



[Contact Us](#)[Log Off](#)[Edit Profile](#)[Letters to the Editor](#)[Subscriber Services](#)[Media Kit](#)[Privacy Policy](#)[Archives](#)

Search:

[Advanced Search](#)



Media Business

May 22, 2006

## Learning Is a Catalyst for Growth

It's Not Enough to Just Listen-Synthesizing Information Requires Asking Questions and Leading by Example

By Mark Dominiak

*Special to TelevisionWeek*

Story continues below...

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO!

PRESENTED BY  
**YAHOO!**

CLICK HERE TO WATCH NOW!

Last month we discussed the need to seek help from people and organizations as a step toward attaining growth.

But that step in and of itself does not ensure growth. We can't simply accept help and move on; we must make a wholehearted effort to learn from others as well. And that doesn't just mean learning skills and information. It also means learning as much as we can by considering the perspective of others.

If you haven't yet realized that "My Name Is Earl" is a helluva show, here's another reason to add it to your must-see list: The character Earl routinely demonstrates how important it is to learn. In his ongoing quest to honor karma and fix past misdeeds,

Earl consistently reaches out to other people for help and learns in the process.

In the episode "Dad's Car," Earl attempts to recover his father's classic Mustang, which he lost in a bet behind his dad's back. When he reclaims the Mustang and returns it to his father, he sees the situation from his dad's perspective and learns something unexpected: The Mustang was intended as a gift for Earl and what really upset his dad was losing time he had expected to spend with his son working on the car. Not only does Earl learn the truth of the situation, he also learns how to rehab the Mustang.

## **Learning Is Fundamental**

Growth in the natural world typically means increasing in size. Living things need resources—food, air, water—to grow physically.

Individuals and businesses also need resources to grow. But since growth for individuals and businesses takes place more often in the realm of intellectual property than physical space, the resources and processes involved take different forms. This kind of growth translates to increased capability and maturity.

Information, skills, assets and perspective serve as the resources people and businesses need to grow. Because there is no physical metabolism present, a process of understanding new information, skills and perspective takes its place. Another word for that process is learning.

To learn means to discover, realize or be taught. Learning can also be defined as a change in, or acquisition of, knowledge, understanding or behavior. When we take raw material to learn something, we gain the capability to embrace environmental change.

## **It's Not Easy**

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks" is a cliché; for a reason. People often forget how important it is to learn. Yet we never stop being students. Life always has something to teach, especially during times of environmental change.

When we reach beyond ourselves to others—people or organizations—we must become sponges if we are to successfully address change. We must make a deep and honest effort to learn from those who understand the world in ways we do not. We need to pay close attention to what others have to convey and try to see the world through their eyes. If we can do this, we will have capabilities and know-how to help address changing marketplace environments.

## **Basic Ways to Learn**

Back in a college consumer behavior class, I remember the professor describing three situations in which people learn. He felt people learned by example, by personal experience or by being taught.

The professor had a great anecdote about learning by example: Repeatedly arriving home from work to discover his kids playing in the street against his orders, the professor finally decided to take action one Halloween season. He calmly parked his station wagon, retrieved a pumpkin from the front porch and invited his kids to join him at the curb. After backing his station wagon over the pumpkin to demonstrate what could happen to a child's head in a car confrontation, he proudly reported his kids never played in the street again.

## **Ask Questions**

No matter what the nature of the situation, one of the most important aspects of learning is to ask many questions. Asking questions reveals to the teacher not only what information is important to the student but also gives the teacher a better idea of where possible gaps in understanding might occur.

It's always important to ask questions that cover a complete spectrum. The questions that we are most inclined to ask are of the "How do I ...?" or the "What happens when ...?" nature. But it is also important to learn what not to do. We forget that we can sometimes learn more from people who have failed than from those who have succeeded. Asking questions about what may have led to failure can provide insights that help avoid mistakes in the future.

## **Listen**

Remember to pay close attention when learning something new. As we interact with new people who are helping us learn, it's easy to get caught up in conversation for the sake of relationship building, or in mentally preparing for the next question we want to ask. In doing so, we sometimes forget to listen.

It's important to be prepared with questions beforehand in order to devote appropriate concentration while listening to the answers. Take notes and make sure to keep a running list of other questions that may pop to mind. Don't allow them to stay in your head during the interaction because having a mind full of questions can get in the way of attentive listening.

## **Internalize**

When you learn something, you shouldn't just file it away in your memory. Careful consideration and assessment is important for everything you learn. What about the new information is contrary to prior understanding? Does it generate positive feelings and energy, or does it stick in your craw? If it does, what about it generates discomfort? Don't consider any new information or skills as truly learned until their strengths and weaknesses are well understood-until you understand why the person you learned it from felt it was important.

## **Practice**

Knowledge is good, but processes must be put into practice to become effective. Skills must be physically attempted and mastered. Another cliché makes just this point: "Practice makes perfect."

There's a great quote attributed to golfer Gary Player that's relevant here. Playing a friendly round with one of his buddies, Mr. Player dropped an iron shot into a bunker, much to his friend's delight. With his next shot, Mr. Player bore down in workman-like fashion and holed out the shot from the bunker. His friend commented that it was the luckiest shot he had ever seen. Player replied, "The more I practice, the luckier I get." Practicing new skills and applying new information will help the internalization process and build a better command of new knowledge and processes.

## **Learn Through Teaching**

Demonstrating what you've learned is important for a few reasons.

First, it will convey how important you believe the new information to be. If a leader is promoting and teaching the new knowledge, it must be worthwhile. Second, demonstrating and communicating new knowledge or skills helps cement what you've learned into your own repertoire. Finally, there is a social commitment aspect to teaching others. Not only does practice benefit you, but others become more convinced as you practice what you preach.

Our growth discussion has covered most of the heavy lifting needed to make ourselves better at addressing challenges in the marketplace. We understand that raising the bar on our media efforts will take time and acknowledge the powerful opportunity to be found in change. We know which critical decisions to make to seize opportunities.

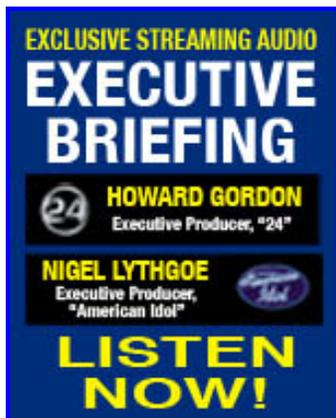
We know we can't succeed alone. We must learn from others. Which brings us to the last principle of growth: In order to be

effective, we must convert our understanding into consistent action and change our behavior. We must adapt. That is the subject of next month's concluding piece on growth.

*Mark Dominiak is principal strategist of marketing, communication and context for Insight Garden.*

[E-mail to a Friend](#)[Format for Printing](#)

## EXECUTIVE BRIEFING



## FREE E-Newsletters



## CLASSIFIEDS

[Classifieds](#)

## VIRAL VIDEO



[For the Full Story Click Here](#)

RESOURCE/TOOLS

[Datebook](#)

[Roving Eye](#)

UPFRONT NAVIGATOR



[Click Here: Sights and Sounds From Upfronts in NY](#)

TV LINKS

## [TV Week Links](#)

SUBSCRIBE



ADVERTISING

## [Media Kit](#)

SPEAKOUT

[What are your picks for the best shows of the current TV season?](#)

NEWSMAKERS

## [Newsmakers](#)

WEEKLY RATINGS

## [Weekly Ratings Chart](#)

AWARDS CENTRAL

## [57th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards](#)

## [63rd Golden Globe Awards](#)

Winter 2006 Critics Poll

## [The Rise of the Antihero](#)

WEBCAST



## [TVWeek Editor Moderates 'Boston Legal' Panel](#)

[Contact Us](#)|[Register](#)|[Letters to the Editor](#)|[Subscriber Services](#)|[Media Kit](#)|[Privacy Policy](#)

Copyright 2006 [Crain Communications Inc.](#)

Site Design, Programming and Administration by [Chaffee :: Interactive](#)