

CONCLUSION

On a Passion for Seeking Truth

"...a candidate who demonstrates capabilities in critical thinking, creative problem-solving and communication has a far greater chance of being employed today than his or her counterpart without those skills."

— Norman Augustine, former chairman and CEO of Lockheed-Martin, which employs over 80,000 engineers¹

"If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."

— Saying on display at the Mayo Clinic²

The Black Mamba

Yesterday my wife and I heard a world-class speaker. It was generally great stuff—potentially life changing. Yet one of his illustrations seemed a bit extreme. He spoke of teaching in an African country inhabited by deadly snakes, including the Black Mamba. According to the speaker, two characteristics make it especially dangerous: its speed and its poison. As the fastest of all snakes, slithering up to 40 mph, we can't outrun it. As the most venomous of all snakes, a strike can kill you within three steps.

To me, these claims seemed rather incredible. I couldn't imagine a snake keeping up with me in my car at 40 mph, so I fact-checked him. According to my sources, while the Black Mamba is indeed the world's fastest snake; it maxes out at about four mph, a far cry from 40 mph. True, it's the world's most poisonous snake, but its bite takes about 30 minutes to kill, much longer than it takes to walk three steps.

"Insignificant details!" some may argue. "Communicator's license!" justifies another. But for me, when I hear exaggerated claims and sloppy research, I ask myself, "If he's mistaken on these details, which he stated with such assurance, why should I trust his accuracy in the rest of his message?" He could have easily introduced the information with, "According to some natives I

spoke to in Africa..." and I might have let it go.

But after those statements, a question mark hung over the rest of his message, ruining its impact.

My point? Truth is important.

Beyond Cynicism: Empowered to Seek Truth

I vividly recall a formative experience from my college days, over three decades ago. On the same day of classes, two professors, both of whom I respected for their integrity and scholarship, taught contradictory truths with equal enthusiasm and authority. Yet, either one or both of them were dead wrong.

The experience plunged me into a period of cynicism and pessimism in my quest for truth. I reasoned,

"I'm not likely to ever be as well informed as these two professors are in their field. Yet, they came to diametrically opposed conclusions. How can I ever hope to achieve any degree of certitude in seeking the truth of such important matters?"

Fortunately, I'd later take courses in exegesis and hermeneutics and research and logic. The tools I acquired helped me to distinguish fact from fiction, well-supported statements from bogus claims. Of course, I often had to settle for degrees of certitude rather than "the truth" on many issues, but at least I had ways to evaluate the contradictory claims made by supposed experts. My newfound tools set me free in my search for truth. I wrote this book to pass on those tools. Practice and expand upon them and I hope you'll feel set free as well.

Truth Is Important

Why search for truth? Because missing it brings heartache and embracing it can lead to success.

By missing the truth...

- Professionals in the recording industry rejected The Beatles because they believed that recent trends (a temporary demise in electric guitars and full bands) would continue into the future.
- Savvy Dutch businessmen lost everything by speculating on tulip bulbs.
- Bright students trained for overcrowded fields because they were led astray by questionable statistics.
- People destroyed their health by following medical advice based upon poor science.
- Skewed research by intellectuals, resulting in dangerous political theories, created 20th century political movements that killed tens of millions of innocent people.

By finding and embracing the truth...

- The Mayo Clinic revolutionized medical care by institutionalizing learning from one another and listening more attentively to their patients.
- Starbucks succeeded by learning to listen to their customers and balancing their original vision with innovation.
- Google tapped into creativity by allowing their employees to spend 20 percent of their time pursuing pet projects and making their insights available for input from all their colleagues.
- Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi found ways to bring about social change without instigating bloody revolutions.

Thus, it pays to develop a passion for truth, utilizing our tools to both see through nonsense and positively pursue innovation and truth.

Wanted: Passionate, Sincere, Seekers of Truth

From Chapter Two, I can still picture Julie, passionately seeking to protect her daughter Jade from catching a cold, which had in the past developed into a serious bout with pneumonia. Driven by concern for her daughter, she plunged into a couple of hours of intense research. She wasn't trying to get published or enhance her platform or impress her teachers or colleagues. Her motives were pure. Driven by concern for her daughter, she passionately sought the truth.

That mental picture of Julie researching at her dining room table with Jade by her side motivates me.

So perhaps it's best to end this book with mental pictures—images that can motivate us to a life of passionate learning.

Can you picture teenager Bill Gates going to the C-Squared company after school (and sneaking out of his bedroom at night) to test software and passionately pursue any opportunity to learn programming? Can you see the Mayo brothers taking vacations from their medical practice to traverse America and Europe, learning from the most innovative and successful surgeons? I like to picture Will and Ariel Durant spending their lives researching and writing a history of civilization, Frederick Copleston dedicating his life to writing an unparalleled history of philosophy.

I can see Steve Jobs obsessing over how to make a computer or iPhone or iPad more user friendly, so that a child in another country, with no instructions, could figure them out. I can see young Albert Einstein trouncing through the mountains with his friends, trying to unravel the mysteries of time and space. I also see him, lost in some thought experiment, forgetting whether he was walking home or walking to work. I see Yngwie Malmsteen and Tommy Emmanuel relentlessly practicing their guitars and continuously learning from other great guitarists.

I can picture Sam Walton snooping through other people's stores to learn what they're doing right, and sharing donuts with his truck drivers early Saturday mornings, to pick their brains on how his stores are doing. I see the CEO of Starbucks bursting out of his "Italian Experience" paradigm by observing the young lady who left his shop to find one that offered non-fat milk. I see Soichiro Honda relentlessly tinkering with his engines, taking non-credit classes that would one day help him revolutionize both the motorcycle and automobile industries.

By way of contrast, I picture the person who reflects over his life thus far, only to realize that it was mostly spent watching TV shows and playing video games, paying just enough attention to lectures and homework to pass tests and one day hold a piece of paper in his hands that supposedly signifies that he knows something.

It's largely up to you and me as to how we choose to live our lives. Let me recommend a passionate search for Wisdom and Truth, motivated by a concern for others.

I'll end with the words of Solomon, calling out to us from millennia past. Don't just read his words. Catch his passion!

How blessed is the man (person) who finds wisdom,
And the man who gains understanding.
For its profit is better than the profit of silver,
And its gain than fine gold."
**She is more precious than jewels;
And nothing you desire compares with her.**
Long life is in her right hand;
In her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are pleasant ways,
And all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are all who hold her fast."

—Proverbs 3:13-18

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Consolidate Your Wisdom

Are you serious about pursuing truth through honing your critical and creative thinking skills? A great next step would be to glance back at the takeaways you wrote at the end of each chapter. Narrow down your list to ten practical insights which, if put into practice, could set a course for a lifetime of chasing wisdom. Write them below. Perhaps you could state them as goals and put them on your refrigerator or bulletin board.

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