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The biggest benefactor of such change is the customer who is now the focal point of every industry

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We no longer have the luxury to learn for first 25 years of our life and use it in the next 35 years. Learning is like food, which you need daily to nurture your mind and be impactful in the real world!

We have all grown up listening to and reading stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. They have many lessons and application of those lessons in real life. One thing that remains consistent in these epic stories is the concept of Gurukul (School). A person in his early years will go under rigorous training imparted by the Guru (Teacher) at the Gurukul. After many years of training, the person is ready to take on the real world. Typically, such training program was a combination of both classroom-based learning as well as on-the-field learning. Once, the training was over, often the person will go on to apply those learnings for the rest of his/her life and will assume various role to execute worldly matter.

The concept of learning is changing rapidly in the 21st century

While the epic of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the lessons from them will always carry timeless value, yet what is changing rapidly is the concept of learning. Learning is going through a fundamental shift from being a one-time activity to a continuous activity. The concept of school and going through initial years of rigorous training has not changed, but elements of it is also evolving. At the same time, learning is now extending beyond the school years and throughout the professional life of an individual.

Is continuous/adult education a new thing

Adult education is definitely not new. In India, the [Indira Gandhi](#) National Open University (IGNOU) was established over 30 years ago to encourage distance and open education in India. This gave an opportunity for people at large to gather learning across disciplines and at any age. However, in the last few years the relevance of what one is learning is rapidly undergoing change. The shelf-life of a skill has come down substantially which is making a skilled person's relevance in the job marketplace challenged, perhaps in every two years or so. Hence, this is pushing individuals to invest their time and money to learn about new and evolving areas and do so continuously.

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Across sectors, most incumbent companies are challenged by newer players who are bringing innovative business models to meet the market demand. This is fueled by technology advancements which is enabling these new players to change the rules of the game. The biggest benefactor of such change is the customer who is now the focal point of every industry.

As the bargaining power shifts more on the customer side, the customer is becoming more demanding than ever. Hence, to stay competitive in the marketplace, both incumbent and new players are equally under pressure to keep innovating and to continuously wow the customer. While things are rapidly evolving across business and technology alike, every person in the business has to rapidly upgrade themselves to be relevant. This would mean building skills required to support the new business model as well as keeping pace with the technology advancements.

How to stay relevant

While it is clear that one needs to keep learning, the most important question is How? There is no easy answer to this question and it will be contextual to the industry one belongs to. While there will be a custom course of action for every individual, there are 5 things everyone can do from today to update oneself.

1. Develop a learning mindset: Most people are so busy in their day to day activities that finding 30 minutes in a day to invest in learning seems like a humungous task. The mind gets quickly occupied with transactional activities and it is very difficult to detach oneself from it. Hence, it is very important to first start by making learning a priority. One can argue that he/she is

effectively, the rest will come from relaxed learning sessions where one wants to move a bit immediately, but in the near term. Once a learning rhythm is established, rest will fall in place over time.

2. Become an avid reader: Read voraciously! It is important to be an avid reader. Most people are readers of newspaper even if they don't read anything else. While news items are interesting and grabs our attention, it may not be value adding in the long term. It is important to read point of view which can be found in columns and editorials. Beyond newspaper one can also invest time in reading magazines in their area of interest. It is also good to alternate reading between fiction and non-fiction which will help develop perspectives.

3. Try to teach: If you are student in the classroom, your attention can sway sometimes and you can get dis-engaged. Yet the class teacher is usually very focused and engaged all the time. This is simply because the teacher is mentally more active as he/she is thinking what needs to be taught next and also expecting questions and hence continuously on the alert. Find teaching opportunities as it will get you become more alert and get you geared towards learning habit. Also, teaching doesn't mean a university engagement but it can be through volunteering outside or at work.

4. Go beyond your area of expertise: Typically, we keep building skills in our area of expertise. Finding a second area which may or may not be related to your current area and building some understanding helps widen your horizon. A banking manager can invest time in learning about emotional intelligence which can help manage teams better or can learn about artificial intelligence which is driving a lot of changes in the banking industry.

5. Create a learning group: Find like-minded individuals and create a learning group focused on common areas of learning. This will help keep the momentum and group members can help encourage each other. Group discussions helps faster learning through collective thinking process and can also help in generating multiple perspectives on a single issue.

Henry Ford has summarized continuous learning very succinctly "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young".

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