecting activities. This puts any teacher in a strange position. We are always simultaneously the greatest possible ally, but also the greatest possible obstacle to our students' development.

**Therefore remember this:**

As students, it is up to us to discern when our teachers are our allies, but also to recognize it when they act as obstacles. This means we have to always keep a skeptical eye on our teachers, mentors and other institutions or persons who are the gateways to new skills. This way we make sure we get the education we need, but we cannot be

held back or lose our ways because of place-protecting by our teachers and mentors.

Why do I start my book with this premise? Because I want to be very clear on one thing: This book is about education. It is about learning new skills and gaining new perspectives and doing both extremely effectively. In order to succeed in this, we have to make a clear distinction between education and place-earning / place politics.

One is empowering and is an ability that you can grow and expand, while the other is a natural external pressure on education that can never be reformed or stopped, but which we have to understand and work-with and around. In other words: We can teach ourselves to become much better learners on a personal level, but we can never really eliminate place-protecting practices in schools or any other human institutions. Think about it. Have you ever heard of a school where the courses become shorter and more effective every year? Of-course not. Courses only ever become longer and more complex. School books only get bigger and more expensive every year and so we shouldn't even try to change this. Instead we must focus on making ourselves extreme learners. We can learn to avoid and break through the hoops that any institutions may throw at us in order to hinder or slow our personal evolution down. At the same time we should grab on to every single bit of help they can offer us. Through this process alone, can we

force our schools and institutions of education to adept to the new world.

Most of all I want you, my dear reader, to realize that, no matter your previous experience in schools, university's or other educational institutes so far. Whether they were a great success for you or even if you dropped out. You can become an extreme learner!

Let's begin!

## **7: The twelve tools of extreme learning:**

Whenever we start the process of learning anything. We follow more-or-less the same steps. From my experience, both as a teacher and a student in a very wide range of skills, I have identified 12 things. You may call them: tools, principles, common pitfalls or great opportunities, depending on your personal outlook. The essence is this: when these 12 are combined together, they form a key insight and allow us as individuals to break through a great number of educational speed barriers. It enables us to overcome a wide range of processes which all work together, nearly invisibly, to slow down almost any learning process. Perhaps the best name for them would be: 12 things that secretly hold back any beginner from mastering anything quickly.

You see, I believe that all humans are by nature extreme learners. Yet, over the course of our lives there are a number of pressures which slowly make it harder and harder for us to use our natural ability. These 12 tools will make us aware of the things that are holding us back and they will give us concrete techniques we can use to overcome these barriers and unlock our full natural learning ability.

## **1: Become a fearless learner!**

When we are born into this world as baby's almost everything around us presents a serious-or even mortal danger. Our parents of course do their best to shield us from our youthful curious natures. As we learn to: crawl and walk, and talk and start exploring more of our little world autonomously.

When we are very small they protect us from danger by erecting fences in front of the stairs at home or by locking us up in pillow-filled soft boxes. Soon our parents will have to change to spoken warnings and instructions though:

*Don't run in the house Johny,*

*Don't run on the stairs Johny,*

*don't leave the street Johny,*

*look left, right and then left again before crossing the street Johny,*

*don't put small toys in your mouth Johny!*

*Etc...*

As we become older and our autonomous range becomes larger we all slowly learn to cope with the dangers of daily life through instruction, following



the examples of those around us and the odd moment of experimentation.

However, because these first 10-to-16 years of every human life are both: filled with an extreme amount of learning and, at the same time, filled with an extreme amount of real potential danger, a large portion of our early learning experiences are emotionally linked to a feeling of fear and uncertainty

The very understandable, but constant pressure from our parents urging our youthful minds not to make deadly mistakes is present at all times in our youth. The memories of all the stern warnings from our parents: (*“Be careful with this! Be careful with that! Etc”*) tends to have a deep effect on our frame of mind and attitude later in life whenever we start learning anything new. Studies have shown that children may receive roughly 600 to a 1000 negative-or-corrective statements from their parents for every 1 positive affirmative comment.

Now it is completely understandable and justified for our parents to try and protect us this way, but the subconscious effect is this:

Much later in life as adults, whenever we go into a learning situation, many of us have subconsciously learned to assume that: whenever we step into a situation that is unfamiliar or new, (like the world of our early childhood) the experience must present

some form of potential mortal danger and we need to be very careful + we need a parent or teacher to supervise us to be safe.

Observe people when they step into almost any learning situation for the first time and you can often clearly see a kind of regression happening. It is as if they transform back into the emotional mindset of a young child. They become overly careful, passive or unable to experiment or take any action without the aid of a teacher or mentor present.

I see it most clearly when I teach adults to play instruments like the saxophone. There is one group in particular that almost always has this behavior. It's adults who have played an instrument for a short time when they were young, but who quit within a year or so and have not played any instrument since. Then... as adults they decide to try an instrument again.

I have seen grown men and woman being extremely careful with their instruments and the first thing I always tell them is: "*Stop being so afraid of your instrument*". They usually look at me a bit puzzled when I first mention it. Then I ask them:

*"As a child, when you tried some instrument in school or when your parents made you play some piano or flute, did your parents warn you a lot to be careful with the instrument?"*

## **Do you think you still need to be THAT careful??" .**

Usually they have to laugh a little bit once they take a moment and reflect on their own behavior after that question.

Of course it was completely reasonable for their parents to warn them to be very careful, but now, when starting to learn an instrument much later in life, It is as if they still feel the warnings from their parents somewhere in the back of their minds.

I have found there are very few people who are completely free of this hidden fear which I like to call: **unconscious excessive carefulness**. Nearly everybody does it to some degree and it hinders us in learning because it makes us TOO careful or reluctant to try things ourselves. I've had students who didn't even have their new instruments out of the case yet when they came to me for a first lesson. They say something like: "I didn't open it yet. I thought I better wait for the first lesson because I was afraid I might break something". Now if you are a 5 year old kid that might be logical. But really, as a 30-year old you were afraid to just gently take an instrument out of a case and experiment a bit yourself??

**You think that is rational??**

Of-course it is great to have a healthy respect for whatever type of tools you are working with. Especially if they are expensive, but you don't want to have any fear or excessive carefulness, when you are learning something new.

This is what I mean by: **You have to become a fearless learner.**

As kids our passion for learning and our curiosity is enormous. We love to play and to try and experiment with everything. We are super open and flexible. As we grow up we tend to slowly stomp our natural curiosity somewhat, because in the first years of our lives, this curiosity often gets us into trouble. However, as we get older the real risk associated with learning new things actually goes down very much! But our new adopted, learned fear of learning stays constant and is often hidden. It's become unconscious. So we need to make a conscious effort to reverse this and regain our full, unrestrained natural curiosity.

Whatever it is you are learning. Make a conscious choice to go into the process fearlessly. To give an example: when I bought my first piano, the day it arrived in my living room I started plucking on it right away (did not have any lessons at that point yet). After a while I noticed a soft metal clicking sound that sounded with several of the keys. So I considered calling a piano technician to check it out, but instead I picked up a screwdriver and

started very slowly, step-by-step, to explore the instrument myself. I unscrewed what I thought I safely could and piece-by-piece I took apart almost the entire instrument. All the time testing and exploring the mechanisms inside.

I spend almost two full days exploring my instrument this way. After a while I finally figured out what was causing the ticking sound and was able to solve it myself. Then I put back the parts bit by bit and finally my piano was assembled and working great again.

Now many of us wouldn't even dream of taking apart a new piano themselves, but why not? The answer in most cases is: a simple childlike fear that makes no logical sense.

*What if I break something?*

*what if I can't put it back together?*

*What if....?*

Well.... **IF** something goes wrong....You simply call and pay an expert to fix it for you and you are fine! You are an adult, you can do that now you know!

All this excessive carefulness is just your early experiences messing around with you.

Of course our parents would probably have been a bit shocked to come home, seeing that their 6-year-old was half-way through disassembling the family piano. However, as an adult this is no longer true.

As an adult there is no real logical reason at all not to be curious or do, with your own property, whatever the heck you choose to do.

**Being a fearless learner means being ready to explore and move forward. It means letting go of your childhood learning strategies of: “waiting like a good boy/girl for others to tell you what you can safely try and what you shouldn't do”. It means being a responsible adult about learning and not letting unreasonable fears stop you from exploring and seeing/experiencing new stuff in whatever way you choose.**

So the first tool to extreme learning is this:

**Become a responsible but fearless adult in your pursuit of knowledge and in exploring the tools and various aspects of your new trade or skill. Dig-in! Re-awaken the curious child in yourself! Try what you can, do what you can! don't be afraid! Don't wait for permission to explore anything unless you feel it truly presents a real danger.**

## **8: Extreme learning tool number 2: Move quickly to deeply understand the tools of your new trade or skill! Get to know your instruments fully!**

If there is one thing you can do to dramatically speed up your learning curve in almost any endeavor, it is this:

**Get to know and understand your tools deeply and thoroughly.**

Musicians use instruments, programmers use computers and programs, painters use canvas and brushes and paints, pilots use planes, taxi drivers use their car and maps, sailors use boats and sails and rigging, businessmen use their deal-making skills. Every trade and skill has its own special tools. Sometimes it's just one, often it is a few.

When we get started on something new, many of us wait much too long to really get to know the tools of our trade.

**How many piano students take apart their instruments in week one?**

**How many tennis players take the strings of their rackets and re-string it in week one?**

**How many beginning programmers buy a computer and take it apart?**

**How many pilots know every part of their plane?**

The answer to all these questions is: Only the great ones! Surprisingly, many teachers also tend to gloss over this subject too quickly. How many of us can even name the basic parts of our car-engine and their functions?

I have found in virtually every field of endeavor. When you meet someone who is truly great at something, they always turn out to be very well-rounded experts in their field. They know how to use their tools. They know how to take their tools apart and fix them if something gets broken. They understand every individual part of the tools they use and how they work together. In other words: They know the “how” and “why” of their tools.

The effect of truly knowing the tools of your trade is significant. To take the example of the musician again, if we need to run to a repair-shop every time something small breaks or gets out of tune on our instrument, we are going to be spending a lot of money and time in the repair shop + traveling to the repair shop.

If we had just taken the time and effort to get to know our instrument better, we might actually be



able to make 75% of the repairs ourselves right away. This then saves us tons of time, effort and money + we would have a lot of extra time for practice. Not to mention the aggravation and DEMOTIVATION that can occur when we are waiting for a repair or when we can't practice because we need to save money to make a repair.

The advantages of truly knowing your instrument manifest themselves very quickly and they really add up. Now I'm not saying that in order to be a good computer programmer you absolutely must be able to build your own computer, completely by yourself just from raw metal plates and some plastic. Obviously that is not possible, but the more we know about: how, the things-we-work-with-every-day are built and how and why they function, the better we will be able to use them. We will break less, experience less problems and we will be able to use our tools far more effectively and efficiently.

**So whatever we can do to increase our knowledge about the tools of our trade. We should do it! And do it right from the start!**

Another example:. When I started sailing at 33 years old and with no prior experience. I deliberately bought a cheap ocean sailor which needed a good bit of refit and repairs. I did this because I knew I would have to familiarize myself with almost every system in order to fix it. When I

finally finished the work. I had gotten to know every mayor system and, as a result I now have a good general understanding of most systems on every sailboat. Its knowledge that comes in handy all the time and which has opened a ton of doors for me.

Now I could have learned sailing without ever bothering to learn about diesel engines or water-makers or 12volt electric systems, etc. but I would have spent much more time and money on paid repairs. Every time something brakes down, I would have had to go into a harbor and wait for someone else to fix things for me. It would have wasted a lot of my time and money. Not to mention the feelings of unease it often creates if we don't know our own systems and we can't repair anything ourselves. It makes us always worried and weary of anything going wrong, because we know it always means a giant hassle, high costs, etc. whenever something breaks.

Also, when you know how your stuff actually works you can talk to other experts at a whole other level and learn in amazing ways. To give an example. I only recently learned about the functions of marine diesel engines and boat-electric systems. It just so happened, while sailing in Holland, we met and became friends with a crew of another boat that was on a similar route towards the Mediterranean sea. This was however one of the most amazing Royal Huisman yachts ever produced. Over 32 meters longs, absolutely stunning in every way. The

dream-boat of any sailor. Worth literally tens of millions. So on our first casual visit on the boat for some drinks, the engineer of the boat (a live-aboard-full-time job) asked me if I would like to see the engine room of the ship. Now to put that in perspective: to a boat person, that is like being asked if you'd like to test-drive you uncle's new Ferrari.

Now imagine if I had not known anything about boat engines. It would have still been an impressive little tour of the belly of the beast, but it would have been by no means the amazing learning opportunity I had now. However, because I knew just enough of how engines work to recognize what was going on. I could really ask some good questions and have a fun interaction with the engineer as he was very happy to show all of the beautiful systems on board and how meticulously he was keeping everything in prime condition. He gave me a real sense of the scale of the systems showing the size of the breakers and the vast expense of electrics and different systems like the water-maker and other life-support systems and how they were all integrated together. I learned some very interesting things which in-turn inspired me to make some adjustments to my own setup.

So a good metaphor to illustrate the difference between knowing your tools and not really knowing your tools I is this:. Imagine you have to cross an ocean in a boat. Now if you really invest some time

in getting to know every detail about the boat before you embark on your journey, you are going to feel confident and safe on board. But imagine how you would feel if you didn't really get to know the boat before-hand. How comfortable would you be on board now? How much larger is the potential for trouble or even death on your journey now?

Now imagine starting anything new and think of investing a good amount of time and effort right from the start to really understand the tools of your new trade. What is that going to do for you learning curve over the long term?

So always remember: If you know your tools: how they work and why they are designed the way they are designed. It will often open all kinds of doors for you which speed up your development along in all kinds of unexpected ways. Most of all, it will make you comfortable and confident. Putting you in a much better state to succeed!

**Strive to get to know and understand the tools and instruments of your trade deeply and right from the start!**

## **9: The 3rd tool of extreme learning: Balance doing with intellectualizing**

Back when we were learning how to walk, nobody told us beforehand how to do it and nobody gave us a book or sheet of paper with instructions. When we learned to speak, nobody gave us instructions about the whole process before we started. Yet, no matter what school or educational provider we attend. Almost every course (no matter the subject) starts with an intellectual (spoken, written or video) introduction.

Before we start doing anything we get (often extensive) instructions about what we are going to do and how we should do it. When studying for a job in a school or university, we usually only get to actually do the job as an intern in the 3rd or 4th year of the study. Now, having read the earlier chapter of this book, we can appreciate this is simply a great amount of place-politics of course, but it also means that most students will literally spend 2 or more years “intellectualizing” before there is much (or even any!) actual practical practice.

There is an understandable reason for this. Getting practical experience means getting our hands dirty and although it can be fun, practical action is also always a little more risky than a theory lesson. It will

always be safer to simply learn how something works intellectually and skip the practical part. Also we all know that practical workshops are often given to groups. Sometimes this means one or two persons in the group actually get to DO, the rest just observes.

Teachers and coaches also have another clear incentive to include long intellectual parts to any course. It enables them to sell much more of their time and they often get to make an extra practice manual or paper book they can sell.

So once again, we see a situation where perhaps nobody sets out to willfully slow down our educational progress, but the combined forces often still do result in exactly that.

How can it be that there is not a single course in any school or university that has no handbook at all? Would it not be very logical for there to be at least a good number of courses which simply do not need any lengthy theory classes?

How many course-books have you been made to purchase over your life which you have never used since? How many theory lessons have you slept through simply in order to get to the practical part?

A significant dis-balance between action and intellectualizing is one of the ways many schools and courses massively slow down our education

process. It's as if we decided on mass that one should never do anything unless we have had intellectual training about it beforehand. I think Sonny Rollins said it best when he proclaimed:

*“Every hour you play the saxophone live on stage, is equal to 3 weeks practicing alone in your practice room or reading books about it”.*

**In truth, intellectualizing is actually a very slow way to learn anything!**

Now don't get me wrong. There is absolutely a place for analyses and forward planning. The fact that we can explain to each other, using words, how something works is a great asset to our kind. Yet, the balance in any learning process should be 90% action and practical practice and only 10% intellectualizing. Just because you have heard or read once, how something works does not actually enable you to do it in real life.

Imagine you have never ever tried snowboarding in your life. Say I make you a deal: I offer to give you a million Euro if you manage to get down a specific mountain (which I would pick) in under 10 minutes.

Now I will allow you some practice before-hand, but you have to choose. Either you get:

**2 hours of practical training on the actual mountain where the challenge will be.**

Or

**8 hours of theoretical education in a classroom.**

Which of the two will give you the best chance to win the million do you think?

So we all intuitively understand that practical training is much more effective than theoretical education. Still, in most places of education the balance is 80 or 90% theory and only 10 to 20% actual practice.

I believe we fall into this trap partly because: it takes simply less energy and effort to sit on a stool and read something, or have a person explain something to us, than it takes to go out there and practice in the real world.

However, as an extreme learner it is vital to make a clear distinction between practice and what I like to call: “**intellectualizing**”.

**Practice** is everything which involves action on the skill itself. If you are learning to windsurf, practice is whenever you are on the water surfing and trying out new moves or tricks or perfecting the parts you already master.

**Intellectualizing** is everything you do when you are off the water. Perhaps you look at some videos of



yourself to see what you can improve. Maybe you create and write down some exercises for your next practice set. Maybe you read a book about improving your surf-technique. Anything you can do to gain new perspectives or see things from a different angle. All of that is intellectualizing.

Isn't it amazing how schools and educators are generally great at coming up with an endless stream of intellectual exercises about their subject, without giving you much opportunity to get any actual practice? For example most people would agree that they learned more about their jobs in the first two months at work, then in their entire time at school. You probably feel the same. Why? Because work is 90% action and 10% intellectualizing while in schools it is sometimes the reverse.

Another reason why this phenomenon can hold us back is because:

**Understanding a skill intellectually often happens much slower and takes much longer than the practice of it.**

For example: I can teach almost anybody to play a little song on almost any instrument in about 20 minutes. However, it is impossible to teach somebody to play a song, reading it from sheet-music in 20 minutes.

Reading sheet-music is a hard intellectual skill. Still, many music teachers couple learning-reading and learning-playing together and their students hardly ever get to play their instrument without reading at the same time. From the start they have students read sheet-music in every exercise. This slows down the progress of their practical playing ability immensely. Playing a few songs by ear is easy to do for most people and can be learned in a few hours. Playing several songs, reading from sheet takes weeks. Because the reading is a complex intellectual exercise, while playing the instrument itself is just a purely physical practice. So these students spend months practicing before they can play their first full song, while it's actually possible to learn that in a few hours or at-most a few days. If we couple practical and intellectual training in one exercise, we can only progress as fast as the slowest of these two processes.

Imagine having to learn how to windsurf while reciting the Latin names of every wave-type you encounter and naming out loud every compass course you sail based on the position of the sun.

Or imagine that as a child, you would have to learn how to speak, while learning how to read and write simultaneously.

Would those intellectual gymnastics help you to learn surfing or talking more quickly? Or would that make your practice unnecessarily difficult?

Still this is how most educators approach teaching. Giving students both intellectual and practical tasks at the same time. So while you are struggling to master a new physical skill you are simultaneously trying to learn some brand new mental gymnastics. The result is we move more slowly in both places.

The way humans learn to speak is a great example. By the time kids go to school they are usually already quite good at speaking. They have learned this without any theory lessons or technical explanations. Simply by mimicking their parents, their surroundings and through playful experimentation. It is only then that they start to learn how to write and read from paper. This is an order of learning that makes sense. What we do in many other fields of study unfortunately often does not make so much sense.

Some universities promote a similar credo but in a different more subtle version. The mantra often seen and heard is: "If you don't understand it, you shouldn't be doing it"!

So students come in with often already amazing ability's and then the teachers start challenging them to intellectualize everything they do. This is not bad in general, but often it is followed by the promotion of a philosophy that:

**A true master should always know exactly what he is doing.**

In my opinion this is one of the biggest loads of grog (excuse my French) ever!

Though there are moments where intellectualizing is a good challenge and helps us develop, most of our time should be spend actually doing/using the skill we are learning!

We see the effect of this the best in many art students. Whether painters, musicians, but also architects and writers. They enter universities being very imaginative and full of a lust for experimentation, but then the teachers start focusing them on form and method. They get challenged all the time to not only create, but to be able to explain why they have created it one-or the other specific way. They learn they must not just do, they must think it through in every way first. Otherwise it has no value.

**The result is that many students exit such schools (either with or without a diploma), with many of them feeling spiritually and creatively completely dead and drained by the time they graduate or drop-out.** They no longer feel creative or playful in any way, because everything they do, they intellectualize instantly. Often it takes them years to shake this learned habit and get back to a state of mind where they can once again play and be imaginative and open.

Balance practice with intellectualizing. If a teacher pushes you to mix the two or focuses too much on intellectualizing everything, call them out on it and demand more practical practice! + Don't mix intellectual and practical progress too much. Often-times your physical ability will progress much faster than your intellectual ability. This is OK!

**80% practical practice and 20% intellectualizing is a good balance to strive for.**

## **10: The 4th tool of extreme learning: Learn with others as fast as you can! Don't practice alone for too long.**

When we start learning a new skill, we generally seek some privacy. After just one painting lesson, we probably don't want to open a gallery just yet. If we've just started salsa-dancing lessons, we won't want to enter into a contest right away. After having just started programming code, we probably don't feel ready to take on our first coding job just yet.

It's understandable that we first want to “get proficient” before we want to step out into the light and present our new skills to the world. However, many of us wait for far too long. Some people who play music instruments seldom play publicly or with others. Many painters never ever present their works anywhere. Some of us never seek out others who are learning the same skills we are exploring.

But, if we wish to be extreme learners, that is exactly what we must do! From the moment we start something we should be looking actively for every chance to share with others and to engage our new skill professionally or as a hobby with others.

This means:

**Join a band!**

**Join a forum or meeting-group about your skill.**

**Start a hobby group,**

**Take your paintings to galleries and try to get them exposed.**

**etc.**

Whatever skill it is we are learning. We can find others who are doing the same and start doing it with and for them. If they are ahead of us, we can learn from them. If they are behind us, we can teach them!

It is one of the most powerful learning strategies available to us. Getting involved with others will increase our learning speed enormously.

**It will challenge our learning in ways we could never have predicted.**

**It will expose us to all the various aspects of our new skill in a practical way.**

**It can help to motivate us and it can stimulate us to challenge ourselves.**

**It also means access to (often free) help whenever we need it and too (often free) extra books and learning materials from others.**

Here is a story about how I applied this principle myself when I was starting to learn to play the saxophone:

Getting started (and knowing 7 years ago already many of the principles described in this book), I knew how important it was to get involved in playing with others as soon as I could.

So I scoured my city (Amsterdam) looking for a place where I, a player with less than 2 weeks of experience, could play together with others. Looking at various event calendars I quickly discovered an event called “workshop & session” in the Amsterdam Bimhuis. This is one of the older jazz clubs in the city and the event also (I did not know that at the time) is one of the longest running weekly music workshops in the city. So I immediately resolved to visit it at the first opportunity. This event was held every Tuesday evening and so the very next Tuesday evening I was there. I had brought my saxophone with me, but since I had no idea what to expect beforehand, I found out there were a few things I needed to prepare first before I could join in.

It turned out this was a music improvisation workshop. You did not need to know how to read



music but you did need to be able to play with others.

I discovered that to start the event, the workshop leader had every new attender play a song (of their own choice) for about one minute on stage before the audience. He did this so that everybody else could hear the person play and so gage their level. Then he would chose somebody from the group of regular attending musicians and tell them to improvise a bit with the new-comer to see if they could do it.

So I knew what I had to do. For the next 7 days I practiced about 2 hours a day on learning the melody to one of my favorite songs (On the Sunny side of the street by Sonny Rollins) and I imagined what it would be like to have to improvise with a complete stranger, on STAGE! With about 40 or 50 people watching.

And so two weeks later I sat there in the crowd again and the leader walked by and noticed my saxophone case and asked me :"*You would like to join the workshop?*" and I said "Yes" Then I asked a guy next to me: "How long do most people play their instrument before they join this thing?" he answered: "Most play maybe 3 or 4 years I guess". You can imagine how I felt then haha.

First a new girl played violin for a minute very beautifully. Then a guitar player from the regulars

joined her and what they improvised was very nice also. Then it was my turn...

I walked on stage, feeling the peering eyes of the crowd. Keep in mind I had never even touched a saxophone until just 3 weeks before this moment. I played my rehearsed melody, which I thought didn't go too bad. The leader asked me how long I played. I said: "3 weeks" He laughed and so did the audience. But then he invited a drummer from the regulars to join me and we started to improvise. I have to admit, I sucked. I guess I blocked a bit. I played some notes, but I was trying way too hard I guess. So we finished. The leader stood up and said. "*Look it is nice that you are trying but you really don't even master the basics of your instrument yet so you don't belong in this workshop*". I started to walk down the stage but then I stopped and said to the workshop leader (who by the way is a legendary jazz teacher from the Amsterdam conservatory and one of the best bass players in the country) "*But I can play some notes. Can't you teach me how to make it work with what I do know?*" The workshop leader paused for a second, and then the whole atmosphere changed. He walked onto the stage himself and then proceeded to teach me exactly what I could do to still make it work despite my limited control of the instrument.

Sufficed to say, that one comment, combined with the fact that I was just there! On stage, showing

that I was willing to try it, made all the difference. From that moment on I was welcome, despite my lack of skill. And for the next two years I never missed a single one of these workshops. I was there every Tuesday evening, playing, playing and playing. And I learned a lot. As I got better other players started to invite me to come play with them and their bands in garages etc and I got invited to other open mike events also. A few years later I even started my own jazz event which become one of the biggest sessions in town for several years playing in both Jazzclub the badcuyp and the North Sea jazz club in Amsterdam.

**So whatever it is you are starting, no matter how impossible it may seem at the beginning. You want to get involved with others as soon as you can! Not when you feel you are ready! Not when it's comfortable! You want to do this long before you are "ready" and long before you feel comfortable with it!**

The benefits are endless!

**So never forget the 4th tool of extreme learning:**

Don't learn alone for too long! Start finding groups and others you can team up with right from the start! No matter your level!

## **11: The 5th tool of extreme learning: The expensive pit! Trying to compensate for your lack of skill by buying better equipment.**

It happens to all of us and it is a trap that each of us has already fallen for at some point in our lives. Let's see if you recognize this story:

We start surfing, or playing an instrument or coding or painting or whatever it happens to be. Now because we are only just getting started we buy some beginner-level tools. A cheap surfboard, a reasonably priced beginner instrument, an average laptop, a cheap easel, brushes and a little set of paints etc.

Now for our start, this materials do just fine, but as soon as we get a little experience this tiny voice in the back of our mind starts saying:

*"If only I had a better.....surfboard...instrument...laptop...etc If Only I had that top-of the line X then I would instantly get soooo much better!"*

So we browse the web or the local store and long for this top-of-the-bill tool. Musicians especially know this phenomenon well! I once met a man who was only playing the saxophone 6 months, but he had bought 8 saxophones and 12 different mouth-

pieces in that period. Especially if you have some money to throw around, this can really hijack your learning curve and become a very expensive detour. Because guess what:

Those new toys don't make YOU any better!

The truth is: We all need to expect that learning anything new is going to take some time. A few weeks, a few months, a year, sometimes even longer (depending on what you are trying to learn). We have to expect that, for a while at least, we will suck at it. And no amount of new gadgets or better equipment is going to change that.

When we start with anything new, a good, middle of the road, quality instrument is absolutely a big plus, but anything above that is not going to help you learn. More likely it will complicate things. It can become like trying to learn how to drive in a formula 1 car. This really doesn't make it easier to learn and it certainly doesn't improve OUR driving skill in any way.

**A good rule of thumb is:**

When you start something new, buy good tools that will last you a while.

**You want to stick with your first tools and really try to get absolutely everything out of them you can. Keep at it until literally every teacher,**

**mentor or colleague you have starts telling you:  
"you need better tools!"**

Only once we get to a level where our beginner tools are truly and obviously starting to impede our further development, is it the right time to start exploring other options. The good thing is: Once we get to that level, we will truly be able to appreciate the difference. We will know much better what we really need. When we finally do upgrade our tools we can make a truly informed choice.

**So don't upgrade your tools in hopes that it will somehow improve your skills. You should instead upgrade your tools whenever your current stuff is starting to hold you back!** It's fine to try out different tools regularly of course to see what the results are, but just remember it's a very easy and seductive trap to fall for.

So when you find yourself once again, not practicing hard at home, but instead wondering around in your personal candy store. Fantasizing about that new.....beauty.... ;) Remember this!

**Don't try to compensate for a lack of skill by buying better equipment!**

## **12: The 6th tool of extreme learning: Keep mixing it up, Don't cultivate a specialty too soon!**

There is a subtle principle which is very prevalent among all humans and in almost all occupations. It has to do with our propensity to prioritize the things we are already good at, over the stuff we are not so good at yet. The experience usually develops somewhat like this:

We start learning something new. Let's say we start painting.

Perhaps a friend gave us a course on classical painting and composition as a birthday gift. The course is really inspiring and as a result, we start painting almost every weekend using the new skills we've learned. After a few weeks we decide we would like to do another course and upgrade our skill to a next level. So we decide to take another (more advanced) classical composition course and we buy a book on classical composition and start working with it. A few weeks later a friend of a friend approaches us with a compliment about one of our paintings he has seen on our Facebook page and this person tells us how he admires the classical style we use. He asks us if we could make a custom painting for his house in the same style? And of-course we happily do!

Now obviously there is nothing wrong here, in fact it's great! Yet, there is something happening here which is often not so obvious to us and it is this:

**Once we start something and we get a little experience with it in a certain style or using a certain method of action, we have a strong tendency to stay in this style or keep using this method for ever.** After all, if we just learned the basics of classical painting, why would we switch to painting abstractly or in the expressionist style? It makes a lot of sense to keep moving in the same direction right? And as we get better at one style, we enjoy painting in that style even more. So why change anything?

In addition to that, as soon as people start to discover we are good at something, they will often contact us for that specific style or method of action. So we tend to quickly develop an external pressure which helps to focus all our development to the style or approach we are already in. Whether it is your: style of painting, your position on the basketball field, the type of cars you race, the type of waves you surf or your field of expertise in the financial department.

Also, different styles within any field usually go accompanied with some level of politics and historic strife. The classical guys perhaps don't really mix with the more experimental crowd, the fiction writers love to look down on the non-fiction writers,



Etc. So sometimes getting another perspective on your skill requires you to “mix with the enemy” a little. At least in the eyes of your teachers or friends.

The combined effect is that: As soon as we get a little good at anything, there is both an internal and external pressure which keeps us moving in that direction and creates a real barrier to changing or experimenting with other styles or methods. And though specialization is generally a good thing. Many of us do it way to fast and without ever consciously making a choice to specialize. The process happens to us almost accidentally and often without us realizing.

**It is a subtle process which works almost invisibly, but actually it can slow down our development a lot and can vastly limit our abilities in the long run.**

If you want to employ extreme learning, you must keep a keen eye on this subtle human tendency and make a conscious effort to regularly step away from the stuff you are already good at, in favor of new styles and experimentation. When the choice comes to choose between: taking a 3rd or 4th course in classical composition or to switch to a beginners-course in expressionist compositions and techniques. Choose to explore the new style!

I like to say: ***“The more you feel like you don't want to explore any new styles or methods, the more you actually really need to!”***

So gage your own feelings regularly and realize that **this barrier does not manifest as a desire not to change your style or method.** Instead, it takes the form of a deep passion and affection for a certain style or method, coupled with the admiration and adulation of your friends and colleagues for your level of mastery in your skill.

As a result, It can be quite hard to emotionally push yourself to try something truly different. Not only will we feel like we are stepping away from our place of power, we also might feel that we are taking a bit of a risk with some of our current fans or friends for fraternizing with the “enemy” ;) but trust me! Once you do. As soon as you do it, you will always find that you enjoy it immensely and that you discover a great many new useful tricks and perspectives.

**Try to actively switch-it-up for a good while and get a broad experience before you choose to specialize.**

For example: after two weeks of skiing, go snowboarding on your next vacation instead. Once you've played classical trumpet for a few months, try a jazz course. Once you've done a few salsa courses, try a classic Cha Cha Cha workshop

instead. If you've been programming IOS apps for a year, try an Android course.

Staying in one genre or methodology is like living your life in only one country. If you never venture out to other lands and get new perspectives, you will miss out on a lot! Every time you visit or explore a different side of your world, you bring stuff back with you. Things that help you get better overall. Often times you will discover answers on how to evolve further, in very unexpected places.

Talk to any professional snowboarder and you will find they are also pretty good: skiers, mountaineers, surfers, sailors, wake-boarders, etc. And exploring each of those different-but-related fields helps them to become better at their sport. So it is with learning everything!

**The more you venture out to other styles and even different-but-related fields of study, the more you empower your skill from all angles.**

Make use of the 6th tool of extreme learning: Keep mixing it up, Don't cultivate a specialty too soon!

## **12: The seventh tool of extreme learning: Become an expert/master in at least one thing!**

You can't become a true extreme learner until you have reached the master level in at least one skill. That is why it is vital to do so as fast as possible. Encourage your kids from a young age to become an expert/master in at least one thing. It can be any skill, but the goal should be to become fully competent-and able to compete at a very high level in this area. If you are not sure what to start with, I encourage you to choose any music instrument or sport and commit to becoming a fully competent player of it.

The reason for this: It takes a lot to achieve mastery for the first time in any area, but once you become an expert at one thing, it becomes much easier to become an expert in a second area. It is as if, once you have proven to yourself and others you can reach a high level in one area, the barriers on everything else go down a notch. Every time you reach a high level in an additional skill, your combined skills compound with each other and make it easier to learn the next thing even faster and easier.

Once you can speak two languages, it becomes much easier to learn a third language. If you're great at Tennis you will easily pick up squash or

badminton. Once you are a good swimmer, you will have a much easier time learning: surfing, wake boarding, scuba diving, sailing etc. If you become great at math you will have a much easier time picking up coding, engineering or doing DIY projects. If you are great at ballet, you will have a much easier time picking up salsa and tango, but also acting and maybe combat sports too.

The goal is to reach a high level. That is to say: to cultivate your ability up to a point where there is almost nothing inside this skill-area you would not be able to do. You don't need to become the actual world champion, but you should be a high level contender.

To take the simple example of surfing, once you reach the level where you are comfortable and able to surf in almost any place or condition. Small waves, big waves, fast waves, slow waves, safe beach breaks, but also dangerous shallows or reef breaks. Once you are capable and comfortable surfing any of these and would be happy to join a contest, you can reasonably claim a high level of competency.

Or say you are learning a foreign language. Once you can speak and write the language on the level where native speakers are honestly impressed and you can claim without a doubt that: you master the language at a level equal to that of a highly competent native speaker.

On an instrument, when you can perform professional concerts, both reading music from sheet or played from memory in front of an audience. Commanding the full range of your chosen instrument and style and being able to speak with other musicians about the spoken and written language of music with detail and complexity.

Though the path to mastery is different for each skill, it is also very similar in most cases. The details and application may be different but the amount of: focus, determination, discipline and perseverance are about the same for learning any skill at a high level.

This is why it is important to achieve mastery at least once! Because once we have seen, in one field, exactly what it takes. It primes and prepares us for every additional time we will go through the process. Also there is a culture among highly skilled people all over the world. Once you are an expert in one thing, it will be far easier to gain access to the help and coaching of other experts in almost any field. Experts always respect other experts. Once you are “in the club” as it were, you will enjoy many benefits, because you have proven your worth, your willpower and your ability to persevere. And you have something to contribute, to share, to TEACH! This is a real substantive something which you can offer in exchange for the help of other experts in your new learning endeavors.

Subsequently I believe there are some skills in life which we should give extra special attention. I like to refer to these as “**Key-Skills**”. Although there is virtually and endless amount of skills we may learn as humans. I believe there is a much more limited amount of very special key-skills. The label of KEY refers to their special function as gate keepers of sorts. We might say that each key-skill unlocks a whole set of others. Often times, if we don't learn the key-skill we cannot ever learn any of the skills that lie “locked” beyond it.

**For an example: let us take the Key-skill of: swimming.**

If you can swim yourself, this may seem like a small feat, but those who cannot swim, truly miss out on a whole world of experiences and skills: snorkeling, surfing, scuba diving, sailing, wake boarding, kite surfing, even the simple joy of: floating around on an inflatable in a pool is often off-limits to the non-swimmer.

There are quite literally thousands of activities that involve swimming or which are made much safer or easier if one is a good swimmer. Therefore we can consider it more than an ordinary skill. It is a key-skill.

**Another key-skill is: singing.**

It is a very different type of key-skill than swimming. This one is actually far less common in our society, but all those who have had even basic training in this art, know its immense impact on a human life. Singing is not just a physical exercise. To sing fully, with all one's power and emotion and without holding back is a feat which requires much more than just physical techniques. It requires tremendous confidence and a true command of one's emotions. To sing fully in front of an audience is something dared only by relatively few people.

If you want to know if any person is truly comfortable in their own skin, ask them to sing. Consequently you will find that.. If you pursue the art of singing, your life will be changed in many exciting and unexpected ways. It is a key to truly special moments which relatively few ever unlock.

Writing - is another Key-skill and so is math. Of-course it is not possible for me to write in detail about every key-skill I have discovered so far, but below I do Include for you a small list with what I consider to be: extremely valuable key-skills that I believe anyone would be wise to master in his/her life as soon as one can.

**swimming,**

**writing,**

**math,**



**English,**

**singing,**

**formal dancing,**

**any martial art,**

**driving a car, motorbike and motor boat,**

**speed-reading,**

**one board-sport (either ski, snowboard or any type of surfing or skate-boarding),**

**writing and reading HTML,**

**woodcraft,**

**stock-trading,**

**painting or drawing,**

**tennis,**

**soldering and welding,**

**cooking,**

**sailing,**

**event organizing,**

**teaching (any subject).**

**playing any music instrument.**

**public speaking.**

So head principle 7! Strive to become an expert in at least one thing, as soon as you can! Throughout your life, try to unlock as many Key-skills as you can. I will come back much more specifically to: how any person can reach the master level in any skill, in a later chapter.

## **13: The 8th tool of extreme learning: First discover each skill's illusive-obvious perspective!**

At the core of each skill is a small number of (often) closely guarded trade-secrets. They usually consist of a certain unique perspective + a few highly specialized skills.

For example. The art of the stage-magician is mostly about **misdirection**. Everything in this trade involves various forms of misdirecting people's attention, and then using this to hide a few moves and finally trick the audience.

**The perspective is: It's all about misdirection.**

The applications of the principle are many. For example: Leading people's eyes with one hand, while secretly doing something with your other hand is one application.

The question the magician keeps asking every time they try to come up with some new trick is: *How can I misdirect people's attention so I can conceal the necessary actions to perform the trick?* Once you understand the principle, you can apply it in a million different ways. You know in each situation, what you are looking to achieve.

**Whenever you enter a new field of study. You should consciously search for the unique perspectives and you should expect your teachers and mentors to do everything they can to prevent you from discovering them too quickly.** You see, once you understand the principles, you can often apply them yourself quite easily. Once you understand them, you can often even come up with your own exercises and you might need a mentor much less. So teachers have a bit of a motive not to teach you the real central principles too quickly. They often beat-around-the-bush for as long as they can.

A perfect and illustrative example of this is the interval secret in music. It's a devilishly simple trick that can teach almost anybody the core of music theory in a simple intuitive way in less than 10 minutes. Once you know the perspective and the trick is learned, you can develop the skill of: recognizing the distance between any two music notes by ear on any instrument in about two hours.

Once you have learned this trick, you will never forget it and it is absolutely the foundation (a key skill) to the entire world of music theory. Yet you will scarce find any music student who was taught this secret in their first year of music lessons. There are piles of music theory books and methods that never even mention this trick. Instead they provide hopelessly complicated and convoluted methods of learning intervals that have virtually zero chance of

success and take a student weeks or months to learn the same thing.

Every professional musician knows the interval trick. All of them use it every day. However, many students only learn it after years of study. When they do eventually find out about it. They are invariably a little shocked that no one ever mentioned it before. You will find this happens in many areas of expertise.

Let's look at another example in mathematics, A Harvard math professor, who is now a physicist, once told me that he always hated and sucked at math until he came across a book on advanced physics, which he picked up by chance during his time at university.

It was a very high level math book, the type of thing you would never even attempt to pick up unless you were a straight-A student at math your whole life. He said that he actually just looked in it by chance. Yet, it opened up the entire field of mathematics for him and from that time on, he loved it. He described the reason why as follows and I quote:

*“My problem with math had always been that it felt like everything was full of black holes. I felt I was doing all kinds of operations with numbers, but I had no real idea why they worked or what I was really doing. When you get into applied physics all of a sudden they start giving you the whole*

*equations and it becomes very clear and easy to see what is actually going on. I realized that math was never hard because it was difficult. It had been hard because I had always been working with only half the tools”.*

So all he gained was some essential key perspectives and all of a sudden, what had been very hard before for years, had become suddenly fun and interesting.

The American Business mogul Eben Pagan coined the term **the Illusive obvious** for these types of perspectives: I'm sure you remember the days (or perhaps children no longer do this in school, but they once did...) when you would take an old shoe-box to school and, with the help of the teacher, you would construct a scene inside this box using cardboard figures and cut-out landscapes etc. You'd put one tiny hole in the top to let in light and another in the side. This side-hole was “the view-point, giving you the only correct perspective”. Only when you looked through this could you see the scene in the box as it was intended.

In a very similar way. Each new skill is like a locked looking-box. No matter from which side you look at it, it may often make very little sense or show you absolutely nothing until you discover the right perspective. It is often very illusive, but once you find it, the scene before you suddenly makes perfect sense. It becomes obvious!

**Eben described it to me using the following example and I paraphrase:**

*“Whenever I visit a carnival and my wife is eyeing me to go and win her some stuffed animal in some silly game. I always like to take my time to study the game first because I know, in order to win, I have to discover the illusive obvious secret first!*

*I think we have all seen the game where the carnny shows you how easy it is to throw a ball in a bucket right? Yet, when you try it yourself it seems nearly impossible. The ball always seems to almost go in. It's always 95% in. Sometimes it even goes in all the way for a moment, but then it kind of bounces out again or roles out. Somehow, no matter how much people try it, it never actually goes in and stays in.*

*When I see a game like that I like to study the carnny for a while from a distance as he demonstrates how easy it is. I know there is some illusive secret and I actively look for it. Maybe he is spinning the ball a certain way, or maybe he is always throwing it at a specific angle or with much less speed than the contestants. In any case I observe from a distance until I figure it out. Often, once you actively look for it, it is quite easy to see what he is doing.*

*Then I approach and enter the game. Almost every time I manage to win the game. And almost always, as soon as I try and the Carnny sees I am using the*

*correct technique they will laugh and say something like... "Ahhh you are going to win!" Because they know immediately that you caught on to their trick and usually they actually can appreciate it. However they also usually only let you win one stuffed animal so it's not really a good investment for me to spend two hours of my time, to figure out some little trick just to win one stuffed dog".*

It's a brilliant explanation, but it also applies far beyond this carnival trick. In every field, there exists a few of these illusive obvious perspectives. They can be hard to discover, but once you know them. Once you see how it works, the magic and complexity disappear like snow before the sun and it usually becomes very easy to do something. It's like hearing the secret to a magic trick. All of a sudden it becomes simple and logical.

The most powerful aspect of it, is that it reveals this: Time is often not a major factor in learning a skill. Think of the carnival trick with the ball in the bucket. Some might assume the carny can only do it successfully, because he has had years and years of practice working at his stall. Perhaps he had to practice this for hours and days as a kid growing up at the traveling carnival? But in reality it was not years of practice, but a simple illusive obvious perspective coupled with only a little practice that makes it possible. This holds true for a great many skills. Although perhaps 20% of the time one truly needs years of practice to be able to do something.



Most of the time, once you have found the right perspective, you may only need a few minutes, hours or days of practice to be able to do it yourself.

So when you enter a new field, you have to look and ask actively for the illusive obvious perspectives of the trade. More often than not, you will have to shake them out for yourself because people who know them will be reluctant to share them. If you feel people are not being straight-up with you or if things seem more complicated than they should be, you are usually correct. And it is usually a sign that something vital is being withheld. When you see a master do something that seems very hard to you, don't automatically assume it is because of years of practice. In some cases it will be, but plenty of times it is not. The master before you may often just be using some simple, but illusive trick which you cannot see yet.

**Don't misunderstand me. Mastering some skills genuinely takes lots of practice and training. I don't want to negate that at all, but without the illusive obvious perspectives, no matter how hard you practice, you will often not master the skill.**

So remember the 8th principle:

**Look for each skill's illusive obvious perspectives! And expect teachers and mentors to be coy about it!**

At the same time, knowing these perspectives gives you great power to recognize great teachers quickly. I have found that invariably, truly great teachers always begin right away by laying out the essential perspectives in great detail.

If you encounter a teacher who does not seem to forward any perspectives. I urge you to take a moment to explain to him/her the concept of the illusive obvious as I have just described it to you and then simply ask them specifically to give them to you. A great many teachers don't think about the power of the perspective that they have consciously, but if you ask them for it in a precise and clear way, they are often able to come up with it on the spot.

## **14: The 9th tool of extreme learning: Experiment much more!**

Every skill has its special tool or set of tools. A computer program, A snowboard, An instrument, a set of special clothing, etc.

When you are in the process of learning a skill, much of that process is in fact: You learning to use the tool of the trade. When you learn painting you are actually learning how to use a canvas, pencils, brushes and paints. When you learn programming, you are learning a coding language and how to use a coding program on a computer. When you learn to surf, you are learning how to handle a surfboard in a variety of waves and conditions etc.

In most cases you're teacher will structure you're learning along a path that gradually introduces you to new, more advanced uses of the tools and more challenging tasks that require more and more skill. This makes total sense, however there is one aspect of learning that teachers and mentors routinely leave out or under-stimulate. And it is: Experimentation!

This is not anybody's fault or caused through any bad intentions. It happens because this skill is by its very nature not particularly suited for a lesson or course setting.

It would feel a little strange if a paid-teacher or mentor would tell us at the beginning of the lesson: “Ok today I want you to actively experiment and improvise however and in whatever way you like”.

After all, what would there be left for the teacher to do during this lesson? Just sit back and watch..? That would be easy money indeed. So it's not surprising teachers don't focus very much on experimentation. However, because most students defer to their teacher to choose what they practice, the unintended consequence is that: most students (in almost every field) hardly ever experiment! Experimentation literally has become the very last phase in formal education. In music teaching for example, it is often the last 5 minutes of a lesson. How would one even practice experimentation during a painting lesson? Or during a basketball training or coding course?

See what I mean?

Though not intentional, this lack of experimentation creates a cultural perception that it's only the seasoned masters that get to experiment, invent and try out new things.

This hurts us all, because:

**Regular autonomous experimentation is in FACT the quickest way we can increase our competency and learn new aspects of whatever it is we are studying.**

It is not the student who does exactly what the teachers says in technical class, who becomes a great innovator. Instead it is the kid who was, in addition to the classes, boldly taking apart his motorcycle at home every Sunday afternoon without any help or guidance.

**True “learning” happens mostly from experimentation.**

The process of experimentation is often misunderstood so let us adopt a clear definition of it:

**We can only experiment with things we have never done before.**

If we are doing something we have tried (even just once) before, we are quickly moving away from pure experimenting and are transitioning quickly into practicing. The difference is significant!

The process of experimentation consists solely of:

***Finding areas of a skill or ability we have never tried before and have no experience with, and then consciously attempting it anyway.***

So it maybe something new, or it may be several things we already know but combined in a way that we never tried before.

Experimentation is an exceedingly special process and most of all, if you really think about it, IT is the reason why we can learn so much faster and more than any other being on earth. We humans don't just accidentally discover stuff. We humans consciously venture out of our comfort-zones and actively test new things. It is the core of our unique human learning ability.

When we experiment, we learn in a completely different way. Imagine you are learning to snowboard. Now there are not so many aspects of snowboarding which you could experiment with that haven't already been tried by a thousand others, but that still doesn't mean that it is not hugely valuable for you to experiment and discover things for yourself.

**It matters whether you have experimented and have figured something out yourself, or if somebody else just instructed you how to do it.**

To give an example: when I learned wave surfing. I never had a single lesson or instruction. After about two days of practice learning the basics, which consisted solely of me experimenting by myself while looking at other surfers around me to see how they were doing it. I came running out of the water

happy as a 5 year old and said to my Girlfriend, who was sunbathing at the time, I said: *"I think I finally got the secret!"*

She and another girl (good friend of ours and an experienced surfer who was also on the beach with us) said: *"What?"* I answered: *"I figured out that as soon as you are standing on the board and you feel the speed coming on, you have to make a sharp turn right back into the wave, It feels like the wrong thing to do, but when you do it, you suddenly gain a lot more speed and you can turn back away from the wave again. As soon as you speed-up you cut back into the wave again, and repeat and repeat. That is how you stay on a wave long."* Our friend, who is an experienced surfer laughed and said: *"Yes duhh! Every surfer knows that, they even call it 'cutting'"*. I laughed and I said, *"I'm sure they do, but I didn't know that. I just discovered it for myself."*

**The difference is: When you learn to do things the right way, through instruction by a teacher and practice it the correct way from the start, you will never learn all the wrong ways to do it!**

When you experiment, you walk the path of the great innovators before you. You are discovering! Like Edison said when a reporter famously asked him: *"how many times have you failed at creating a working light-bulb?"* He answered: *"I never failed. I just discovered 20.000 ways how not to make a*

*light-bulb*". This quote is often cited to show people what it means to have perseverance. We think the message of the quote is: Don't quit no matter how many times you fail! But actually there is a different meaning to this quote. It is: **the value is not just in learning the correct way, learning all the wrong ways is an essential step to truly learning the correct way. And each wrong way you discover is immensely valuable in its own way too!**

Experimentation is vital if you want to gain a deep understanding of what you are doing. Don't get me wrong I do not want to negate the value of good instruction, but the order should often be turned around. One should first experiment to see if one can figure something out by yourself. Then, if we cannot, a teacher can help us by guiding us to the right insights and techniques. With instruction we only learn in a shallow way. When you learn through personal experimentation you learn deep. You become familiar with every aspect of the skill and you get a complete 360 view of both the what-to-do and the why-you-do-it-that-way.

A good friend of mine who is one of the most respected teachers in the Amsterdam conservatory once told me: "*You can always tell if a musician is self-taught or not*". I didn't know this at the time so I asked him: "*How can you tell?*" He told me: "*A self-taught musician always sounds unique. You can always pick them out very easily because they will sound clearly different from everybody else. Their*



*sound, their stylistic quirks, they will all be a little unusual. So if you take 5 saxophone players or 5 flutists, or five pianists, and there is one amongst them who is self-taught. You will generally be able to pick them out very easily. They will do all kinds of things a teacher would have told them not to do, but for them it works, because it's just their unique sound. Take Louis Armstrong for example. When he decided to start singing in addition to his trumpet playing. All his friends (at first) thought he was mad. He didn't have any formal training in it and he sounded completely unlike any of the singers in that time.*

***People LOVED it! And he of course quickly became one of the most innovative vocalists of the time”.***

Whenever and whatever you learn through instruction, you are learning a very specific style and method which was created by others. Whenever you experiment, you potentially go beyond the boundaries of method and style. You enter a unique space where you get to truly be creative. As a result, what you learn will be your method and your style. Which will be unique and in many cases superior to any general methodology, because it is specific to you! So it is perfect for you!

To become an extreme learner you have to make the switch from relying on instruction, to focusing 80% on experimentation. You want to employ this

as much as possible. Instruction is what you fall back on whenever experimentation fails-or if it is simply too dangerous to use experimentation.

Experimentation can help you break through a lot of walls. Can you imagine if Louis Armstrong had taken singing lessons? What might have happened had he relied on others to tell him if he should attempt a career as a singer or not? They would have told him after the first lesson: "Sorry but you just don't have a good singing voice". Because he didn't fit the existing mold.

**When you experiment, almost nothing can stop you from succeeding. You are making your own path.**

And there is another important difference..

For example: If we want to become a master skydiver. Ideally we would do that fully through experimentation. So that means creating our own parachutes and then testing them and gradually figuring out the entire sport through experimentation. You can see how much deeper we would learn if we actually would do it this way right? However, it is of course not really practical or very safe to re-invent skydiving on our own. The amount of money and risk we would have to take would render it almost impossible. And so this is why we rely for a good part on instruction.

This is the balance we need to seek as extreme learners. In theory, it's always best to learn anything 100% through pure experimentation if we can, because we learn much deeper when we do. Most of the time however, for reasons of having limited time and in order to avoid unnecessary risks to our health and safety, it is better to rely on instruction in some situations.

The important thing to remember is **that experimentation is truly an almost magical process**. And we should all use its power more. This is why the symbol of extreme learning is the light bulb filled with lightning. The bulb symbolizes the power of experimentation and perseverance (Edison's 20.000 light bulb experiments) the lightning symbolizes the immense power, but also reminds us of the risks of experimentation. That is the essence of extreme learning: **Experiment! Persevere and take calculated risks when you escalate your experiments step by step!**

Not only does experimentation have a huge impact on the development of our personal methodologies, but also on our tools. In my life, I have built the insides of a complete house (my first) with my own hands. I have rebuilt an old sailing-boat from top to bottom with my own hands. I have designed and handcrafted my own music instrument (a saxophone) with my own hands, I have written quite a few methodologies for learning various things and in general in my life, I am surrounded by lots of stuff

which I have created myself. All of them are unique because I relied heavily on experimentation to create them. For me, each of these are perfect tools and they give me a great advantage.

All of my commercial products also have been experimentations and have been received as unique but also as challenging conventions. My saxophone method has been praised as the most effective in the world but also as dangerous (by the more old-fashioned music teachers) because it does not follow convention. Of-course this is very understandable.

**When you learn through experimentation, you will often find that it is worth-while and possible for you to craft you own tools. And these will be better than any other tool you can purchase because they will be exactly right for you. They are personalized.** This is another unique benefit that experimentation unlocks for us.

Use the 10th tool of extreme learning as much as you can!

**Experiment much more!** And we should do so preferably before we get instructions. Experimentation should ideally take precedence over instruction. **Experimentation is the fastest and deepest way to learn anything!** Instruction is what we fall back on whenever we can't succeed

through experimentation or when we need to save time or avoid unnecessary risk.

However, learning through experimentation requires personal responsibility. We need to know ourselves very well and make sure we manage the risk that comes from using experimentation and we should rely on instruction when necessary.

## **REVERSE!**

There is however one place in which experimentation will be detrimental to us all. So I feel I must mention it here specifically. You can probably guess what that place is by now.

Whenever you are learning something to obtain a diploma or permit of any kind in an official (government approved) educational institution, Do not use experimentation here!

Because it will not do you any good. No matter if your creative solutions will: save lots of money and time or increase effectiveness. Always remember. When in the bowls of any official course or curriculum with a goal of a permit or diploma, simply set your experimental abilities aside and follow the program to the letter.

## **15: The 10th tool of extreme learning: The goal is to become so familiar with your tools, they become like a body extension**

The easiest way to illustrate this principle is again through the example of the study of music.

Professional musicians are often, as I like to say, one with their instrument. As soon as they grab their instrument they in fact become one with it. Their bodies incorporate the instrument as if it is the most natural part of their being and they can command every aspect of the instrument in the minutest detail. As they play they are not even really thinking of their hands or the instrument. They are simply singing the way each of us sings with our voice effortlessly under the shower. No need to search for the words or the notes. It has become completely intuitive for them. In other words: their instrument has become like a natural extension of their body.

The same goes for professional snowboarders. It is as if they can feel through their boards as they glide on the snow. Feeling the density of the snow beneath them, estimating how icy it is and which moves they can -and cannot make at any given time easily and intuitively.

A great programmer or engineer will feel the same when it comes to his computer or the programs they use. They are like the musician. Engrossed in a passion for their projects and creating using numbers on their screens or shaping with metal tools the cogs and parts of their machines in much the same way as the great Michelangelo shaped his majestic statue of David.

It is impossible to reach a high level of skill without becoming one with the tools of your trade. As a good friend of mine who is a programmer likes to say: "All the really great programmers sleep with their laptops under their pillow". It is much the same for all the great musicians. They would sleep with their instruments under their pillows if they could. The great sculptors and painters would sleep with their paints and brushes under their pillows. Surfers sleep best in hip Volkswagen vans surrounded by their boards and so it is for every passion!

We need to love our tools and seek actively to become as one with them. The best way to do that is to spend as much time using them as we can and as much time experimenting with them as we can.

The more we spend time using our tools and experimenting, the more we will learn to trust in our tools and our own abilities using them. Literally the amount of time you spend with it makes sooo much difference. If you play a music instrument for more than 1 hour every day and you do so every day for

a year, it almost doesn't matter what exercises you choose to do, you will be stunned at how much you can improve in a year, just because of this raw investment of dedicated time.

The buying of a sailboat illustrates the process perhaps very well also. When you buy a new boat and you take her for a first few trips it is always a little scary. You hope nothing will break, every time you take her in stronger winds or on higher sea's you hope all will go well. Every time you come through safely you learn to trust your boat a little bit more. You get to know her, what she can handle and what she cannot do. Through this process you become closer and closer. It works the same with every tool. **Time, time, time and more time** and **experimenting together** is the key!

The best way to achieve this is a process I like to call “**isolate, practice and release**”. The principle is this: All our abilities are learned through 4 stages: first we are **unconscious and incompetent** (meaning we don't know that we can't do it). From there we move first to **conscious incompetence** (now we know that we can't do it). Than we progress hopefully to **conscious competence** ( we understand it and we can do it but have to consciously focus on it while we do it) and then finally with the passage of more time we become **unconsciously competent** (meaning we now have the skill, but it has become so natural that



we can do it even without much focus on it like for example, riding a bike).

The technique of **isolation, practice and release** is great for becoming more at ease and natural with our tools. It's very simple. We isolate one aspect of our skill. If you are playing tennis it could be your service for example. Then we focus our practice very narrowly only on that aspect for a while. Making lots of repetitions and working on the smallest details. Often it also helps to slow the process down and practice our moves very precisely in slow motion. Then we slowly speed them up to normal speed. Once we feel we have improved the isolated aspect, we release it by letting lose our focus on it.

This slow and precise way of practicing is utilized by Olympic athletes to stunning results.

**The goal is to become so familiar with our tools, they become like a body extension. Use isolation, practice and release to increase your connection with your instruments.**

## **16: The 11th tool of extreme learning: Take and keep control of you own learning curve!**

Contemplate the following:

No one knows better what will challenge you the most, motivate you the most, or what will push your individual learning curve the most, except for **YOU!**

When in the presence of teachers, courses and official guidelines, we humans have a natural tendency to sit back a bit, relax and let the teacher, mentor or course-calendar guide us. This laid back and passive attitude is an absolute advancement killer.

Take a good look at anybody who ever learned something quickly and you will find the same thing over and over again.

They constantly challenge, subvert or ignore their teachers and mentors. Think of Harry Potter's life for a moment: Harry accepts guidance when he gets stuck or feels he needs it, but the rest of the time him and his lovely band of friends simply venture out and practically ignore the advice of all their teachers nearly all of the time. They break rules and guidelines left and right and seek instead adventure and the experiment everywhere they can and must

I very much like the way Harry Potter was written. Throughout his growing-up we see him learning on his feet, despite being constantly: undermined, under-informed, kept in the dark, left to his own devices, or plainly taught outright falsehoods. All this is done by his teachers and care-takers with the same rationale used by our real teachers and care-takers: To protect us from pain, to shield us from hardship or from challenges our teachers perceive as too hard for us! But are they ever truly helping us by doing this?

Real life and real learning is not so much different from what we see happening to Harry and he indeed stands as a model of an extreme learner. After all he is still but a young teen when he finally has to face to most powerful adversary in his world and he prevails despite his young age and lack of formal education (he is even officially kicked out of his wizard school at the time of his victory). In his wizard school we constantly see one teacher after another abusing their power over the class to: push political ideas, prevent the students from learning to defend themselves or prevent them from learning the real secrets to power, but are Harry and his friends ever deterred by this?

Extreme learners in all walks of life are used to hearing the following phrases:

**- Should you be doing that?**

- Do you really think you are ready for that?
- Shouldn't you train much longer for that?
- Are you really sure you have enough experience for that?
- Don't you think you should learn to do X first before you can even attempt Y?
- You can't do that!
- You shouldn't do that!
- Your plan does not meet our standard requirements
- Your idea does not fit the protocol

**Etc...**

Only one person truly knows if you are ready for something: You!

Fortunately the real world is (most of the time) not so bleak and many teachers and mentors are in fact good willing and only wanting to spread the joy that comes from joining their group and learning their skills, but the principle stands and it is important to always remember. **Teachers and mentors will naturally want to guide us away from risk. Obviously if something goes wrong**

**they might be blamed also. So they naturally wish to provide a very safe path to success for us. However, the safer path is often a slower path.** Harry Potter was never really safe, but he learned faster and more than all the other students in his class, because ultimately he had the guts to take control of his own learning curve.

And who was the most useful and vital teacher to Harry? It was the headmaster. An elusive master, who basically leaves Harry to figure things out on his own 99% of the time, only stepping in himself in moments when Harry truly cannot make it without his help. And even in those cases we see him rarely instruct, instead he shows through example. Whether Harry likes it or not, this master basically forces Harry to do what we should be doing also! Don't wait for permission or instruction, GO! Experiment, read what you can find, adapt, try out stuff, use your own wits! And only if you really can't figure it out yourself, find instruction!

Take and keep control of your own learning curve. If you feel things are moving too slow, you are probably correct! If it feels things are going too fast you are probably correct!

The point is not to go fast or slow, the point is to discover your own optimal pace. Don't be afraid to ignore a teacher's advice if you feel he/she is slowing you down. Sometimes they will be right,

sometimes they will be wrong, but in the end the responsibility to learn always stays with you!

**Take and keep control of your own learning curve.**

## **17: The Extreme learning process explained step by step:**

Applying the 12 tools above will, by itself, easily triple or quadruple the speed and depth with which you learn new skills, In addition to these basic principles there is also a more specific, step by step format you can use to streamline your process and add a few more extremely helpful tricks to your extreme learning toolbox. Below I will try to carefully describe the steps I personally follow whenever I start the learning of anything new:

### **Step 1: Gouge your emotional involvement. Make sure you are passionate before you start!**

Whenever a new path of learning presents itself, it is advisable to take a moment to make an honest assessment of our desire for the new skill. In my experience, to employ successfully the techniques of extreme learning we must be passionate or very passionate about the new skill. If we do not feel a strong spontaneous desire, we will first have to change this somehow before we can start the process.

If it is something we have to learn for work or to comply with some regulation, we should take the time to do, whatever we need to do, to find some angle of approach that does ignite some real passion in us for the new skill. We can relate it to

the new chances we will have at work, the extra pay we will get or use whatever other mental tricks we can employ to first cultivate a real desire for the skill.

But of course it is best if we already have a strong natural desire for the new skill and you feel passionate to get started. If we can't find a passion for the skill, our chances of extreme learning it will be ZERO!

## **2: Make an honest mental assessment if you are talented or handicapped for this skill.**

We may not be able to assess if we are talented before trying it, but we can usually tell beforehand if we have some clear handicap which might make it harder for us to learn something compared to an average person. As mentioned: neither having talent nor having handicaps need be a decisive factor in choosing to pursue a skill or not, but it does help to have an accurate sense of our own ability up front. It will help us assess how much risk we can safely take during the process.

Extreme learning leans on experimentation much more than on instruction. Experimentation always carries with it a little more risk. So assessing our own ability honestly is vital in making good choices throughout the process. To know when we are ready-or-not for a next experiment or to estimate



how fast we can safely escalate a challenge for ourselves.

For example:. Say we determine that we would like to learn windsurfing, but we also know we might have very little natural talent because we have never been into outdoor sports and we are not a great swimmer + plus we've had a car accident years back and we have a slightly weakened ankle as a result, which acts up every once in a while.

This need not mean we can't or shouldn't attempt to learn windsurfing. We can still employ extreme learning techniques if we are passionate enough, but we should probably be cautious about how fast we escalate to surfing in more challenging weather conditions. As we are more at risk of being overwhelmed physically than somebody who is already a great swimmer and who is in great physical shape.

So before you start, look at yourself in the mirror and be honest for a moment and ask yourself: Is this something that you are very well suited for? Or is this going to be a more though challenge? Make a mental note of it to keep yourself honest later!

### **3: Immediately setup a date and time for your first experiment.**

Remember an experiment is: **doing something you have never done before or a combination of things that you have never tried before.**

Perhaps we will take a beginners course, perhaps this is just an informative evening we wish to attend about something we wish to learn or do. Perhaps we plan to just rent a tool we wish to try for a day. Maybe we book a tandem parachute jump or a flight as a passenger in an ultra-light plane or we go on a touristic scuba diving event or something else like that.

What matters is that we set a date on which we will actually get TO DO whatever it is we wish to start learning.

#### **4: Then we face a choice:**

**Strategy A:** We can use our enthusiasm to WAY-over-prepare for our first experience and try to earn a mentor.

How does this strategy work?

You start by reading, watching Youtube (or other video platforms), and finding out everything you can about your chosen new skill. I don't mean glancing over things or reading a few pages. I mean dive in with both legs! Read every detail, make drawings, visualize yourself doing it, soak up every detail about everything you can, related to this new skill. Once you are ready, go into the experience with the clear goal to consciously see everything you have read and learned about in action. During the experiment, do your absolute best to honestly

impress your guide or teacher and show him/her you are ready to be an amazing student.

Every teacher and guide in the world loves it when they have a great student in their class. Because believe it or not, great students are exceedingly rare! Having taught a wide range of subjects myself, I know exactly the feeling of relief and joy you feel as a teacher when you encounter a student or participant who gets it and is truly engaged.

It is our explicit goal to be the most astounding student your instructor has seen in a long time. By over-preparing we ensure that we will stand out in a positive way. And most of all, we maximize our chances of getting a great opportunity for a big BONUS! The trust and goodwill of the teacher or instructor.

Imagine you are a teacher. You have some group for a trip or day program. Most of the people in the group are nice, but not that interested and are more like passive participants. But there is this one student who is on fire with questions and who seems to be super excited. Who are you going to use as your assistant that day?

Yup it will be the super-student every time. By asking the right questions and showing initiative, you can very quickly create a lot of trust with a teacher or guide. And then when you ask:” Can I steer the boat for a bit? Can I steer the plane a bit?

Can I try to use the .....X..... a bit?" The teacher or guide will often TRUST you enough to give you a chance at it.

To give a practical example: I once visited a dolphin show while on a trip in Thailand. It was a rather special moment for me because there was no glass basin or clear pool. The event was on a natural lake and our group was seated on a wooden scaffold while we watched the trainers do some tricks with the dolphins. After the show I "happened to" bump into the trainer and immediately struck up a conversation. Soon we were talking about the specifics of teaching the dolphins tricks and I asked him how hard it was to signal the dolphins and other things. Now up until that point I had never swam with dolphins or seen a live dolphin show. Once I heard we would attend this event, I got very passionate about it and I had read and had learned a lot about it in the days leading up to the event.

So as I asked more and better questions, the trainer explained more and more. Then he taught me one signal and invited me to try it myself with one of the dolphins. I did, and to my surprise it actually worked (the dolphin made a high jump out of the water on my signal). We kept talking and, to make a long story short, I ended up jumping in the water with the trainer and for about an hour, he explained nearly the entire show to me and let me try many of the moves with the dolphins myself. Including being launched from the water on the

nose of a dolphin. Still one of my most cherished memories.

As I was doing that, half of the audience was still around. Of course they were looking on and afterwards some of them talked to me and told me: "Wow that was so cool he let you do all that!" Now I'm sure some of them would have loved to get the same experience that day, but they were passive spectators, they came to sit back and watch a show. I came as an extreme learner. I came ready and looking for any way to participate and gain experience.

You see the difference?

This is how the power of extreme learning can regularly open up all kinds of interesting new paths for anybody who practices its principles.

In similar ways I have gotten highly valuable experiences with a wide range of cool stuff. Simply by being an active and enthusiastic student. There is no way better to start a learning process than by truly impressing a great teacher or guide. In many cases they will love to teach you more and will take you under their wing. Meaning now you have a coach that is very motivated to teach you!

Let's look at another example of how this can work in your career. When I was 23 I catapulted from being a student, to being CEO of a marketing

company within the space of about 1,5 years. And this happened through extreme learning.

When I started working as an intern (as part of my marketing bachelor) I took the extreme action to purchase every popular book on marketing that had been published in that year and in the 5 years previous. Within the space of about 4 weeks I read all of them. I soaked up every piece of information I could find on marketing and marketing psychology (stuff that was never even mentioned in my university I might add). My idea was, I was starting to work at a marketing company now, so I better know everything there is to know about that.

Then I started my internship as an internal communications director. About two weeks into the experience I bumped into the founder and CEO of the company where I worked and she and I started talking. That conversation lasted about two hours and by the end of it she literally had me change my desk and had me moved to her office. Literally across the table from her. She said (and I'm still very grateful for this Aukje :) "I'm going to teach you!"

Over the next few months she took me under her wing and brought me to lectures, dinners, networking events etc. and introduced me to all the major players in the Dutch media world. She showed me how leading a company actually works. And learning from someone who, all by herself, had

built a multi-million dollar marketing agency when she was just 25, sufficed to say gave me invaluable insights and skills which I still use to this day. 7 months in she and another business partner invited me to a meeting and told me they were founding a new media company and they asked me point-blank to quit my studies and become the new CEO and run the business day-to-day.

This experience proved to me once again a central truth: when you push yourself to be the highest level student, you will attract the best mentors to you and they will be very happy to teach you. As a result you can make incredible fast progress.

This is like strapping a rocket to your learning curve. It propels you forward. To an average student there is often a lot of waiting involved. They feel ready and eager to try something new for days or weeks before they are finally allowed to try it. Extreme learners experience the opposite. Often your teachers will push you into situations which you don't feel ready for yet. They will tell you: "You can do this!". And you will feel like: "I can??!!" It happens because they are experimenting with and through you. They are enthusiastic and curious to test your abilities as much or often even more than you are.

So that is strategy A.

**Or you can use strategy B:**

Don't prepare at all and go into the first experience completely blank, but be prepared to be the most curious student they have ever had! Ask in detail about absolutely everything you experience on the day and be open to try everything you can yourself!! The goal is the same. Demonstrating that you will make a great student and see if you can force some kind of opening!

Either way is great, based on what you prefer as a style of learning and how you feel. Personally I prefer to over-prepare if I have the option, but if you don't have that option you can still make it work using this strategy sometimes.

**5: After the first experience, setup a second experience right away and use your new insights and connections to expand your search for information.**

Reed as much and watch as much basic instruction as you can. Remember, you are always actively hunting for the illusive obvious perspectives!

If you've made contact with a coach or personal mentor in the previous step, I have found it is best to absolutely overwhelm them with assertiveness and attention to detail. It is as if any mentor has to make a choice with each new student they meet. They ask themselves:



1: Is this going to be a slow-long-term student that will follow my steady lesson program?

Or

2: Is this the exceptional student who I just want to help as best I can and who is clearly taking charge of his/her learning curve him/herself?

I have found that teachers will quickly and gladly go for option two but only if you show clearly you are an unstoppable force. To give an example: It should be you, the student, who enters every lesson with a list of questions. So your teacher goes: *“Ow wow you already figured that out on your own huh? Oh my... You are already trying that?!! I thought I was going to explain that to you next month...”*.

Your goal in this phase is to get a good intellectual framework for the skill and simultaneously gather friends so you can practice and learn together with others. Remember, you're looking for the illusive obvious perspectives and you are trying to make new connections wherever and whenever you can.

## **6: Know your classics**

Check out the history of whatever it is you are doing. Look up the heroes of the past who are seen as role-models within the skill group. Look at their works and read up on their achievements. This

should be a fun thing to do which is both inspiring to you and teaches you lots at the same time.

**7: Set a realistic but optimistic time frame to achieve the “good amateur” level within your new skill-group.**

I have found that, once you reach the level of a good amateur in any skill, you usually reach a plateau from where you will never truly lose the skill again. As an example: Once you learn to ride a bike and have done so daily for a certain amount of time, you will never unlearn or forget how to ride a bike. You may not use one for years, but the next time you need to, you will still be able to do it (even though you might be a little rusty or clumsy the first 5 minutes).

The “good amateur” level forms a great first goal for every starter. Once you reach this level, which you can usually do in a limited time, you are 75 or 80% of the way to becoming a true expert, but the last 20% of mastery is always much harder than the first 80%. I will explain how to tackle this last illusive 20% a little later in this book.

Also, if we don't reach the “good amateur” level within a reasonable time, we can get de-motivated easily and can lose interest and eventually stop practicing. So it's smart to take this as a concrete first goal.

When we first start something we usually quickly gain a lot of velocity in our learning process. In this first phase of learning you can always really feel how much progress you are making. It always starts with big steps. As you master more of the skill your progress naturally slows down a bit and the steps of progress become smaller and more challenging. So once we have gained a lot of speed in our learning initially, we need to hold this speed and use it to burst through to the “good amateur” level as fast as we can.

**Don't start with a goal of becoming an expert at first. Instead, set your sites on becoming a good amateur first.**

Being a good amateur means you master the basics of a skill and are well rounded in it. You take a look at a pro windsurfer on the beach next to a good amateur windsurfer and at first glance you probably will not be able to tell the difference. It is only when the waves become very high and the wind becomes stormy that all of a sudden, the amateur may step off the water, while the pro seems instead to come into his element and starts doing all kinds of advanced tricks and moves.

Another example: You walk into a bar where some jazz band is playing. There is a good amateur trumpet player and a great pro trumpet player. It may not be clear at all at first who is the pro. Both players will play the melody equally nicely, but

when the time comes to solo, the amateur plays a nice solo while the pro suddenly seems to shift to a gear all his own and amazes the whole crowd with his extreme mastery of his instrument. Playing for example at extremely high tempo's or using very complex harmonic structures that even more advanced amateurs would have no idea how to use.

In the end it is up to you to define what it means to have reached the good amateur level in your chosen skill, but I would describe it as a feeling. A sense of comfort with the skill. This naturally develops over time. For some skills it can go very fast, while for others it may take months or years. In any case, sooner or later you will feel that you have reached a level of comfort and you will feel that you have the basics of it forever. You know you are not a pro yet, but you also know you are pretty good at it now. When you feel that, you know you have reached the level of a good amateur.

**How do you get to the “good amateur level” fast?**

**1: First of all/, look to the 12 principles described earlier in this book and seek to apply them whenever you can!**

**2: Find good mentors, ask them to teach you and most of all observe them in action!**

Often times you will learn the most from simply watching a great mentor do his/her thing and emulating them precisely. It often reveals even more than having them explain things to you intellectually. You see, every expert does lots of things unconsciously which they are (often) no longer fully aware of. So they will sometimes not tell you about things, but if you observe them and cultivate a real eye for detail you can learn much more from them. Especially by asking them to clarify things as they do it.

When you see a master in action and you observe something you don't quite understand, ask about that part specifically and let them explain it to you. The combination of observing and asking clarifying questions is often much more potent than having a teacher give you a prepared story or lesson.

I have been in situations where I would point out that a mentor was doing a certain thing every time. Once I mentioned it to them, they would laugh or look surprised and say something along the lines of: *"...Wow you are correct that is actually because you need to do .....x..... Wow I learned that little trick years ago. Never even realized I'm still using that all the time..."*. So it is not that they wish to give us bad or incomplete info, it is just that skills automatically become unconscious and intuitive after a while. Because of this, experts can sometimes slowly get foggy on some of the

important details. To them it seems so obvious they forget that they really need to tell us about it.

### **3: Use isolation and experimentation to structure your advancements.**

The pillars of science are: isolation and experimentation.

Scientists use isolation all the time to zoom in and research particular parts or aspects of whatever subject or process they are exploring. They isolate a small part of a process and then devise some experiment by which they test the new idea (hypothesis) and then they carefully observe what happens. Once they get some result they do the experiment again to see if the result will come out the same. Then they often try the experiment again but under different circumstances and see if the result is still the same. They keep repeating this until they are sure of the result and the conditions under which it works. Then they teach the experiment to others and observe if they experience the same results.

The basic structure of that process is the most perfect structure for human learning. So whenever you are doing a practice with your skill, follow the same pattern.

**1: Isolate a part of your skill.** Let's say you are learning to snowboard and you wish to focus on

learning a basic jump. So you can now isolate this one move and practice it part by part.

**2: Setup an experiment:** For example, you could decide to first practice a jump while standing still on a flat surface (to make it an easy and safe first experiment).

It is a little risky, so let's assume you prepared yourself first by looking up some info on it on-line or perhaps you asked a teacher how it works or observed a mentor and figured out the technique. My point is: you are a responsible learner so you prepared for the experiment as well as you possibly could! Let's assume you learned the following in your preparation.

1: You need to lean forwards or backwards on one of your legs, which loads a spring-like-pressure into your snowboard.

2: When you release this pressure, timed with a small jump, the board will provide a spring-effect lifting you off the ground.

So first you practice leaning to one side while standing still. You feel the pressure from the board as it bends a bit, you try the first jump and fall on your ass. The power of the springing from the board is stronger than you imagined. So you try it again a few more times. Until you can keep standing and

feel you have a good grasp on the basic jump from a still position.

**3: Escalate the experiment:** Time to move to a more complex experiment. This time you may want to try the jump sliding down a slope slowly. So you climb up a few meters. You push off until you have just a little bit of speed and now you try the jumping technique while moving forward for the first time... You fall on your ass again! You discovered: if you are not perfectly balanced and moving in a straight line, the spring-effect also makes you spin a bit while you jump. This can make you land sideways and then the rail of your board tends to dig into the snow and will topple you over. So you try it again. Now you know you will have to focus on keeping in a truly straight line while spring-loading the board and setting off. Three attempts later you make your first successful small jump.

So you keep practicing many more times that day gradually increasing the speed. Every time you escalate the experiment by changing one or more of the conditions, you will discover some new unexpected forces or challenges, but by isolating and taking it step by step you quickly make progress.



The process is always the same:

**1: Isolate an aspect**

**2: Setup an experiment (decide how you will practice the isolated move)**

**3: Run the experiment and discover**

**4: Analyze your discoveries, see what went well and what should be different and then try again.**

**5: Keep repeating your experiment (training) until you can do it easily**

**6: Repeat until you feel you have mastered the isolated sub-skill**

**7: Escalate the experiment to the next phase by adding complexity or upping the physical challenge to the next level.**

**Repeat again from step 3.**

Now there is one final step which is important to take:

**Consciously switch from “practice or training” to “play”.**

There is a big difference between practicing your skill and using you skill. Practice is focused and,

though it is also a lot of fun, it is specifically aimed at purposely increasing your skill through experimentation, discovery, adaptation and repetition.

Using your skill is very different. When you do that, you should be in the moment, enjoying and focused on completing the challenge at hand (scaling that mountain, completing that design, finishing that new program, creating the painting the client ordered, finishing the race in the 1st place! Etc.

When you are using your skill you want to be in a very different mindset from when you are engaged in practice. In practice it is effective to be critical of yourself and push yourself to improve, but while playing you don't want to be critical at all. You want to accept every move you make; you don't want to judge your actions too much. This is not practice! Enjoy, give it your all and just let your practice flow through you. If you've practiced hard enough your training will kick in and guide you effortlessly and you will be able to act intuitively and without thinking.

If you follow these steps you will advance to the good amateur level at a record speed.

## **18: Extreme learning tool nr 12: Take the triple road to mastery.**

Once you have reached the good amateur level, you are in a realistic position to advance to the level of master or expert.

I have long pondered and looked at the how-to of attaining this highest level in any skill. I wanted to understand what the general path and principle is by which individuals break through to this level. I have guided and observed many who have aspired to enter the Master-level in their chosen fields and I have seen a good many succeed. In doing so, I have found 3 very clear ways.

The master-level in almost any skill is reached only either through:

- 1: official competition,
- 2: public performance,
- 3: or through teaching.

It is reached most quickly through the use of all 3.

And so in many aspects the strategy for becoming a master is very different than the one used for becoming a good amateur. However there are good

reasons why it is only these three activities which can elevate any person to the level of master.

Let us look at each separately:

**Competition** is a force that is proven in our long history to be the best at improving the quality of everything. No process is so successful at pushing human excellence as competition. The drive to win can motivate us to pay attention to the smallest details and makes us strive to perfect every aspect of our craft. So if you are somebody who enjoys competition, your best chance at evolving from the good amateur level to the master level will be to simply: start entering whatever competitions you can find in your field and in these arenas prove your skill. Over time the process itself will push you to the Master-level.

**Public performance:** Does something closely related to competition. To raise yourself up before a crowd and publicly showcase your skill, whether it is: paintings, performing music, swimming across the English channel, cooking for a crowd. writing and publishing a book or showcasing any other skill or its products. It is putting us on the spot. It naturally brings out the best in us. And over time this natural drive to perform better and better again every show, will push you onto the master-level.

**Teaching** is a very different way to break into the master level. The old saying is that, when you

teach, the teacher generally learns more than the student. This is true. When you teach you are forced to focus and thoroughly work through every step of your process. You are forced to observe a million mistakes of others and to counter/guard against every one. You are forced to confront any missing link in your knowledge you may have, because students will ask you about anything and everything.

When you teach, you commit strongly and openly to a method and application. Each lesson is like a performance, and at the same time it is a competition in which you always have to stay several steps ahead of your students. Therefore teaching combines the best of all learning activities. You are performing, you explain and you compete at the same time. Which is why this is the fastest path to the mastery-level.

In general it is of course best to pursue all three. Compete, perform and teach. So once you successfully reach the good amateur level, make a conscious pivot. Start entering competitions as soon as you feel you are ready, start performing publicly as soon you are ready and **NEVER EVER decline an opportunity to teach anybody who expresses an interest to learn from you.** Remember: **to be able to teach, you do not have to be a great master yourself, you just have to be better and know more than your student.**

## **18: Attaining the extreme learner state**

In many religions and other systems of life, enlightenment is the highest reachable state. In extreme-learning such a state also exists, but it is far less fuzzy and much more pragmatically attainable than any spiritual enlightenment.

When you apply the principles and tools of extreme learning and once you have implemented them in your every-day life to learn 3 or 4 new skills successfully, something very powerful happens. It is nothing vague or spiritual. What happens is that quite simply: you have proven to yourself that you can do it. The amount of stuff you have learned has grown very very fast! And you feel this on every level. The more you learn, the quicker you can pick up other things, which makes it easier to learn the next thing, so you learn even more, and then the next things are even easier to learn and you learn even faster, and then the next thing goes even faster and faster... etc.

The cumulative effect of this is an amazing feeling. The human brain is most alive when it is learning. When it is in the midst of a new experiment. Open, curious and ready to respond and adapt to anything. I believe this is truly the most amazing state of being we humans have. A true and attainable enlightenment!

Once you taste even a little of it, you will suddenly realize how enormous your true potential to evolve really is. Evolving continuously as a human is a great source of natural challenge and adventure.

This is what it means to be a true extreme learner. Once you reach this frame of mind you will know it, balls to bones! And you will know that nothing will ever stop you from learning anything you wish to learn ever again.

There are however other influences on both achieving and maintaining this state. One of them is food. Having corresponded extensively for a previous book of mine, with various MD's and nutritional experts, it is very clear to me + **there is ample scientific proof, that our food has a great impact on our state of mind.**

Particularly the aspect of focus. We all know the feeling of having a foggy mind after a night of partying. It is as if our mind is swimming in a muddy pool instead of a clear one.

A night of fun and alcohol can have a very noticeable negative impact on our ability to focus and think clearly, but good food and conscious relaxation can also have a very noticeable positive impact on the clarity of our minds.

I have found that particular shakes of fruits in combination with raw vegetables like spinach,

tomatoes and broccoli can noticeably increase our focus for a period of several hours. This is not a book on nutrition so I will not venture into this particular aspect any deeper here, but I do highly recommend you personally experiment with food with the goal of increasing and maximizing your focus and clarity of mind. Some of us seldom make the connection between our daily food and the amount of focus and mental clarity we have, but the effects are real and very noticeable. The pursuit of a quick and clear mind is absolutely a vital part of maintaining the extreme learner state of mind.

There are also 4 other global cultural phenomena which can hinder us from attaining and maintaining the extreme learner state.

### **1: The culture of over-choice!**

The amount of choice in our daily life is staggering and is still growing at an stupendous rate. If we just take the example of choosing a toothpaste. If you would like to find out which toothpaste is truly best for you. You would have to invest many hours in reading about all of the various aspects of the available options. Herbal? Extra minty? Extra whitening? Shine white? Extra gentle? For sensitive gums? Sparkling bright?...etc. There are literally hundreds of toothpastes available. All with their own focus and special aspects.



If you want to buy a new phone you run into a similar problem... What size would be best? How much memory will you need? A faster processor for games or not? Will it support GPS apps? Is it the correct operating system?.etc.

In every aspect of our lives, the amount of choice has exploded over the last 20 years. This has (often unnoticeably) consumed huge amounts of our time.

Pondering and making choices consumes a large amount of our available focus every day.

It is smart to short-circuit this influence on your life by eliminating the daily pressure of over-choice on your mind. Buy groceries for a whole week, stick to one shampoo or toothpaste, take a moment to examine if there are area's in your life where 'making choices' is consuming a lot of your time and focus needlessly. Try to eliminate these influences as much as possible so you free up your time and focus for learning and focusing on the more important stuff in your life.

## **2: The culture of over-tainment!**

Too much of anything is usually not a good thing. Just as our choices have exploded. So has the amount of entertainment in our lives skyrocketed. What I mean by that is that: the importance and focus on the entertaining aspect of everything has

become very large in our culture. Much of our food today is not very healthy or nutritional, but it tastes great (it is entertainment for the mouth). Much of our news is void of any substance, but it has become very entertaining to watch. The essence is that: just because something is entertaining, does not mean it is good for us. Often times, it is stuff that is perhaps not always so entertaining which can greatly improve our lives. The culture of entertainment can have a tendency to envelop us. It can make it hard for us to do anything which is truly challenging, because there is always something nice and fun easily accessible to us. Creative avoidance is very easy in our modern world. So beware of this and try to avoid being too much of a slave to the culture of entertainment.

Also, get over the idea that everything has to always be fun or entertaining in some way. Not every food that is good for you, tastes good. Also many other things which are great for our development are not always fun or entertaining. And they don't have to be!

### **3: Snack culture:**

We don't listen to complete songs on the radio anymore, we skip from jingle to jingle, We don't have three meals a day anymore, instead we have 12 smaller bytes throughout the day. Even our relationships have changed. Instead of heaving 2 or 3 close friends we hang out with all the time, we all

have 700 Facebook friends and we see a great many of them for short periods throughout each year.

The more choice we have, the more tempting it is to have a little bite from everything instead of going deep into one thing. It is great that we have so much choice now, so many friends from all over the world, so much food etc., but there is the danger of us becoming slowly and unconsciously more and more shallow. We can forget to make the deep dive sometimes. To go in all the way.

Try to stay aware of snack-culture and your personal tendency to snack in all the various aspects of your life.

#### **4: The fast fix paradigm:**

**How I became a millionaire in 2 weeks,**

**How I got 4 million followers in 1 week with this one technique.**

**This one secret cured my cancer in 8 days**

**etc.**

We all see click-bate headlines like these every day. Even though we all know there is more to it, it is true that, especially in the medical field, we have made great progress and many medical problems

can now be solved or can at least made manageable with a simple pill. Perhaps invisibly, this has influenced our culture. It has created a false feeling in all of us that...Almost anything can be fixed quickly... It can be a dangerous idea. It has given rise to the idea that, if you have a little headache, just take some aspirin, but what if that headache is a first sign of something more serious?

We have seen an explosion of burn-outs in our culture. It is now even considered “normal” for some students to have a burn-out break which can last up to a year during their studies. This type of stuff happens because we no longer truly consider underlying causes any more. We address symptoms quickly with pills and other remedies, but we tend to leave underlying causes unattended.

**If you believe that, valuable things in life can be achieved or managed quickly and easily, you run a high chance of running into problems in your life.**

If you believe worth-while things always take some time and effort, you are setting yourself up for success.

Don't believe too much in fast fixes. If you believe just reading this book is going to magically make you a faster learner you are wrong, but if you take

the tools and work with them every day and put in the effort, you will achieve great results.

Add these 4 together:

- **over-choice,**
- **over-tainment,**
- **snack culture**
- **fast fix culture**

And you can probably see how these are fused together in a million different ways in our society. They are promoted very heavily everywhere. Watch MTV for 5 minutes and you will recognize the mantra: Make more choices! Entertain yourself! Snack away and try everything! Do everything now! You can be a millionaire tomorrow!

It is not surprising that some of us are: constantly stressed from being overwhelmed with too much choice in all aspects of life, have a hard time pulling ourselves away from all manners of entertaining but shallow pursuits, struggle with long-running medical problems which drain our energy and health, and are obsessed and have way too much faith in whatever the next “this is how we quickly and easily fix our lives” trend is.

The more you can separate yourself from too much of this, the more you will get done in your life. The easier you will stay in the extreme learner state of mind. Continuously growing and evolving at great speed. My advice is:

**Willfully limit the amount of choice in your daily life.**

**Avoid watching too much TV or doing passive things in general (anything that involves sitting on your ass and watching other people do something)**

**Try not to snack, have full meals, go for real relationships, listen to songs from beginning to end, etc.**

**Don't believe in any quick fixes for anything in life! The best thing I have ever heard on this is the quote "Most people grossly over estimate what they can do in a week, but they grossly under estimate what they can achieve in a year.**

## **19: Learning for degrees, exams and permits**

I felt this book wouldn't be complete without a chapter specifically dedicated to succeeding in tests and exams. Mind you though, that we now consciously must make the switch from education, to the business of overcoming the process of place politics. How do we increase and maximize our chances of succeeding in the formal institutions of education?

### **1: Understand that it is not about being successful at learning.**

Law schools don't test if we will be good lawyers, business schools don't test us on our skills in actual business. Not a single school in the world actually tests it's students on their ability to succeed in the market using the skills the school has thought them. Is there even one school in the world where you only get your diploma once you have gotten and held on to a job for a year or more after you have finished the school?

No there is not... Why not?

Well it would simply be to much work + only about 50% of graduates from every field of study actually get a job inside the field they studied. Folks with law degrees start IT companies, business graduates

become film-directors, graduated chefs become restaurant owners or dancing teachers, etc. You don't get a diploma or degree after you have proven yourself capable in the actual world.

Instead we are awarded degrees, permits, etc mostly after we have completed a simulated intellectual test. And it is this, which schools prepare us for. There is an assumption underpinning the very principle of our education system and it is this: **If somebody is able to perform well on a written or oral examination, answering various questions about the different aspects of a subject, THAT MEANS this person will be able to do (or at least start in) this job.**

So we (or perhaps it is better to say... our education system) is built on the idea that: if we prepare people to succeed at completing a written or oral exam, we have successfully prepared them adequately for the real thing.

Now of course everybody knows that a graduate is in no way officially ready for the real thing. We all know any graduate starting in any job will usually first start in an internship or a traineeship and it is there, within a time frame of usually 6 to 12 months that he/she will quickly learn everything they really need.

**So if an exam doesn't really prepare you for the real world, what does it do?**



What frustrates a lot of students is that they mistake their universities intent to get them ready for the exam, with the intent to really teach them the trade.

If you enter any university hoping to really learn the trade in the classroom you will be sorely disappointed and you will have a hard and frustrating time. However, if you approach any school with the knowledge that, all they are really doing and all they are really interested in, is preparing you to pass their exam, you will fly through the experience much easier and faster. Especially if you realise this exam will focus on adherence to the current methods and culture.

Now don't get me wrong I am not saying teachers or administrators don't want you to succeed in your future job or don't want to educate you well or anything like that. I am simply stating the fact that, a school is never a true reflection of the real environment. A law school does not resemble a law firm, a business school does not resemble a real business. Etc. So all they really can do is intellectually inform you about some of the principles you will need in the job, and test you on your intellectual knowledge of their application.

So when you enter any school. The very best you can hope for is: honest and kind teachers who are willing to tell you the true illusive obvious secrets of the trade. People who are forthcoming with the best practical methods to succeed and who provide a

space and time for practical applied experimentation as much as possible.

But you have to expect that the true learning of the skill will not happen during your time at school (unless you take charge of this yourself through internships or by getting a job in the field during your studies). This will happen for the most part only after you have completed your studies and have entered the real workplace.

So what does that mean for our learning strategy in the school environment?

**- When you want to learn a skill, use extreme learning! Apply the power of experimentation.**

**- When learning for school, focus completely and only on one thing: passing the tests and exams!**

When you are focusing on learning a skill, you ask your mentors and teacher **whatever you need to get better at using the skill.**

When you are focusing on passing a test, you should be **asking you mentors and teachers very different questions:**

**- Is this going to be on the exam?**

**- How is this going to be handled in the exam?**

**- What format of questions will we get on this?**

**- Are there practice exams I can make?**

**Etc...**

Real life practical education focuses 99% on the daily activities of any job, hobby or skill. It is the regular stuff that happens every day when you actually use your skill which you will be focusing on most of the time.

School education focuses instead on the exceptions. They naturally focus on the situations and aspects of any subject that presents the most risk or difficulty or interest. Think about it, 95% of math classes in the world are not about the everyday math which all of us use in our daily lives (basically simple addition and subtraction). Instead, math class focuses 95% of its time on the exceptional stuff which perhaps only 1 out of every 30.000 people will every need to use in a real life situation. The average 7rd or 8th grade writing or grammar class concerns itself mostly with exceptions in grammar which only a professional writer or journalist will ever really be concerned with. In law school, students will work through one exceptional case after another, but they will not see much which is actually more like the very ordinary cases they will encounter 90% of the time in their jobs,

This is again something we must realize when attending a school or university. What we are shown there is an abstraction. Often times quite an unrealistic abstraction. This is not by any means evil intend or any willful attempt to make education worse (apart from the very real place politics aspects of it all of course) it is just the nature of the institution. Simply because... A school cannot do anything more than: try to create a simulated and abstracted version of the real challenge you will face once you start your job.

So getting a degree or obtaining a permit through some exam or official test is not about learning the skill. You don't need to master the skill to pass the exam. You only need to do and know, whatever it is you specifically need to know + be able to do, to pass the exam.

So there are always two separate tracks. On the one hand, there is your real ability and the progress you make there. And on the other side, there is the make-believe world of school and universities and other institutions.

In the real world you make incremental progress every day. In school you make progress in leaps and bounds. In school your progress is only validated once you pass a test.

Let me illustrate with two examples. I have a younger brother, who choose (as part of his

international business studies) to move to, and do an internship of 6 months in South America. He had studied some Spanish in school as preparation of course ,but once he came back from the experience, his level of Spanish had dramatically improved. Since obviously he had been speaking this new language every day for 6 months (so equivalent of about 4 years of weekly classes perhaps?).

Now my brother actually had a fantastically good and kind Spanish teacher in school and this man had a habit of letting all his students, who went on foreign internships, re-do the Spanish oral exam they had done before the trip. His reasoning was... There were no further oral exams after the internship. So if a student had scored a C on his oral exam, than after 6 months abroad he/she would come back and would be able to easily get an A or A+ at this same oral exam. So this teacher figured: "If I let these kids redo their oral exam, their final grade will actually represent their real skill at the language, which can be an important factor when they go out and apply for a job".

When the school board got wind of this practice, which had stood for years, they instructed the teacher to stop the practice. He promptly resigned and started teaching at another school.

You will often encounter this unwillingness to have formal education match up to the real world

progress of students. Even though it seems to make perfect sense. This rigidity is a result of the underlying nature of the institutions as place-protecting devices. It is not just students who must adhere to the common practice. Any teacher who deviates from it will risk being shunt, because it could inspire students and teachers to experiment and abandon the rigid structure of the institution and become less obedient.

Another example is the story of Laura Dekker. A young Dutch girl who was one of my personal inspirations to start sailing.

Laura grew up on the sailboat of her parents. When she was only 11 years old, she decided she wanted to be the youngest person to solo sail around the world. Not only did she have the aspiration, she single handedly managed to get a boat, sponsors and everything else she needed to set of and do it. However, when the Dutch government got wind of her plans, child services intervened and placed her parents under legal observation, citing they had somehow been negligent in raising her. After all, they could not have been responsible parents by encouraging her to attempt this circumnavigation right?

Laura was ordered by the Dutch court to undergo extensive psychological testing and was even made to pass special sailing exam's the government made for her. Even though the girl had sailed all her

life and had actually already crossed the English Channel by herself at the age of 12. In a TV interview she was seen saying: *"those government people, who made those sailing exams they gave me, they obviously didn't know anything about sailing"*.

If you are interested in her story. Google her name. She actually completed her dream at age 16 after two years of legally battling the Dutch state. She became the youngest person ever to sail around the globe. An amazing documentary was made of her trip with the name **Maiden trip**. Laura is a great example of a natural extreme learner. She shined with the power of her perseverance, her love of the pure experiment and her dedication to responsible risk taking. At the same time, the highly predictable negative reactions from her surroundings are a testament to the real world challenges every extreme learner faces. We might expect that, if a 14 year old girl declares she will solo sail around the world and then shows great professionalism managing to get a boat, sponsors and everything else she needs, a country would be excited and full of praise of such a brave endeavor. After all, what country would not be proud of such a thing? The reality sadly was very different. Up to the actual president of the country stating on television that: "a 14 year old child belongs in school".

From the perspective of an extreme learner, this big negative public reaction was both predictable and

understandable. After all, what would it do to our organized education system if 14 year olds started traveling the world all the time? If a 14 year old girl can round the globe by herself on a sailboat, it means many other 14 year olds can do many other things too. What if 14 year olds start founding IT companies or be astronauts or bankers? What happened to Laura is what happens to anybody who publicly blasts through the place-politics wall. Anybody who publicly shows that young people can do things which are generally reserved for adults, will be fought at all costs because it is a threat to our entire way of life.

So those are two examples I hope illustrate to us all clearly the difference between succeeding in the real world, and succeeding in the world of schools, universities, government courses etc. Schools are not here to make you learn fast or reach your full potential. They are here to make us learn, but not too fast. And they like to make sure we don't do anything too amazing, because that might make the rest of us look bad.

**- A school will not adjust your grades, even if you have improved enormously while outside the school. It is a not a reflection of the real world and it doesn't want to be. It does not want us to disobey and do our own thing.**

**- A 14 year old can round the globe successfully, but there is no way she could**



**have done it if she had followed the rules. In the eyes of the institutions, what she did was literally impossible.**

After she completed her challenge, the Guinness book of records even stopped accepting sailing challenges from kids in order to NOT ENCOURAGE young people to take dangerous risks. Was it really to minimize risk? or was it to make sure young people don't get too inspired to pursue their true potential?

The lesson here is this: Don't make the mistake of treating schools as if you are going to learn or must learn the practical skill in order to pass the exams and get a degree. In very rare cases you may have to, but 99 out of 100 times you don't need to worry about learning the actual skill in school. You can do that on your own time and at your own pace.

The only thing you need to do is focus very narrowly on whatever the next test or exam is and make sure you pass it. And of course you will often also learn plenty of good things from this. If you want to avoid what happened to Laura or so many of the other people in the world who are great at something, but who have a hard time getting through any official school or course because they expect their practical skills to be enough to pass the exams. Keep in mind that just being great at something is never enough and often, it will make institutions fight you instead of praise you. Exams

will always focus heavily on exceptions and odd situations. I believe that only perhaps 20% of long practicing professionals from almost any field, would be able to pass the current exams that are given in universities about their fields.

Even though they may be successful working experts in their jobs, if you gave them the exams without giving them time to prepare, they would have to concede they don't know the answer to more than half the questions. Their most frequent comment would be something along the lines of: *"That is a situation or problem that almost never occurs...I know about it of course but I would have to look up the specifics"*.

As a graduate you will know everything about the exceptions, but very little about the general practice. The real experts however, know everything about the general practice but have long since forgotten about most of the details concerning the rare exceptions.

That is what we can expect and that is the best we can get from our institutions!

**Let's recap it all:**

**Extreme learning in the school situation:**

Focus on passing the tests and exams; don't worry about learning the practical skill too much. This will 99% not be a factor in our succeeding or failing the course.

Get very specific information about each test or exam. What type of questions? How many questions? What exactly will be on the test? Are there test exams you can make or exams from previous years you can try? Etc.!

Don't use experimentation in the school situation. It almost never gets you anything worthwhile. At the same time it is almost guaranteed to make you unpopular with teachers.

If you want to be great in your chosen field, start up a parallel track of education using the full power of extreme learning. You can use the education from your school wherever it is good and supplement it with external mentors and practical experimentation in an internship or by actually working in the field you wish to enter.

## **Extreme learning in the real world:**

**Keep track of the difference between education activities and place-politics activities and apply the correct strategy for both.**

Tool 1: Be a fearless learner

Tool 2: Move quickly to get to know your tools thoroughly

Tool 3: Balance doing VS intellectualizing 80/20

Tool 4: Don't practice alone for too long

Tool 5: Avoid the expensive pit! (don't try to compensate for your lack of skill by buying lots of gadgets or expensive tools)

Tool 6: Keep mixing it up! Don't cultivate a specialty too soon or without making a conscious choice for it.

Tool 7 Become an expert in at least 1 thing as fast as possible

Tool 8: Discover each skill's illusive obvious secrets

Tool 9: Harness the power of responsible experimentation as much as you can!

Tool 10: The goal is to become as one with the tools of your trade.

Tool 11: Take and keep control over you own learning curve.

Tool 12: Aim for the good amateur level at first, once you attain it, consciously switch your aim to the Master level by entering competitions, performing publicly and by teaching.

Attain and maintain the Extreme learner state by first learning 3 or more new skills using the extreme learning method. Then avoid being pulled of your path by the culture of distraction and entertainment, etc.

Keep evolving!

## **19: With great power, comes great... opportunity?**

There you have it. Every illusive obvious perspective + the important practical skills of extreme learning explained. Doesn't seem too hard, right? I did my very best to keep this work as short and compact as I could. I admit the application of it all can at times be a fun challenge, but it is very much worth it in the end. Like most skills the secrets to extreme learning are not difficult to understand once we have them, but the application does take time and dedication.

Now that I have given you both the insights and the tricks that you need to succeed, I hope you will permit me to take these final pages to discuss with you a hope of mine. Because besides each and every one of my readers reaching the state of Extreme learner I wish to give you something else, an important goal.

And I should warn you beforehand that I will go off on a bit of a side-story for a while to make this point. And it is of a more philosophical and serious nature.

So please bear with me:

When we hear or read the words of Shakespeare, Gogol, or Chaucer. When we see the works of Da

Vinci, Michelangelo or Rodin. When we walk the hall-of-mirrors in Versailles, enter the mysterious great hall of the Pantheon in Rome, or walk beneath the Eiffel tower in Paris. None can resist a feeling of pure awe at the sheer power of these creations. Whether forged in steel or stone, crafted in words on paper, caught in paint on linen or channeled by great actors on stage.

It matters little in which format these great creations have manifested themselves into reality. The great skill and creativity of the masters behind them shines through. Each and every one of us can recognize their power to inspire and delight us. Once upon a time all of these things were experiments by great minds. Never done before (and in many cases since).

Once you've seen Romeo and Juliette, your image of romance and love are forever enriched and changed. Once we see the movie Titanic, we cannot help but be in awww at the grace of the human heart in the midst of such a great tragedy. When we stand at the foot of Michelangelo's great David, how can we not marvel at the stupendous level of craft and skill it must have taken to create a statue that awesome.

And perhaps most vividly, on a human level. When we meet our special person for the very first time. When we look into his/her eyes and are bewitched

by a smile and seem to lose ourselves in a bliss that is without an equal.

The significance and the deep and lasting impact of events and experiences like these are something we all understand and value equally as human beings.

But these beautiful and deep experiences of life do not only bring us bliss, joy and adulation. Often they inspire reflection and introspection. Opening the door for us into the amazing realm of the mind. Where all of us, regardless of our personal convictions, religious beliefs or cultural heritage must confront the central truth at the heart of all human experiences. The enigma that is both a blessing and at times a bit of a scare. It can soothe us to sleep one night, but may keep us awake the next.

The simple but truth I speak of is this:

**We live in a deeply mysterious place.**

In my life I have had conversations with a great many people from a great many religions and convictions. None of us seem to agree much on any of our religious beliefs or on what the true meaning or purpose of this world is, but the one statement that I have found, which finds 100% agreement and acknowledgment among all peoples is this statement: "We live in a deeply mysterious



world” It is a simple, undeniable statement and it is central to each and every one of us.

Of course for most of us, the world of deep contemplation is not a place where we spend (or even wish to spend) too much time. Because whoever spends too much time here, runs the risk of forgetting to live.

However for this short detour, I hope you will follow me for a bit into the personal space of perhaps the most significant question we have in this world:

What should we do with our lives?

The first thing I want to talk about is finding something I like to call the unbreakable path. Or perhaps I should say. The unbreakable path turned out to be the first step (for me) in solving this mystery. Think about this:.

If you wanted to genuinely solve the question :”why are we here?”, “What are we supposed to do in life?” and you wanted to find a genuinely satisfying answer, where would you start??

It's a tough cookie, right..?

The only way I know to identify and reveal the unbreakable path is by showing you its opposite first. And for that I invite you back to the universe of our good friend Harry Potter. For the world of

fantasy-fiction, has for a great many (probably thousands) of years been smacking us in the face with a clue perhaps to the secret of our own world.

In the world of our friend Harry, **magic is real.**

We start his story with Harry living in, what looks somewhat like our own world. It seems normal at first, but soon it is revealed that Harry, using special powers, can do all sorts of things that we in our world cannot do. Like:

1: Flying on a broomstick without the use of a jet engine,

2: Shooting colored bolts of lightning from a feather-filled-stick that has no known power source and never needs to recharge.

3: He can transport himself all across the country from fireplace to fireplace by simply throwing a powder into the fire while shouting the intended destination. How exactly the de-and re-materialization happens is not explained in the books or in the movies.

4: And perhaps most stunning of all, wizards in the universe of Harry are able to perform extensive facial (and even full body) cosmetic surgery by simply drinking a potion. And although the writer invests considerable time and effort trying to convince the reader that this potion is not very easy

to make, the story ultimately proves this potion can be made by 3 six year olds. So how hard can it really be than? ;)

The means by which all of this is possible? Or in other words, the power that makes all this possible in the world of Harry is called: **magic!**

To us, the reader, this word 'magic' is a way of the writer telling us: "Yes, me the writer of Harry understands that none of these feats are actually possible in our world. Yet in the world of Harry Potter there are different laws. Things work altogether differently there. And so what is impossible in our world, becomes possible in the world of Harry though the addition of Magic".

Hence the question. If magic is what makes everything possible in the world of Harry Potter, What is it that makes everything possible in our world?

**What is the equivalent of "magic" in our "real" world?**

The answer to this question is:

**Truth**

**If we ask the people in the world of Harry how they do anything: Heal the sick, move heavy objects, travel, fight enemies, make pictures,**

**send letters, etc. The answer to all these would be one and the same: they use magic to do all of these things.**

**If we ask how we, in the real world, do anything? Heal the sick, move heavy objects, fly to travel, fight enemies, make pictures, send letters or communicate to our friends over large distances, etc. The answer to all of these is also one and the same. We use TRUTH to do all of these things.**

Some of you may now be thinking, “No, we use science right??” but that would be incorrect. Science is merely a methodology for discovering the truth. The truth itself is something altogether different. Something much more mysterious. Like magic in Harry’s world. If you ask Harry what Magic is, he wouldn’t really be able to tell you. He knows how to do spells with it. He can use it, but he can never know why or how it actually works. Same goes for our world. We can use the truth (science) to create all kinds of stuff, but we do not know why it only works that way, and not any other way.

### **So what is truth?**

If we forgot or erased every religion in the world overnight, and then waited for 200 years, none of them would ever come back in quite the same way. The new gods may have different names, the rituals would be different etc. but if we forgot or erased

every scientific discovery ever made today, after a while, the Truth would emerge exactly the same. Religious stories vary greatly all over the world, but each civilization in history used the exact same mathematical laws to construct houses and bridges and roads. To forge iron for swords, to make boats which float and airplanes that fly we MUST use truth!

The truth is a mysterious but undeniable force that permeates every part of our world. In the same way Magic permeates every part of the world of Harry Potter. Harry can look into the mind of his great Nemesis Voldermort using magic.

In the same way, I can Skype with my brother from the other side of the planet across thousands of kilometers using the power of truth.

BUT it only works because each step in the system of Skype is completely true. From the computer that I use, to the satellite that relays our messages to the speakers of my brothers laptop, which mimic the sound of my voice almost perfectly and almost in real-time as we converse.

To put it in Harry Potter terms, Skype only works if all the spells are done correctly and many of the truth spells our magicians (scientists) use in our technology are so complex that we would have a very hard time performing them ourselves.

Just like many of the objects in Harry's world are enchanted in ways very few may be able to reproduce.

So what sets the truth apart? How can we know we are dealing with truth and not a lie?

**The 3-step method that science has developed for this is very simple in its principle.**

**1: Whoever seeks the truth about anything in our world, must devise an experiment.**

**2: That experiment must prove and show a truth to be true. In other words he/she must perform a magic spell that works. And not only must it work. It must work in exactly the way the researcher predicts.**

**3: And not just that. If another performs the experiment in exactly the same way, He/she should get the exact same results.**

Only when these 3 criteria are met: 1. The experiment works 2. It works as predicted 3. The experiment when reproduced by others yields the exact same (or extremely closely similar) results. Only then, do we speak of truth and facts (things that are true) and even then we only softly whisper them, because we humans seldom know the complete truth. When we trust too much that we

have the complete picture, disaster is often the result.

When a spell is wrongly cast in the world of Harry Potter, people may die as a result. The same is true of the wrongful or irresponsible use of truth.

The story of the Titanic is a good example: a ship constructed by scientists that was created to be unsinkable as long as it stayed within a certain set of rules given by its creators. Most importantly: not to exceed a certain speed when moving amidst icebergs.

It is funny that in popular culture if you ask anybody “Why did the Titanic sink? They will likely answer: “Because it hit an iceberg. Sadly though this is not the truth.

Had its captain not exceeded the speed limit given by its creators, The Titanic would have indeed been unsinkable. It could have hit the iceberg and would still have been fine. But by exceeding the speed limit. putting his fate not in truth but in idle hope, the captain destroyed the spell of safety its makers had so carefully cast and he made the ship sinkable again. And then, being suddenly a ship like no other, but in a very dangerous situation where no normal ship should venture, the Titanic inevitably sank.

The captain ignored the truth. He ignored science. That is why the Titanic sank.

To put it in another way and bring my point home. Whenever we stray from the unbreakable path (truth) we will find that all our endeavors, no matter how well intended, will fail. Like a badly cast spell in the world of Harry Potter. Our efforts will either backfire in some unexpected way or have no effect at all.

The unbreakable path (the truth) is the only thing we can walk on in this world. Stray from it and we will fall. It cannot be broken, changed or avoided. In Harry's world, Magic is real and there is no way around it. In our world, truth is real and there is no way around it!

This brings us to the question of why the unbreakable path must form the start of our journey into the why of our world. Whatever the answer that lies at the end of that question. The only path that can possibly lead us there is the path of truth.

It is this mysterious phenomenon, TRUTH, that somehow lies at the heart of our deeply mysterious world. It forms a path unlike any other. One truth leading to the next, stretching from the discovery of "how to make fire at will" to "how to fly", "How to create a guitar" and all the way to: how to make a quantum computer and how to be an extreme learner.



Is it perhaps this path that we were supposed to find and must somehow follow to unravel the mystery of what we are supposed to do in life?

If we assume this, then the challenge becomes: as with any road (or perhaps it is better to refer to truth as a vast network of roads) it is easy to get lost. So having found the unbreakable path that underpins our world, now what we must seek is a direction!

### **A light that leads the way?**

To quote one of our finest living philosophers:

*“If we were to ask any of the great artists of the ancient world (Rome, Greece) what is the purpose of the Arts and Literature? They would have replied without a second’s hesitation:*

### ***Beauty!***

*And they would have continued to remark that beauty is an essential human need. As important as water or food, without which no human can survive for long”.*

Great thinkers like Plato were obsessed with the mystery of beauty, calling it the path to God. We can all understand that experience. Whenever we encounter a work of beauty:

- A painting that captures the heart of its subject,

- A poem that channels the deep feelings of its writer,
- A statue whose exquisite details fill us with awe.
- A piece of music that moves us to tears.
- A truth which amazes us

It is in these moments that, if only for a fleeting moment, we feel without a shred of doubt that life is worthwhile. That we would not want to miss this moment for anything and suddenly we feel that there is more to our world than meets the eye. There is something deeper here, a magic of sorts? A force that only reveals itself when all the elements come together in exactly the right way. Like during a solar eclipse, our ordinary world suddenly, for a moment, seems filled with real magic.

This special thing “beauty” is the answer to our riddle. And I have come to believe that it is the one and only answer that truly makes sense as a response to the question of: Why are we here? What is the purpose of our lives? It seems the only piece that truly fits the puzzle.

Why are we here? What are we supposed to do?:

**We are here to experience beauty in all its forms and most of all. To become beautiful ourselves.**

**To create beautiful things and inspire beauty in others. To put it simply. Our only goal is:**

**To live a beautiful life.**

After we have passed on, those who stay behind. Whether they were our friends or our adversaries in life. All can agree on one thing. **We lived a beautiful life.**

As the father remarks over the grave of his dead son in the epic movie **Legends of the fall**. "He was beautiful". That says it all does it not?

Answer the question for yourself with this answer and observe your feelings.

**You are here to live a beautiful life!**

Does it fit for you also?

Note that beauty is a value beyond riches or success or any plain human achievement. One can be poor but still be beautiful. One can be a total fool but be beautiful, One can be rich and beautiful or smart and beautiful or hopelessly in an unanswered love and beautiful. Beauty requires nothing extra.

**Truth and beauty stand alone. Truth is undeniable, beauty is undeniable. No one can give it to us or take it from us but ourselves.**

Nothing could be more satisfying, nothing could require more effort from us in life. There is no goal higher in life, nothing more complicated or simple at the same time than simply to live beautifully. **It takes guts, perseverance and hope. Through the perspective of beauty, happiness is no better than sorrow or even despair.**

Can anybody really lead a happy life? Or a successful life? Are both of those goals not hollow and empty?

**But could we all lead a truly beautiful life? Is that not easily attainable for all?**

It's application is simple. My advice to you is this: Just avoid doing anything or participating in anything that feels to you 'ugly' in any way. Let your emotions guide you in this. Focus simply on all those things you find beautiful around you. The people, the places, the experiences. Experience them fully and enjoy their beauty.

Anything which feels off, wrong or ugly, avoid it. Do not participate in it.

**This is what I want to invite you to do with the power of extreme learning.**

Work hard to attain the state of an extreme learner and then use it **simply** and **only** to **make your life more and more beautiful**. Choose not the things

that make you richer or more powerful or which promise happiness at the end. Choose to chase more beauty in your life. Learn the things you know will make your life more beautiful. Do the things that inspire a search for beauty in others.

That is my hope.

I wish you well and I hope you enjoyed reading this little experiment of mine.

Remember: Experiment, Persevere, Take calculated risks and don't mind those who say you can't do it.

Because we can!

We all can! Please share what you have learned with others and live a beautiful life.

Yours with passion, truth and beauty,

Florian Rooz



## Join the movement!

If you feel inspired about Extreme Learning, please join the movement! As an organization learn3timesfaster is doing everything we can to introduce these principles and practices to world.

### How can I help?

1: Share this book with at least two others, but preferably with anyone who you think might benefit from it or have an interest.

2: Get an extreme Learning Master accreditation through one of our day-courses and organize your own workshops and lectures about extreme learning, using the official book and teaching materials. (see [learn3timesfaster.com](http://learn3timesfaster.com) for more info on this)

3: Recommend local teachers and school personnel to read the book and become Extreme Learning Masters.

4: Lead by example and chase your dreams. Learn the skills you always dreamed of and show others that it's possible and fun!

5: Send us your feedback and ideas at **[contact@learn3timesfaster.com](mailto:contact@learn3timesfaster.com)**

## About the author

Florian Rooz is an entrepreneur and author from Amsterdam. He has started and co-owns over a dozen companies in a wide area of business. In addition he also works as a creative adviser for a wide range of organizations. Over the last 10+ years he has explored many different aspects of the human learning ability, most notably by starting and growing an on-line music education platform which quickly grew to over 450.000 users.

How to learn anything 3 times faster is the culmination of all his previous works into one, ultra powerful and widely accessible method of education (extreme learning).

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**More info at: [www.Learn3timesfaster.com](http://www.Learn3timesfaster.com)**