



## Continual Learning's Benefit

-Mark Haeussler, CEO

As we progress in our careers, most leaders seek out educational opportunities related to the field they are in: Doctors and nurses learn more about treating diseases, Chief Financial Officers may study the nuances of asset/liability risk, an educator might learn the latest approaches in teaching. These vertical learnings are important to continually advance our abilities in our chosen field.



I challenge you to this: Instead of deepening your skills in a vertical manner, consider learning something entirely new – horizontally, meaning you move across completely different domains.

Why bother? What's the value of such an endeavor?

The science indicates some key benefits to the brain. First, learning new things, especially in a new field, helps build the wiring in the brain. Second key tissue of the brain, myelin (the white matter that fills half of our brain), is known to benefit from learning. Third, novelty releases dopamine, a key neurotransmitter and one of the chemicals known to support motivation.

My own experiences bear it out. In my adult life, I have learned to tutor grade schoolers, was the system administrator for an IBM-36 (that dates me!), studied martial arts, earned an EMT license, became expert at off-roading, learned to play a third instrument, and studied about public schools. While these allowed me to be of service in different ways, I also found my overall engagement in everything, and my mental acuity, increase. I also can see my own domain from different perspectives (how valuable centering is in emergency services, for example). The experience of becoming a beginner again energized my mind, brought back the emotional sense of wonder in a field, coupled with humility. It also had unexpected benefits that are applicable in the business world: How to approach emergencies, increased navigation skills, greater creativity, and how to mentor people new to a subject all had applications in my chosen domain and in my personal life. By undertaking a new endeavor, you can expect to become a better thinker, more engaged in your primary endeavors, and a more complete citizen and person.

As a recruiter, I certainly pay attention to the career in assessing a candidate. That said, I also look for people who are engaged in activities horizontal to their career. In addition to adding to the character of a person, it provides insight into a desire to continually grow personally and support growth in their brain. And, from what I learned and shared in this article about horizontal learning, I know that such candidates be more motivated, have a more balanced overall life, and will have a more effective brain. Remember, the dopamine comes as we learn something, so you will need to generate your own initial motivation to get started. Do not agonize over what to do; just follow an emerging interest and see where it takes you.