

See farther, go farther

*"The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend."
-- Robertson Davies.*

Have you ever bought a new car? I imagine you have. One day, you pick a car off the lot, drive it home, and over the next week, you'll suddenly start seeing cars that look just like yours.

"Where did they all come from," you'll ask. But they were there before you bought the car – only your view of them has changed.

Our brains are marvelous instruments – if that's the right word. Not only do our brains pick out important items for us to focus on, they also reduce the unimportant "chaff" to where we rarely notice it.

It's the way we're wired. If we noticed everything, soon we'd hit an information overload. We would be unable to focus on the important things – we'd be unprepared to take action when action needed to be taken.

It's this "single-minded" (so that's where that came from) focus on things that is one of our great strengths – and also a weakness.

It's a weakness because we often overlook things that would be important to us – if we only knew to look.

I'm sure, like me, you've driven to work and suddenly noticed that a new building has turned up. They didn't build it overnight – it just got to the point where your brain started noticing it.

As you experience more and more, or as you learn more and more, you also notice this effect. Gain a little more knowledge, and all of a sudden, opportunities present themselves. You see things you haven't seen before, gain insights that have eluded you, grasp an understanding you have never been able to gain.

As you do these things, your brain starts recognizing these things – and incorporating them into your understanding of the world. Studying music may help your brain to understand math; chemistry might help it to understand cooking.

When I first started studying negotiation techniques, I found the techniques closely paralleled things I already knew about interviewing people – studying

negotiation taught me to be a better interviewer, because it taught me about people.

Now here's the downside – many of us never bother to gain greater understanding of our life – or if we do, we do it accidentally. If we read, we read things we already know – if we talk to people, they are people we've talked to countless times before.

When we limit our exposure – to people, ideas, the world around us – we limit our ability to grow and progress. We limit the upside of our growth and learning.

This is why in order to make yourself better, one of the greatest things you can do is to embark on a reading plan – just a few minutes a day will help. If you can't read a book, listen to one in the car (I've gotten through a lot of great books in the car). Don't confine yourself to just your area of interest – start with that as your center, but branch out into related (and unrelated) disciplines. Read fiction – good fiction (I recommend Dickens' "Great Expectations" and "David Copperfield").

Gaining new insights, whether it be through training, experience, or reading, is essential to our personal growth. We don't want to become stagnant in our lives. We want to become the greatest individuals that we can become.

And it comes about by teaching your brain to see new things.

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