

The Economist

Successful Lifelong Careers Come to Lifelong Learners

by Julie Winkle Giulioni

Lifelong learning has been a topic of conversation for some time. But, it's never more important or relevant than today. The rate of change experienced in the workplace continues to accelerate. Uncertainty runs rampant. Artificial intelligence looms large, causing many professionals to wonder what it means for them and their futures. And, most industry sectors continue to experience heightening competition in the marketplace.

Life is also longer today, putting greater emphasis on lifelong learning. Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott, authors of *The 100-Year Life*, summarize a key implication of living and working longer: "If you now work into your 70s or 80s in a rapidly changing job market, then maintaining productivity is no longer about brushing up on knowledge – it is about setting time aside to make fundamental investments in re-learning and re-skilling."

Additionally, we're developing a deeper understanding of the relationship between learning and success. For instance, Brian Tracy suggests that most successful people read 2-3 hours each day. In the article, [The Secret to Lifelong Success is Lifelong Learning](#), author Michael Simmons describes the learning commitments made by such success stories as:

- Former President Barack Obama: He read for one hour each day while in office.
- Warren Buffett: He invested 80% of his time reading and thinking.
- Bill Gates: He reads a book a week and sets aside two-week each year for reading vacations.

My own research which involves interviews with hundreds of individuals who've achieved stature, influence, and significant contributions within their fields reveals that all share a deep commitment to, respect for, and prioritization of ongoing learning in their lives.

They have a similar orientation and practice that ensures that learning doesn't get sidetracked or perpetually pushed down the list of urgent priorities. They are more likely to be voracious readers like the high-profile individuals mentioned above. But they do four other things that make them continuous and successful learners.

They own their learning. What distinguishes particularly successful individuals is that they take responsibility for, and control of, their learning. They proactively seek out what they need or might be interested in as opposed to passively waiting for it to find them.

They embrace risk and failure. Those who achieve career success tend to be unafraid of making mistakes because they understand

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that 'trial and error' is a powerful force for learning. They trust – based upon their experience – that failure accelerates insights, capacity, and their own performance and that of their teams... when addressed within the context of learning.

They are reflective. For many, reflection has become a lost art. But highly successful individuals have developed a discipline or cadence that allows for plain old-fashioned thinking. They understand the value of quiet contemplation. They take the time and deploy the sustained attention required to generate ideas, arrive at insights, and capture learnings. They've developed practices that allow them to remain open and receptive to the lessons that routinely present themselves.

Which brings us to one final practice.

They appreciate that learning opportunities are ubiquitous. Effective and successful lifelong learners recognize the ever-present nature of learning in the world around them. They define sources of learning far more broadly than others who might default to schools, workshops and books.

They live in a world where important lessons are like oxygen – always floating around and available to those who consciously breathe them in. They learn when they listen or interact with others, when they observe the world around them, and when they make the kind of unusual connections that might go unnoticed by others without their commitment or skills.

In the words of Albert Einstein, "Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death." Want a successful career? Commit to learning every day in between.

*Julie Winkle Giulioni is a champion for workplace growth and development and helps leaders optimize talent and potential within their organizations. Named one of Inc. Magazine's top 100 leadership speakers, she's the co-author of the international bestseller, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* and author of the Nautilus and Axiom business book award-winner, *Promotions Are So Yesterday*. Julie is a regular contributor to numerous business publications.*