

To Increase Your Value, Think Of Yourself As A 'Product,' And 'Upgrade' Yourself Every Year

Are you a recent graduate looking for ways to be successful in your career (or mid-career, looking for a boost)? Try thinking of yourself as a product and find ways to 'upgrade' yourself every year. Even if you're still paying off your college loans, there are creative and cost effective ways to continuously learn and grow.

THINK OF YOURSELF AS A PRODUCT That's right! View yourself as a competitive product with features, benefits, assets and liabilities — all waiting to be improved upon year over year, carefully differentiating yourself from others and creating your [personal brand](#).

Don't Rely On Luck At Work: Define Your Career Aspirations And Goals.

Companies spend time every year listening to their customers' needs and then they work on upgrading and improving their products. Why? So they can sell more of their products and services in the marketplace. You can use this business process of continual product improvement to make yourself more valuable as an employee as you progress through your career.

DETERMINE HOW YOU CAN 'UPGRADE' YOURSELF Improvement doesn't have to be expensive. For example, what would happen if you picked one topic each year? Let's say you have a new job and you want to be able to take on new and challenging projects, so you choose the topic of project management. Then, let's say you went to the library and each month or so you checked out (or downloaded) and read a different book about project management. How much of an expert on the topic of project management could you become after one year and reading six or more books?

If you started this practice now, of picking one subject per year and reading books on that topic, just think about how many subjects you could learn about and become an expert in over the next 10 – 20 years. It's truly amazing when you think about how such a small change like this could have such a huge impact on your career and your life.

I've been practicing this self-improvement technique since I was in my early twenties and have found it to be incredibly powerful. Here are examples of some of the topics I've chosen for in-depth study over the years:

- Sales | Coaching and Mentoring Techniques | Social Styles | Meeting Planning and Management | Communication Techniques
- Presentation/Speaking Skills | Organizational Behavior | Listening Skills | Leadership | Strategic Planning
- Mergers and Acquisitions | Pricing | Change Management | Business Law | Finance

NEVER STOP LEARNING OR GROWING I always ask interview candidates to tell me what they've done during the last few years to 'upgrade' themselves; in other words, what have they done to improve their skills and abilities recently? One job candidate looked at me, laughed, then said, "*Nothing lately, I graduated from college a few years ago so I'm finally finished with my education.*" Ouch. Guess what? As you can probably imagine, this person didn't get the job.

Learning shouldn't stop after graduating from high school or college. Continuously seeking knowledge should be a lifelong pursuit. Consider all the inspiring stories about women who go back to college later in life and pursue a completely new career path after having raised their children. Or, the real life stories of men and women who were laid off due to company downsizing, obtained additional training or certifications and successfully changed careers. Wonderful stories can be found all around the world and the foundation for the person's accomplishment is almost always their willingness and openness to learn new things.

What I've found throughout my life is that the more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know. The best way I know to improve myself and increase my value as an employee is to always keep learning and growing. I treat my career as a business and treat myself as a competitive product to be continuously improved, year after year. As Jim Rohn, a business philosopher, once said, "*Never wish life were easier, wish that you were better.*"