



20 Strategies to Make Your Mind Bloom

"Training for Competitiveness"- "Competencies" "Productivity" - "Certification" - Performance Improvement" these are the buzz words of the business world. They suggest a formal process of learning with measurable outcomes and results. But there are other ways that individuals can learn. Following even one or two of the suggestions below can have a marked influence on your personal development.

1. **Understand How Your Brain Works.** The brain makes connections based on millions of traces of experience. After a time, frequent repetition makes some activities automatic, - like freeway driving. With new experiences the brain has to adjust, rethink, and revise. If you want to keep your brain active, seek new and different experiences.
2. **Understand Thinking Styles.** Experts disagree on the roles of nature and nurture in human development, but they know that both play a part — and that humans develop preferences for different styles of thinking. Use learning models to understand your personal thinking styles and develop appreciation of the thinking styles of others.
3. **Use the Right Thinking Tools.** There are new thinking tools that allow you to explore and expand ideas and capture them as you go. The ideal tools encourage you to experiment first and then focus on structure so that you can move toward a clear plan of action.
4. **Be versatile.** Develop a wide range of different skills and grow beyond the specific requirements of your job. You will find that the skills learned in hobbies and volunteer projects will enhance your capability in other work you perform.
5. **Learn fast - but also learn slowly.** In the world of work, you sometimes have to master new tools and techniques with breakneck speed. But don't confuse this fast track processing of tips and techniques with the kind of learning that comes from savoring the meaning of a poem, absorbing the beauty of a picture, or mastering the intricacies of a language. This kind of learning takes a lifetime and is well worth meandering along a road less traveled.
6. **Heighten your senses.** Our first learning was sensory. Look at the intricate patterns of a

flower, smell fresh bread, taste a sauce so hot that it makes your eyes water, hear the sound of the waves, touch an aged wrinkled hand.

7. **Feel.** Allow yourself to experience a full range of feelings - anger, jealousy, fear, regret, timidity, joy, happiness, hilarity. You can feel them without having to act on them.

8. **Travel.** Travel within your block, within your city, within your area, within your country, within your world. Avoid the familiar, the sanitized travel brochure or theme park outlook and seek the particular, the local craft, the national dish. Travel virtually through pictures, films, cookbooks and online services when funds don't allow you to climb on a plane.

9. **Volunteer.** Learn about the challenges of a CEO by chairing a board. There are thousands of organizations large and small that offer a real life experience of making something grow and succeed. Meet different kinds of people and solve different kinds of problems.

10. **Join a committed community.** Reconsider the church, mosque or synagogue you escaped from as a child; consider joining those who care about the environment, the homeless, the abandoned and the sick. Recover passion and faith and help others to discover their own.

11. **Make friends with a young child.** It might be your own or it might be one that you borrow from time to time, or meet through volunteer activities. Discover what it is like to see the world through fresh eyes and to find simple solutions to things that have become over complicated.

12. **Explore food and drink.** Escape from fast food and rediscover slow food. Pick berries and explore their colour and texture on a warm June afternoon. Perfect bread making by kneading a hundred loaves. Visit vineyards and cheese factories. Rise at dawn to buy fresh vegetables or perfect croissants - and sip wine after dark.

13. **Take Up an Art, Craft or Sport.** Embark upon a lifelong journey of discovery and experience the joys and the pain of travelling through it. Learn by making mistakes and picking yourself up again. Learn the value of working when you don't feel inspired and experience the joy of sudden and unexpected success.

14. **Adopt technology - but don't worship it.** Early adapters are optimistic that it will solve all problems. Naysayers predict that it will never take hold. Usually both are wrong. There are few constraints against mastering most forms of technology other than our own negative attitudes. Many new technologies are here to stay. But they are valuable when they enhance personal communication or eliminate drudgery, - not when they act as a substitute for them.

15. **Ask questions.** Every new discovery or advance has happened when someone questioned the status quo. It is more comfortable to go with the known and not rock the

boat. Real learning begins when we are surprised that we didn't get the result we expected and have to start to figure out why. Getting the right answers on the test is not about learning. Knowing how comes from doing — usually after a lot of false starts. Knowing why comes from reflecting on many experiences with varying results.

16. **Garden.** Grow seeds in a window box or develop an elaborate private world of trees, shrubs and plants. You will discover that you reap what you sow, that the results depend partly on you but also on conditions of light, soil, and moisture that may or may not be within your control, that your failure to nurture your garden causes things to die and that wonderful results occasionally have nothing whatever to do with you.

17. **Have confidence that you know more than you think.** The world is still a better classroom than any that humans can devise. You can learn about behavior character, patterns, organization and design from its bountiful examples. Before embarking on any new learning experience, take time to reflect on what you know already and build on it.

18. **Consider how your learning affects others.** It's fine to scale Mount Everest, but not at the expense of killing yourself in the process and leaving your spouse to raise the family. Keep it in balance.

19. **Find wise mentors.** Recognize you don't have to learn everything first hand and that you can benefit from the experience of others.

20. **Take responsibility for your own learning.** Only you can determine what you need to know and the depth of the exploration. Distinguish between the credentials currently valued by our culture and your own personal quest.