

Although the following excerpt is geared for the business professionals, I believe there are some applicable lessons for us educators. Gary Lockwood is a business coach who seeks to increase the effectiveness of business owners and professionals.



Personal and Professional Growth: Old Dogs and New Tricks

by Gary Lockwood

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks." How many times have you heard this old saying as an excuse for not trying something new or avoiding a fresh approach?

The expert animal trainers say that a dog of almost any age can learn new tricks. It's the human animal that makes choices regarding when and how much to learn.

I'm constantly amazed at how frequently I hear one of my CEO clients say, "I'm too old to change." Nonsense! This is simply an excuse to sidestep the effort required to learn or experiment. When you try something new, you often feel uneasy about it, and frequently pull back. The security feels good. You are in your "comfort zone."

Your personal "comfort zone" is where you are comfortable in what you are doing in your job, your life and your experiences. It is when you have no feelings of risk or anxiety. Some would call it "being comfortable." You could also call it "a rut."

The downside of always staying in your comfort zone is that it can be very limiting. Why is this significant?

The past few decades have seen enormous and accelerating changes in technology and social structure, in geopolitics and especially in the organizations in which we work. The pace of change is staggering and daunting. The mass of information available to humankind is doubling every 20 months.



The world passes us by as we stand still. Complacency, in our fast-paced competitive world, can be fatal to business and severely limit personal and professional growth. If you are not learning, trying new things and growing, your job or business may be deteriorating.

Having a positive attitude toward learning and changing may be one of the most important characteristics of successful people. In my years as a business coach, I have observed many successful CEOs and entrepreneurs. With very few exceptions, those who are successful and happy have developed and maintained a positive outlook about change and continuous improvement.

This positive attitude is not accidental. Successful business people know how to create a positive attitude and positive motivation for themselves. They don't just wait for it to happen. They purposely create positive change.

All change implies learning and vice versa. They are inseparable, one impossible without the other. If you learn, you change.

Effective learning must be conscious vs. unconscious, active vs. reactive. It must be something you seek, not just "let it happen." If learning is not conscious, it can't be improved. It just becomes "another task" without effective application to the circumstances in your business (and personal) life.

Learning in today's fast-paced and ever-changing environment can't be left to chance. Make a conscious effort to capture your experiences and learn from them or be doomed to repeat your mistakes. Worse yet, you may habitually keep doing those things that are working for you while your competition is actively seeking new ideas, innovation and growth.

The competitive advantage of the future is your adaptability to learning and change.

"There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction." ~ John F. Kennedy



What are some higher level activities that could add to your personal and professional growth?

Here's my challenge to you.

Make a list of 50 things that, if you really were successful in doing them, you would be a better person or a better company. Consider a few new tricks such as:

- Give a speech
- Write and publish an article
- Start an exercise program
- Meditate daily
- Teach a class
- Feed a homeless person
- Volunteer
- Climb a mountain
- Learn to play a new musical instrument



Then choose one or two that you are willing to do within the next 90 days. Schedule those new activities, then go for it. Afterward, choose one or two more and do it again.

Make personal and professional growth a lifelong habit. You will not become an old dog as long as you keep learning new tricks.