

The Three Most Important Skills

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It was said some 20 years ago by the Education President, George H. W. Bush that everyone should be able to: **Speak, Write and Think**. These are the three most important skills everyone should have. Why are these skills so important? Because they are the most transferrable skills a person will use throughout their life. These skills also create the widest range of opportunities for people in a world where specific job related skills can become obsolete. And if you don't think you need transferrable skills, then consider that the average American will go through 10 to 14 jobs by the age of 38. One out of every four workers has been on the job one year or less according to the Department of Labor.

One good place to start in developing these skills is to **read**. As the American historian David McCullough once said: "You are what you read." People who read are reading someone else's writing and this in turn helps you become smart and develop your writing skills. As you develop your writing skills, this rolls over into speaking and thinking. When you read, you are preparing yourself for speaking and decision making. Therefore, reading is a fundamental building block and if you can't read, you are most likely stuck. Consider the following facts:

- Two-thirds of students who cannot read proficiently either end up in jail or on welfare
- Three out of every four people on welfare cannot read

It's worth noting that the more types of reading materials (catalogs, magazines, newsletters, etc.) you have in the house, the higher the reading proficiency of those who live in the house. As you begin to read more, spend time writing. Writing is essential to getting a job, winning a proposal, and communicating complex problems. Writing is how businesses communicate information. The most important decisions are made based on what is written. Writing also dominates social media and how you write is how others will perceive you. Writing also forces you to think, filtering through ideas and putting your thoughts together in a coherent and concise way.

"There is a problem we find in our government, in our schools, and in our families. It affects every country in the world and every citizen in them. We invest years of our lives and billions of dollars in an attempt to solve it. Big companies battle it. Nonprofits dread it. It's big. It's everywhere. So the greatest problem in the world requires the greatest solution in the world: an immediate and widespread increase in human connection. And words are a darn good place to start." – Magic Words by Tim David

In today's sound bite world where key decision makers have little time, you have to be able to speak. Speaking is not easy. It requires that you convey a wide range of qualities:

- Speaking with confidence, but also having some humility by listening and adjusting your conversation

- Being extremely clear and concise so that others can clearly understand what you are saying
- Communicating from the other person's perspective so that you connect and hold the person's interest
- Recognizing the importance of body language – you are face to face with others and they will pick up on your expressions, tone, and visual cues

The third and final skill is thinking. If you read, spend time writing and interacting with people. This positions you to think. The key here is to think with your whole brain. Most of us, including myself, are skewed too much on either the left side of the brain or the right side. Left brain thinking people tend to be analytical, logical thinkers, and very business centric. Right brain thinking people are more creative, free flowing and act on their intuition. For example, you may encounter situations where there is very little information, forcing you to use your right brain. If you try to use your left brain where no information is available, you will struggle. Likewise, if you can collection data about the situation and analyze it, you can reach a more logical decision.

“The inadequacies in what someone says will not always leap out at you. You must be an active reader and listener. You can do this by asking questions. The best search strategy is a critical-questioning strategy. A powerful advantage of these questions is that they permit you to ask searching questions even when you know very little about the topic being discussed. For example, you do not need to be an expert on childcare to ask critical questions about the adequacy of day-care centers.” – Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking by M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley

Today's world tends to be overloaded with information. So perhaps one of the best skills to master is critical thinking. Asking questions is the key to critical thinking. Similar to a child, critical thinkers are curious, always learning and building their knowledge base. The challenge is to be free from bias which requires consideration of all viewpoints. In some cases, you may have to defer a decision until you've had a chance to hear the other side. Once you have considered all the evidence from various sources, you can then apply reasoning and reach a conclusion. Think of yourself as a judge in a court room, listening to both arguments, weighing the evidence, and then making an informed decision.

Because our world is so connected, knowing how to write and speak is incredibly important. If you couple this with thinking skills, you should be able to manage every major challenge you will encounter in life. People who can master these skills are poised for great success.