Dodging Burnout and Minimizing Turnover
Fred O. Walumbwa, PhD, I-Chieh Hsu, PhD, Cindy Wu, PhD, Everlyne Misati, PhD Candidate, and Amanda Christensen-Salem, PhD

Timing is Everything: A Scheduled Plan for Your Social Media Presence
Vamsi K. Kanuri, PhD, Yixing Chen, PhD Candidate, and Shrihari (Hari) Sridhar, PhD

Boosting Sales Force Morale in Highly Dynamic, Complex Markets: The Role of Job Resources
Nikolaos G. Panagopoulos, PhD, Bryan Hochstein, PhD, Thomas L. Baker, PhD, and Michael A. Pimentel, PhD Candidate

Riding the Wave: How to Make Your Videos Go Viral
Gerard J. Tellis, PhD, Deborah J. MacInnis, PhD, Seshadri Tirunillai, PhD, and Yanwei Zhang, PhD

Entrepreneurship: The Path to Well-Being
Nadav Shir, PhD, Boris N. Nikolaev, PhD, and Joakim Wincent, PhD

INSIDER: Breathe to Succeed: Increase Workplace Productivity, Creativity, and Clarity through the Power of Mindfulness
Corrie A. H. Penraat, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Ultralearning
Brian LeCompte, MDiv/MBA Candidate
INSIDER: Ultralearning
Brian LeCompte, MDiv/MBA Candidate

What dreams do you have for the future? What skills stand between you and where you want to be? Perhaps you dream about having a better career or being the best in the world at something you love to do. The world is filled with smart people, though, so how could anyone expect to stand out in a world where there is always someone more talented? Most people think genius is an unmerited inheritance for a few lucky people, but what if genius could be learned? Moreover, what if it could be learned quickly? If you could master in a few months what you are only curious about today, the possibilities would seem endless. You would probably think about changing industries, moving somewhere new, or even becoming your own boss. If you could learn like that, it would change your life.

In *Ultralearning*, Scott Young arms his readers with the principles for becoming self-made experts in a skill set they want to develop in less time than is expected. Young shares his stories of completing all the coursework of a four-year MIT degree in computer science in one year, of learning four different languages in one year, and of attaining expert-level, self-portrait artistry in a month. He assures readers that these feats are not magic. The pages of his book are filled with stories of child prodigies, competition champions, polyglots, and trailblazers. They are examples of proper application of nine ultralearning principles. If you can dream it and are willing to work for it, you can be it.

THINK POINT #1: Making the Case for Ultralearning

Ultralearning is conducted through projects that are self-directed and very intense. Most people lack the self-motivation to finish intense projects. Why would any normal person go to such extreme measures? Today’s job market is more competitive than ever. Our culture is witnessing an era of skill-polarization. Medium-skilled jobs like clerks, travel agents, and factory workers are becoming increasingly automated, and there is significantly less demand for these roles. Demand is rising for low-skilled (e.g. customer service) and high-skilled (e.g. technical or managerial) jobs. There are opportunities for higher-level skills in the real estate industry. As more and more customers search for and list their properties on the web, it is no secret that competition is as tough as it has ever been in the real estate industry. The best agents will prepare for the future of the home-buying experience.
Higher education is expensive, and much of it is indirect learning wherein skills are practiced outside of their normal environment of use. Higher education depends on the belief in skill transfer—that skills learned in school will translate into competence in a job role. The truth is, even PhD recipients require on-the-job training after their formal education. Of course, if a position for which you have an interest requires a professional degree, then there is not much choice in the matter, but you will have to constantly gain new skills to remain competitive in your job role. The biggest obstacle standing between most people and their dreams is learning.

THINK POINT #2: Learning Effectively

Metalearning is the first ultralearning principle. It describes the research phase of every ultralearning project. Draw a map that shows your destination and the path you need to take to get there. Why are you learning this skillset? What knowledge do you need to have? How will you learn (i.e. resources)? Putting ample time into this first step will save you massive amounts of time in the next eight steps. Metalearning is an aerial view of your project that charts the whole course so you will not make a wrong turn when you are in the weeds.

Focus is the next principle that every ultralearning project requires. Procrastination is the first problem for those wishing to develop their ability to focus. Some good news is that the distracting impulse that causes procrastination does not last long. A helpful suggestion to overcome this short-lived set back is to force yourself to work for short periods of time with intermittent breaks at first. It may take some experimentation to find the right study environment for you, but the key to retaining focus is to engage in the right task. Find a task that is engaging, and you will be surprised how easy it is to stay focused.

Directness refers to the relationship between the learning process and the real-life practice of a skill. In contrast to most formal education at universities, ultralearning projects provide skill transfer by ditching the classroom for the real world. If you want to learn a programming language, learn by engaging in a project to create your own program. If you want to learn to speak a new language, immerse yourself in a place where you must use that language to communicate. If you want to learn something well, make it difficult by placing yourself in a high-stakes environment where missing important lessons and feedback is less likely.

THINK POINT #3: Practice Makes Perfect

Drill is the principle for overcoming the toughest parts of the ultralearning project. With every skillset there are individual skills that must be mastered in order to possess it. The weakest skills will require the most attention. Drill exists in tension with directness, because you will identify these weak points in the field and then use drills at home to strengthen them. Try to copy the work of an expert if it helps, but the key is to sharpen your skill so you can practice the entire skillset in a direct environment.
Retrieval refers to the act of recalling necessary information from memory. Many people get discouraged if they cannot remember information they need to know for a test or a project, so they quickly resort to passively looking up the correct answer. However, those who endure the discomfort and attempt to retrieve the information from their memory experience better results and deeper understanding of the task at hand. In other words, taking tests is a form of learning. Embrace the struggle of staring at a question until your mind can dredge up the answer and it will not be easily forgotten.

Feedback is one of the most complicated principles for ultralearning. Feedback is necessary, but there is a plethora of feedback in this world that is harmful to learning. Both negative and positive feedback carry the potential to kill motivation. A large amount of feedback is directed at the characteristics of a person rather than activity itself. It is important to eliminate the noise of unhelpful feedback by finding tasks that are complex enough that they will generate unexpected feedback. Usually, the unexpected responses are the ones that are the most helpful.

THINK POINT #4: Mastery

Retention is the seventh principle. One of the most challenging truths about learning is that it is much easier to forget than to remember. Retaining the information from your ultralearning project is a lot of work. Avoid cramming information, and instead space out intense study sessions. Work until you can perform the skill without putting much thought into it. It is better to learn too much about a skill than to learn too little. Overlearning something increases the chance that it will never be forgotten.

Intuition is the product of a large amount of experience working with a particular problem. It is a level of mastery that sees cognitive connections between situations that do not appear similar to most people. It is a sense or feeling for how to solve a problem that only comes from a deep understanding of the skillset. Obsess over the details and eventually you will see the things no one else sees, even if it is right under their noses.

Experimentation is the key to mastery. It is the final ultralearning principle that ties the other eight principles together. Previous learning principles depend on work that experts have already done, but experimentation moves from copying the experts to creative expression. Usually, projects start with learning the tools of trade and then move on to common techniques for using
them. After some time mastering the resources and techniques, ultralearners find their unique approach to the task. Creating an original product is both the goal and the process of learning.

Conclusion

During the mid-20th century in Hungary, an educational psychologist named Lazlo Polgar decided he wanted to raise his daughters as geniuses. He believed genius was trained, not born. By the time his youngest daughter, Judit, was seven she had won her first chess game against a chess master while blindfolded. Today she is considered to be the best female chess player of all time. The Polgar sisters are known for shaking up the male-dominated world of competitive chess. Grown men who played chess their entire lives lost at the hands of teenage girls who grew up with metalearning research, focused exercises, direct learning, drills, retrieval challenges, feedback, retention maximizing practices, intuition development, and experimentation. They were raised as ultralearners. Whether you have a few hours a week or ten hours a day, ultralearning is for you. Whether you want to earn that next promotion or change industries completely, ultralearning is for you. Whether you are 22 or 82, ultralearning can help you accomplish your dreams. Innate talent does play a role, but learning makes all the difference. Maybe you are uncomfortable with new technologies. Maybe you are experienced and want to start your own brokerage. Maybe you are content in your career, but you want to learn a new hobby. Every ultralearning project you do makes the next project easier to accomplish. The only thing standing in the way is your desire to learn. There is no better time than right now. So, what will your first ultralearning project be?

Recommended Reading


About the Author

Brian LeCompte, MDiv/MBA Candidate
Baylor University

Brian LeCompte is a graduate student from Conyers, Georgia. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies and his Master of Arts in Theological studies from Criswell College. He has previously worked as a universal banker with BBVA Bank while simultaneously serving as a Baptist minister in Central Texas. Brian is pursuing a joint Master of Divinity/Master of Business Administration degree and is seeking a career as a bivocational pastor working full-time in the financial services industry and serving part-time on staff at a local church.