



You Are Never Too Good to Stop Learning

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I once read an article in *Wired* magazine about a guy who had developed an airplane with foldable wings that you can tow behind a car. It was a long article, and I was very interested in this airplane because at one point in my life I was studying to be a pilot. As I read the article I realized that this particular guy was having a ton of fun. He was trying to develop something that would revolutionize aviation and was really trying to change the world with his airplane. It was an exciting article, and I had read previous articles about this guy and his airplane at least one or two times before in other magazines. Apparently the airplane, called "The Icon," would be going into production very shortly and selling for \$139,000. This new airplane was predicted to change aviation for private pilots and make the skies accessible to the world.

When I read this particular article, however, something completely amazing happened. I realized that I knew the guy. In fact, I had spent a couple of days with him only three or four years previously when I had decided to pursue a master's degree at Stanford Business School. I had gone up and enrolled in Stanford Business School and met him during a weekend orientation for new students. We had actually become friends and spent a couple of days together. At the time he was older than me, around 38, and I was in my mid-30s. Incredibly, in the few months I had been reading about this airplane and this guy, I had not realized it was him.

After picking out a dorm room, getting various textbooks from the school, and putting down a deposit on my tuition, I decided that I was no longer interested in going to business school. I thought that there was nothing the school could teach me that I did not already know about business, and that the businesses I was running would suffer too much if I went away to school.

How arrogant that was of me at the time.

Imagine believing you're too old and know too much. Imagine how limiting this would be. You need to constantly learn and stretch yourself. In addition, you need to take advantage of every opportunity to learn that ever presents itself. Had I gone to Stanford Business School, I realized I might be doing something with the guy I met up there. Who knows what could have happened?

Every time I look up in the sky and see an airplane flying by, I remember the value of education and the things you can do with it. You can develop airplanes or do tons of other things that will literally change your life when you pursue education with vigor. Education is about the most important thing you can do with your time. Another thing about education is that it doesn't matter how old you are. You can get an education at any time. Regardless of your age, if you keep learning, it's going to change you. There's simply nothing more important than education. The guy who developed the airplane and was now [marketing](#) it, was 38 at the time he enrolled in business school. It's never too late to pursue your dreams.

Most people, at some point in their lives, decide they have learned enough. This is a huge mistake. There is so much power in knowledge. Knowledge can empower you to become better, faster, and stronger in everything you do. It is astonishing to me that so many people go through their lives making the same mistakes over and over and over again. Many of these mistakes could be fixed if they took the time to get some education and learn more about themselves. So many people fail to reach their full potential because they don't allow themselves to get the education they should.

There's more to education than just going to school, however. Education is also about making sure you're continually learning. There are tons of books out there that you can read about your profession and what you do specifically that will allow you to get better and better at everything you do. You should be working in a job you're continually interested in learning more about. The more you learn about your job and how to get better at it, the better you will do in your career. Regardless of whether you're in [sales](#), management, or the law, the more you know about your profession, the better you are going to do.

One of my favorite [copywriters](#) in the world is a guy named Joe Sugarman. I really like Joe Sugarman because he's so exceptionally gifted at copywriting. His copywriting is all based on educating consumers about why they should buy a given product that he sells.

Sugarman is most famous for selling items such as BluBlocker sunglasses. Sugarman also owns a good portion of the islands of Maui and Kauai and the newspaper in Maui. Sugarman has written several books which include step-by-step instructions to teach people exactly what they need to do in order to write like him. The books are exceptional and people who follow the advice in the books can do very well if they are also copywriters.

I find it incredible that someone can make literally hundreds of millions of dollars by writing very good ads like Sugarman. Sugarman doesn't even work all that hard. He finds a product he likes and thinks about the product in an unconventional way that educates the consumer by creating an analogy to something more significant than the product. Then, he writes an advertisement in a few hours and makes sure he has a number set up for ordering and someplace that will ship the product to people. It's a bit more complex than that, of course, but this is the gist of it.

I have met Sugarman on several occasions, and he is relaxed and incredibly eager to teach people about what he does. This guy probably makes more money than the presidents of General Motors, IBM, and Boeing combined. While the main goal of no life should be purely financial (the goal of Sugarman's life is not financial), the point is there are rules people can learn and easily follow that can drastically change and improve their careers.

Throughout the years, I've employed probably at least 100 writers in our offices in Los Angeles. I'm in the career business and not the writing business; however, I have always admired Sugarman. Whenever I've encountered a writer in our company who had promise, I have gone out and purchased for them all of the books by Sugarman I can find. I've spent \$200+ doing this for some of my favorite writers. I tell the writers, "You are so lucky to have this talent. Read these books and study them. Let me tell you about what this guy, Joe Sugarman, has been able to do with the same ability. If you get really good at this, you can have the same sort of career he has had. In the interim, you can make a hell of a lot of money

here if you learn all about this stuff."

A lot of the people I have given these books to have been maybe in their early 50s. Others have been in their mid-20s, having just completed degrees at schools like Harvard. Others have been people who have come to our company from successful careers in other sorts of companies, like working in copywriting for major department store chains writing weekly newspaper ads.

The most depressing thing has happened with the education I've handed to these people. Almost all of the people I've given these books to have never opened them a crack. They don't read these books. I know this because I've seen the books on their desks month after month, pristine and unopened. To me, this is amazing. If I were a writer, I would want to do everything possible within my power to dramatically increase my income and make sure I was the best I could be. If I could own half the islands of Hawaii as well, that wouldn't be so bad.

There are people out there who have whatever job you're doing figured out. All you need to do is find their book or learn about whatever they do. Once you know what they do, you can step up and learn from them as well. It's easy to get good at something. There's not a lot you need to do to get better and better at your job.

There is another thing that's really important to understand about seeking out knowledge: the more you have, the more people will seek you out. People want to hire and do business with people who are knowledgeable about what they do and continuously study it. That's why people hire you and don't do the work themselves. That is why I hired copywriters and didn't do the work myself. People are comforted by people who have taken the time to understand what they do and constantly learn.

Think about how you would react in the following situations if you were the boss:

In the first situation, you interview someone for a job in your company and the person comes in and tells you they are very good at what they do. They don't provide you any reasons for you to really believe them, but they are pretty adamant about being really good at this type of work.

The second situation involves a person who comes in and, in addition to telling you they are really good at what they do, starts discussing all sorts of books they've recently put together about their profession and new developments in their profession. They tell you about seminars they've attended and developments in your field.

I would always hire the second person, and I think you would as well. We are comforted knowing a person cares about what they do and has educated themselves about it. The more we believe someone knows, and the more seriously we believe they take their job, the more we will want to work with them. This is just human nature.

It should be this way with you, too. Education is not just a matter of going to school and being done with it. Education needs to be a process of continually educating yourself, continually growing, and continually improving. The more you constantly push yourself, the more you will grow.

In some respects I feel many workplaces are sort of like zombie movies. People report to work each day, leave at the end of the day, and never seek to improve themselves. You need to constantly and consistently continue educating yourself about what you do. Never stop educating yourself. The more you learn, the more profound your ultimate experience will be and the greater the career and life you experience will be.

One of the best examples of the power of education is the career of Claude Hopkins, one of the greatest marketing strategists of all time. In 1919, Schlitz Beer of Milwaukee had mediocre sales compared to other nationally-marketed beers. Claude Hopkins was hired and brought in from New York to try to improve Schlitz's sales. The first thing Hopkins did was try to learn everything he could about beer. He took a class to understand how beer was made, and he toured the facilities and learned everything he could.

One of the first things that Hopkins discovered was even though Schlitz was right on a Great Lake, they had dug a 4,000-foot deep well because they wanted the purest water possible. In addition, they showed Hopkins a mother yeast cell they had made that was the product of 2,000+ experiments they'd done because they wanted to ensure the beer had a certain taste. Then they showed him how the beer bottles were cleaned at least 10 times for purity before the beer was bottled. They also showed him several rooms with three-foot thick glass where the beer was condensed and re-condensed to ensure it was as pure as possible.

When Hopkins studied all of this, he said, "My God, you should be telling everyone everything you do in order to make your beer so pure."

"Well, every beer does this. It's not just our beer, but every beer," the Schlitz people told Hopkins.

"Yes, but the first brewer who tells the public about this will have a huge advantage," Hopkins said. Within six months of promoting this aspect of how they made beer, Schlitz went to number one in terms of its sales.

Hopkins understood the value of [education](#) and also the value of educating the public. You, too, need to really understand the value of education and what it can mean in your life. You need to ensure you are constantly educating yourself so you can improve. The worst thing you can do with your career and your life is stop learning. Get books, tapes, and whatever else you can and apply these to your work. This one piece of advice could literally change your career and life forever.