

Ten Ways to Cultivate Wisdom

Chapter 6: Reputation

Having the self-knowledge to understand your own goals, and the discipline to stick with them in the face of distraction, relies on developing wisdom. While it often feels like an intangible quality, psychologists suggest wisdom is a thinking process that integrates knowledge, experience, deep understanding, common sense, and insight.

To cultivate wisdom, consider these ten opportunities.

Try unfamiliar things. Each time you try something unfamiliar—from visiting a new place, to experiencing a new hobby, to checking out a different form of entertainment, to trying a new skill at work—you open yourself up to learning. Approach it with a growth mindset and current you slowly becomes wiser future you. Even more, you'll better home in on your purpose, unique abilities, and values. Because experiences teach you which things to do more of and which to do less of.

Strategically face your fears and do the uncomfortable. It's often the things we're afraid of, the things we come up with seemingly good justifications for not doing, that help us grow. Or, at the very least, hold the key to helping us handle discomfort in the future. Don't purposelessly expose yourself to real or psychic danger, of course. Instead, look for the fearful things—like starting that book you've been wanting to write, or applying for the new business loan, or asking a colleague for help—that will give you meaningful growth rather than just pointless pain or anxiety.

Talk to people with different perspectives. Listening closely to people who think differently than you (about social, political, economic, religious, and scientific issues) and have different life experiences (from where they grew up, to the jobs they've held, to the hardships they've faced, to the triumphs they've experienced) can teach you about perspective, kindness, and compassion. You have to really listen, though. And ask: "What's it like to live in their shoes? What would my worldview be if I were them?" You don't have to agree with their conclusions. Yet the more you're able to see the world through multiple lenses and understand why those exist, the wiser you'll be.

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Pursue education. No, you don't have to go back to school. But you do have to learn with intention. Because the more exposed you are to organized and well-researched viewpoints, the more likely you'll be to discern fact from fiction, signal from noise. We'll talk more about this in the next chapter.

Read. Reading can be done as part of your educational curriculum or purely for pleasure. Whatever the goal, read. Not only does it expose you to the narratives and inner lives of thousands of real and imagined characters, it also gives you the quiet time to absorb, process, and reflect on what you're learning in your life and help integrate it into your thinking.

Spend time with wise people. Humans are expert mimics. From infancy, we learn everything by copying others. People around us walked, talked, and fed themselves. So we figured out how to walk, talk, and feed ourselves. If wisdom, then, is our new goal, the next step is obvious: Spend time with wise people. Yes, ask them how they think, what frameworks they use to see the world, and why they do what they do. But, most importantly, observe what's behind the words: how they live.

Know your (changing) self. While learning from others is clearly important, wisdom also comes from balancing what they offer with what you offer. As mentioned earlier, "self" isn't a fixed thing but an ever-changing one. Yet, at any point in time, each of our selves does have a purpose, unique abilities, and values. Get to know each iteration of your today self—expecting, of course, that it'll one day change—to grow ever more comfortable with the wisdom of change.

Lead with a beginner's mind. As you gather experiences, education, and insight, it's easy to rely on pattern recognition, make quick assumptions, and get everything wrong. That's why it's important to enter new situations like a beginner: wide-eyed, open, and curious. Ask questions, listen closely, and confirm that your understanding is correct before assuming you know exactly what's going on and what to do about it.

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Review cause and effect often. Nothing feels more frustrating and foolish than making the same mistakes, over and over and over, without learning anything or even seeing what's happening. Wisdom is able to see patterns and links between inputs and outputs, rather than insisting that something should work, even though it demonstrably hasn't. However, it's hard to see this without making space to reflect, and without purposely looking for how things might be connected.

Slow down. When you act (or react) too quickly, you don't have time to engage all the parts of your brain. Especially the parts that store your accumulating knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight. To develop this skill, practice meditation, mindfulness, or even counting to ten. Respond too quickly and emotionally in high-stakes situations and it's like you've never cultivated wisdom at all.

These activities and worksheets are taken from the book **Change Maker**: Turn your passion for health and fitness into a powerful purpose and a wildly successful career by John Berardi, PhD.

Check it out at: www.changemakeracademy.com/book