

Reinvent yourself: Learn

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The quote lover than I am wanted to start this written piece by citing one quote I came across:

“The capacity to learn is a gift, the ability to learn is a skill, the willingness to learn is a choice”.

Brian Herbert

A choice

A choice.. that’s exactly what will make a difference in what you do and want to do, and the point from which I would like to start this discussion. There is a possibility that you’ll be reading this on the train, at your desk, hopefully not while driving, but wherever you are think about the direction you would like to give to your life, your career, your personal development, etc.

It simply starts with a decision to act. And contrary to some other life decisions, choosing to learn or develop yourself isn’t a scary one, it’s pretty simple, pretty easy to do and guess what, it sometimes can even be free. It’s entirely up to you to decide to make that step but I promise you, once you’ll start you’ll get hooked. So tidy up your agenda and embark on a learning journey.

Your day job keeps you quite busy, and adding a new activity or course to your schedule requires some good time management skills and mental strength. Especially if you work long hours or have a family, or social commitment.

But let’s say you are motivated and disciplined enough to want to try, let’s see why and how you can do that.

Distance learning ? Sport class ? Free conferences ? Evening class ?

Depending on your schedule, lifestyle, availability, access to a venue, you can think of a wide range of ways to get that extra knowledge or skills. With new technologies and online information, we have an unlimited source of information ready and available for us to use.

As you can imagine the quality of courses and educational resources greatly differs from one organisation to the other, and so that’s your job to make sure you do your due diligence. After spending some time researching, you’ll often come across the usual suspects. Depending on your background, skills, level and what topic you are trying to learn, some websites will be better than some others, so always make sure you chose one that will get you up to speed with what you are trying to achieve.

In your research, be creative. If you are worried of not being able to commit to a two-year bachelor degree distance learning course, register to a short course like a 4 weeks’ course for example, there are so many out there. I will not make a list of all the websites which exist as it isn’t the purpose of this article, but as an example coursera.org offers this type of courses. This is a great website with lots of short courses (generally a couple of weeks) that start at various dates throughout the year. It has a very good range of topics available to study from many universities. When you chose to register for one, you’ll have access to very

well structured courses, online material posted every week by professors, coursework and exams as well as online interaction with professors and students. And the best in all that ? It's free ! If you would like to receive a certificate, you'll have to pay a small amount of money but in my opinion it's worth it.

When doing your research, explore as many options as possible. A few years ago, I studied an online course about Conflict Analysis with the United Nations University for a couple of weeks. It was short but intense and I was extremely satisfied with the quality of the course. The United Nations University has a lot of courses available for a fee, but you get a certificate, a high-quality study material and case studies, as well as the possibility to interact with professors and students located around the world. The World Bank also have courses you can take online, I'm not sure about the process for registering, but my point is: there are many resources out there with many providers, and it's entirely up to you to choose which one suits you the best.

If you are someone who needs to be physically present somewhere to learn, it is also a possible option to consider and short courses are available too. A couple of years ago I took an evening course in international law with City University in London. The university has a very good reputation; the teacher was excellent and students were all very involved and motivated. Being physically present helped me to focus.

Can't commit to a course ? Go to a conference !

To acquire knowledge, you don't always need to attend a course. You can for example participate to conferences and events. London is a great city for that. I always used to check upcoming free conferences at the London School of Economics and register to the ones I thought would bring me the knowledge I was looking for. I was lucky to attend speech of French politicians, hear about poverty

alleviation from a well know economist, get inspired by the speech of the founder of Microfinance, learn about human rights from LSE university professors and many more things. Those events were all free and had a simple registration process.

Boring subject ? It doesn't have to be

You don't need to choose a preformatted standard subject. Do something different, take a theatre class for example.

Challenge yourself with something you've never done before.

I did a theatre improvisation class a couple of years ago. When I had finished my work, I would change my outfit, hop on a train and dive into a completely different world. Some days I was exhausted and didn't feel like going anywhere else than home, and I would drag myself to the class, but once I was there it was always fun and different, and was allowing me to disconnect from my work and break my routine. Doing improvisation theatre in a language that wasn't mine was quite challenging but so much fun. I surprised myself by doing things I never thought I'll do, laugh on stage and meet people I would otherwise not have met.

Don't know exactly what you would like to do ?

Spend time researching and look for something that will bring you value and make you feel you are doing something interesting and exciting, as the last thing you want is to drag your feet after work to a place where you don't want to be and end up bored to death feeling this isn't going nowhere.

The more you do, the more you share, and the more you connect to others

Taking a course or attending an event, won't necessarily get you THE job or THAT skill, but you'll get closer to your objective, closer to yourself and closer to other people. One of the powerful result of getting involved in all sort of activities and meet all sort of people is that you'll be able to understand better our society, its dynamic, personalities and people's thoughts, and

you'll be able to talk about anything with anyone.

Every course I attended was a great experience, I learnt something new, met some new people, some pretty funky ones at times, shared some moments and ended up in some unique situations. I often meet people who did similar things and that's a great way to connect. More people than you think do this kind of courses and activities. You are not just your day job, you are everything that you do. Wake up the funky nerd inside you.

By doing more and putting yourself out there you will create new opportunity for yourself and make life more interesting.

Finally.. Inspire others

Be careful who you talk to about what you do. Select the right audience, and see how you can influence and inspire someone by showing that

it is possible to do things in your life and constantly reinvent yourself.

Thank you for reading