



International Association of
Administrative Professionals®

Book Cliff Chapter

BOOK CLIFF CHAPTER

April 2011
Volume XVII Issue VIII



2010-2011 Officers

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Administrative Professional's Day Preparation



Date: April 20, 2011

Time: 5:30 pm – 6:30 or 7 pm

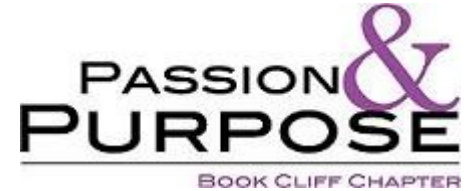
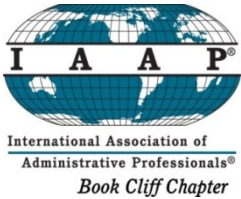
Location: Colorado West, Inc.
515 28 3/4 Road, Building A,
Behind Texas Roadhouse, Main
Entrance, Southside. Take the
elevator to the second floor,
Training Room #236

This will not be a traditional meeting night, we will not be covering any business or cater dinner. You may bring your own dinner or eat before or after. Please bring any items that you have for APD at this time, we will be doing all final preparation for APD on this evening.

If you have any questions on what you have volunteered for please contact Pearl Hasson, CAP Pearl.Hasson@vctrabank.com or Kyle Sheldon-Chandler Kyle@virtualadminkcs.com or Kristin Hoaglund khoaglund@gmail.com.



International Association
of
Administrative Professionals



SAVE THE DATE!!

Administrative Professionals Day

Wednesday, April 27, 2011

11:00 AM

Two Rivers Convention Center - Grand Junction, CO

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND!



BILL BEAUSAY

Don't miss this highly interactive workshop - "Conquering Obstacles with Passion and Purpose -- Conquering Obstacles With Passion & Purpose", from 11:00 - 4:00 p.m. at the Two Rivers Convention Center, Wednesday, April 27, 2011.

Bill Beausay is a nationally known best-selling author, speaker, and seminar producer. He was a clinical psychotherapist for twelve years and served as vice president of research and development for the Academy of Sports Psychology. This workshop is for personal motivation and team building during stressful times and creating an atmosphere of vision, focus and opportunity finding.

"I have found it to be a good idea to keep a running list of your fears so that you may attack them effectively, systematically and often. Another reason for the list is that you tend to forget things you know. For example you might know that you fear embarrassing circumstances, but forget about it and wander off in life avoiding all potential embarrassments, when in fact you need some of them for success. In this way fears begin to easily operate unseen in your life, robbing you without you knowing it. Having a list reminds you of what is running unseen in you and allows you to be on your toes to attack them immediately. Kill them off, or they will rule you". – Bill Beausay

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION – RECEIVE A FREE GIFT

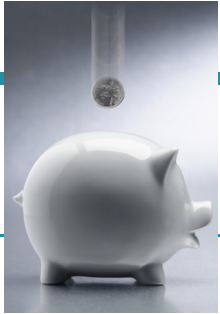
Register before April 15th and receive a free gift! More savings if you join IAAP Book Cliff Chapter and receive the member discount! We are proud to announce that the cost has not gone up in two years for our Administrative Professional's Day program!

Non-members - Lunch/Seminar \$35.00
Non-members - Lunch/Seminar and Workshop \$70.00
Members - Lunch/Seminar and Workshop \$35.00

Vendor booths will be providing demos, product sales and great prizes!

419-215-5055 • bill@beausay.com • www.beausay.com

Financial Planning



Guest Speaker: Bonnie Wasli, CFO, CPA
Colorado West, Inc.

401k's, Retirement, Investing, Insurance, Wills and Estate Planning are all a part of our personal financial future. Most of us are financially illiterate and are learning through trial and error with costly mistakes. Learn how to use your money with "Passion and Purpose". Don't miss this program!

Location: St. Mary's Hospital 5th Floor
Date: May 18, 2011
Networking/Dinner: 5:30-6:00 pm
Chapter Business: 6:00 - 6:30 pm
Program: 6:30 - 7:30 pm

Members: \$20, Students: \$10, First Time Guests: No charge.

Location: St. Mary's Hospital will be hosting this program on the 5th floor. Park in the parking garage and cross over on the walkway that leads to the main foyer. Turn left and go to the elevator and get off on the 5th floor. Dinner will be catered.

Book Cliff Chapter Mission Statement

The Book Cliff Chapter is committed to unite individuals in the administrative profession, by encouraging personal and professional growth, through education, mentoring and leadership.

Emotional Intelligence Presentation on March 16, 2011

By Mark Simpson, PhD



What does this all mean?

- Are people with higher level of competence on emotional intelligence skills are more effective in the workplace?
- More time working with Customers
- Less time in conflict with coworkers
- Less feelings of being overwhelmed or likely to give up on projects
- Better problem solving at their job

What is Intelligence?

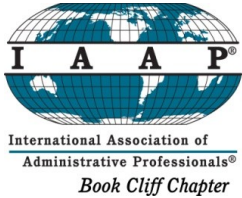
Verbal Skills

- 1 Verbal Comprehension
- 2 Attention
- 3 Memory
- 4 Language ability
- 5 Vocabulary
- 6 Practical Knowledge
- 7 Social Judgment

Non-Verbal Skills

- 1 Perceptual Organization
- 2 Non-verbal Reasoning
- 3 Spatial Skills
- 4 Visual Perception
- 5 Motor Coordination
- 6 Pattern Recognition

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Book Cliff Chapter,

In honor of Administrative Professionals week I thought that I would share some inspirational quotes that are directed to the amazing Administrative Professionals we all are.

The trouble with doing something right the first time is that nobody appreciates how difficult it was.

Author unknown, but probably a secretary!

Accomplishing the impossible means only that the boss will add it to your regular duties.

Doug Larson

Next to excellence is the appreciation of it.

William Makepeace

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

William Arthur Ward

I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.

G.K. Chesterton

No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burden of another. Thank you.

Author Unknown

Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.

Voltaire

No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.

James Allen

You're no good unless you are a good assistant; and if you are, you're too good to be an assistant.

Martin H. Fischer

Always be nice to secretaries. They are the real gatekeepers in the world.

Anthony J. D'Angelo

Appreciate everything your associates do for the business. Nothing else can quite substitute for a few well-chosen, well-timed, sincere words of praise. They're absolutely free and worth a fortune.

Sam Walton

No one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.

Author Unknown

As soon as you sit down to a cup of hot coffee, your boss will ask you to do something which will last until the coffee is cold.

Author Unknown

We have been celebrating Administrative Professionals Day since 1952, with IAAP being the originator and sole sponsor of Administrative Professionals Week. It was originally proclaimed National Secretaries Week and to keep up with the ever changing role we play, the week was renamed in 2000 as Administrative Professionals Week. On this day, April 27, 2011, I hope the time is taken to recognize all administrative professionals for their skills, loyalty, professionalism, efficiency and dedication put in day in and day out.

I would like to say thank you to all the administrative professionals, for the great name you have continued to give us all!

Sincerely,

Kristin Hoaglund

Book Cliff Chapter President 2010-2011

7 Ways To Upgrade Your Brain

2011 by [Mark Shead](http://www.productivity501.com/7-ways-to-upgrade-your-brain/8502/) at <http://www.productivity501.com/7-ways-to-upgrade-your-brain/8502/>

A person's mind is their most powerful tool. Yet very few people take intentional steps toward "upgrading" their brain and trying to become smarter. Here are some scary statistics from an article in [The Economist](#):

- In 1991 a worker with a bachelors degree earned 2.5 times as much as a high-school drop out.
- In 2010 a worker with a bachelors degree earned 3 times as much as a high-school drop out.

There is an obvious trend toward paying people who have "upgraded their brain" more money. This probably isn't too surprising, but consider this:

42% of people who graduate from college never read another book.

Wow! 42%! To me that says that a good number of people get out of college and just assume they have arrived—no need to work on getting any smarter. Obviously there are ways to learn other than reading books, but books have traditionally been and still are one of the main ways you acquire formal knowledge. If you aren't reading, it is very unlikely you are growing. It is even less likely that you are actually getting smarter in ways that have value outside of the tasks you do on a weekly basis.

In this post, we are going to look at seven ways to upgrade your brain. They are:

1. Read
2. Get a degree
3. Seek out new experiences
4. Think
5. Practice
6. Write

Do things that are hard

Read

1. Reading is the primary way we educate ourselves. If you aren't reading, you are doing yourself a huge dis-service. With only a few exceptions, I'd go as far as to say that if you aren't reading your brain is dying. Reading is the fundamental bedrock of upgrading your brain and [becoming smarter](#). You have to read regularly.
2. Not all reading methods and not all reading contents are equal. There is a very big difference between reading on a computer and reading a physical book. A few months ago I read a study that compared reading on an iPad or Nook to reading a book and the researchers found that people remembered less when reading from the iPad. It had something to do with the way we perceive a lighted surface vs. a reflective one. Perhaps because we associate lighted surfaces with TV and are less engaged.
3. Reading on the Internet is also quite different from reading a book. A book presents a clear start and end point. There are also more barriers to publishing a physical book than getting something up on the web. Chances are a book will have more thought behind it than an article published on a web page. In addition, it is much easier to jump from place to place on the web so Internet articles don't typically require or inspire the same level of concentration as what you might need for an intense book.
4. I'm not saying that reading from the Internet is bad. The web is an incredible tool and gives us access to information that would have been impossible in the past. However, we need to take care to not let it crowd out our traditional reading. We also need to be careful to use the Internet for things that the Internet is good for and use books for things books are good for. The Internet is great for looking up a single fact—something that can take a very long time with a book. Books are great for deeply studying a subject. (Obviously there are exceptions depending on what you are researching, but this is still true in general.)
5. So what should you read? Here are some suggested categories:
 6. Classic books
 7. Books related to your area of your current expertise.
 8. Books related to the expertise you will need to be competitive in 10 years.
 9. Books on topics from a completely different field.



(Continued on page 9)

DIVISION POEM

Passion & Purpose-

Ignite the Leader within You!!!

We have the passion within us all,
And a purpose that will go the distance.
We will lead and stand up tall.

The Division is here for your assistance.
Union Colony is a great chapter of IAAP accountability
Increased enthusiasm, commitment, and a shared vision,
Encouraging teamwork, growth, and possibility
Of professional opportunities as our mission.
[Union Colony - "Versatility is one of your outstanding traits"]

With Passion and Purpose since 1944,
Our enthusiastic commitment is our vision for the future.
The Pikes Peak Chapter does constantly explore,
New ways to continue on this wonderful adventure!
[Pikes Peak Chapter - "Avoid senseless contradictions with others"]

Denver's purpose rises to the occasion
When challenge and opportunity give us cause.
For passion truly is our vision
No matter what, no matter when, without a pause.
[Denver Chapter]

Boulder Chapter has a passion for education
to join with all chapters with zest
for sharing techniques and imagination
its purpose to make our Division the best!
[Boulder Chapter - "You are cautious in showing your true self to others."]

We are small but mighty but we get 'er done Just like the legends, that's how the
west was won.
With purpose true; our profession our passion, We will carry out our IAAP mission in
true Old West fashion.
[Old West Chapter]

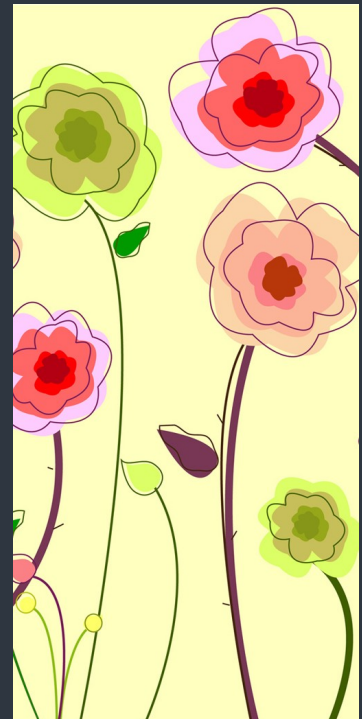
Found near the foothills, 'tween the Rockies and the Plains
Mountain View Chapter coaches and trains
Administrative Professionals with Passion & Purpose
Developing others is always in fashion.
[Mountain View Chapter]

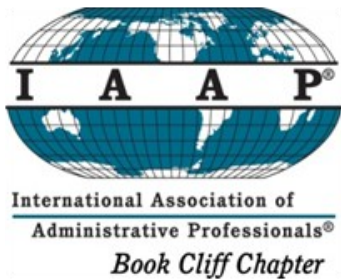
Book Cliff Chapter continues to work on ideas, both new and old.
Sixty plus years in the making our Chapter is strong and will not fold.
Working together on common values and goals,
Building our network and growing, we are passionate souls.
[Book Cliff Chapter]

With Passion and Purpose in the morning we meet,
Denver Downtown's networking, meetings, and speakers cannot be beat.
The CWM Division meeting our Chapter will host.
A great time to be had by all, we can boast.
[Denver Downtown Chapter]

*As a member of the
CWM Division we
have been included in
the participation of
building a Division
Poem based on
Passion and Purpose.
Every month a
Chapter has been
selected to add a
stanza to the poem.
The poem is available
to read at any time by
visiting the Division
website.*

www.iaap-co-wy-mt.org





“Passion and Purpose, Igniting the Leader Within You!” 2010 -2011 Program/Meeting Schedule

All programs except the December meeting are being submitted for recertification points.
Programs are subject to change.

Month	Program	Speaker
April 20, 2011	Administrative Professional Day preparation. This is a non-traditional meeting. No business	Colorado West, Inc., 515 28 3/4 Road, Grand Junction, CO, Building A, 2nd Floor, Training Room 236.
April 27, 2011	Administrative Professional’s Day	Two River’s Convention Center
May 18, 2011	Financial Planning (401k, Retirement, Insurance, Wills and Estate Planning, etc.)	Bonnie Wasli, CFO, CPA Colorado West
June 15, 2011	Awards and Installation of Officer’s for 2011 – 12 Year	Kristin Hoaglund, President
July – August 2011	Summer vacation and Strategic Planning for 2011 - 12	All members and guests, location TBD

April 27, 2011
Special Program

Administrative
Professional’s
Day

11:00 a.m.

Non-Members:
Lunch/Seminar \$35.00

Non-Members:
Lunch, Seminar and
Workshop \$70.00

Members:
Lunch, Seminar and
Workshop \$35.00



IAAP Book Cliff Chapter



@BookcliffIAAP



2010-11 IAAP Book Cliff Chapter Officers from left to right: Bernice Stogsdill, Melissa Medina, Pam Lair, Kristin Hoaglund



The Book Cliff Chapter meets the third Wednesday of each month, September through June, at the Two Rivers Convention Center. Note: All members are on a standing RSVP list and will be expected to attend our monthly meetings. Regrets only are to be sent to Melissa Medina, Treasurer at bookcliffchapter@gmail.com not later than 9:00 pm the Thursday prior to the Wednesday meeting.

***Note: Due to an increase in monthly dinner and meeting space costs have increased this year.**



CERTIFICATION INFORMATION

THE CAREER ADVANTAGE

If you're looking for ways to help you get ahead in the workplace, stop here. We at IAAP offer two professional ratings for office professionals. The Certified Professional Secretary and Certified Administrative Professional ratings are the industry recognized standards of proficiency.

You'll improve your professional qualifications, increase your skills and knowledge and raise your self-esteem by taking and passing the exams. You may also obtain college credit and, according to the latest survey from OfficeTeam, get up to a 7 percent increase in salary.

The CPS and CAP exams are based on the premise that an administrative professional should have basic knowledge of office systems, technology, office administration, and management, and know how to apply the principles of good human relations and communications. Some of the examinations are based on knowledge acquired by the office professional through formal education and informal reading. Employers also expect their admin to be thoroughly familiar with current techniques in office practice and procedures and aware of developments in office systems and technology.

Why wait? Do something for yourself and your career today. **Get certified!**

Go to: <http://www.iaap-hq.org/certification>

(Continued from page 6)

For example, a computer programmer might read *The Scarlet Letter* for category 1. A book on advanced features of their programming language for category 2. A book on business [management](#) for category 3 and a book on neuroscience or physics for category 4.

An entry level accountant might read:

1. *Moby Dick*
2. A book on best accounting practices
3. A book about preparing for the CPA exam
4. A book on social media

This type of approach will help make sure you are getting a well rounded reading experience that helps prepare you for today AND tomorrow. Obviously there is nothing to keep you from reading other books like current fiction, etc. However, if all of your reading falls outside of these four categories, you probably are reading more for entertainment than for upgrading your brain.

Get a(nother) degree

If you don't have a college degree, get one. However, keep in mind that not every degree is equal. You can get a diploma without necessarily learning very much just like you can become very smart without getting a diploma. You need two things from a degree:

1. You need the recognition that comes from having a formal college degree.
2. You need the knowledge that comes from having worked hard at an academic pursuit.

Society has decided that everyone should go to college. Because of this people without a degree have a much harder time at getting jobs. Colleges have responded by lowering standards so a degree doesn't mean as much as it use to—particularly from some institutions.

This is why it is worth putting the extra effort into getting a degree that is well recognized and that will give you the best educational experience. We will discuss choosing a good school later on.

(Continued on page 12)



Book Cliff
Membership
Anniversaries

April 2011

Peggy Kramer
4.1.2001

Alane Wooster
4.1.2003

Sally Lowrey
4.1.2005

Kym Bevan
4.1.2008



COLORADO-WYOMING- MONTANA DIVISION

www.iaap-co-wy-mt.org

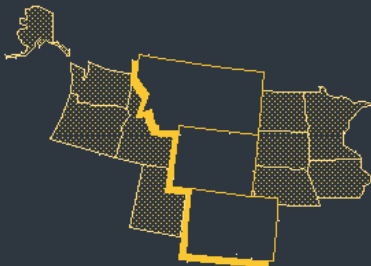
2011 CWM Division Annual Meeting

June 3-4, 2011

The Curtis Hotel
Denver, Colorado

Host Chapter:
Denver Downtown Chapter

**STAY TUNED FOR MORE
INFORMATION**



Colorado-Wyoming-Montana 2010-2011 Division Officers

Leticia "Tish" Neff - President

Book Cliff Chapter, Grand Junction, CO

Eileen Verosko, CPS - President-elect

Pikes Peak Chapter, Colorado Springs, CO

Carol Hardin, CPS/CAP - Vice President

Pikes Peak Chapter, Colorado Springs, CO

Deanna Anthony, CAP - Secretary

Rim Rock Chapter, Billings, MT

Andrea Latine, CPS - Treasurer

Denver Chapter, Denver, CO

Sharon Hunvald, CPS - Parliamentarian

Denver Chapter, Denver, CO

IAAP Podcasts

Reputation Management

By: [Susan Fenner](#) Apr 05, 2011

Posted in: [IAAP Podcasts](#)

After a crisis or a major faux pas, be it a person or a corporation, there are things you can do to salvage your reputation. Hear the advice that Burke Allen, a noted consultant on media strategies, gives to stage an effective comeback.



Trendspotting

By: [Susan Fenner](#) Mar 30, 2011

Posted in: [IAAP Podcasts](#)

What does it take for your organization to be successful in the future? How can you be a good organizational leader using technology to its (and your) advantage? Scott Klososky, author of The Velocity Manifesto, will discuss these topics and how v-teams, geek seeding, and reverse mentoring may help do just that.



Hosting A Virtual Conference

By: [Susan Fenner](#) Mar 22, 2011

Posted in: [IAAP Podcasts](#)

Wendy Melby CPS/CAP was responsible for many behind-the-scenes activities involved in Manpower, Inc. hosting an international all-virtual conference originating from their corporate headquarters in Milwaukee WI. Find out how it worked (and if it worked) and be prepared when your company puts you in charge of spearheading this new and exciting way of holding full-fledged conferences.



Free Weekly Podcast Series

IAAP members can also access free weekly podcasts from The Office Professional. To access the podcasts, make sure you are logged in and use the link below.

[\[Listen to Podcasts from The Office Professional\]](#)

WWW.IAAP-HQ.ORG



International Association
of
Administrative Professionals



International
Education Forum
Annual Meeting

EFAM

Countdown
to EFAM
Early Bird Registration
Now Open!

Don't miss Clinton Kelly of
TLC's *What Not To Wear*, one
of this year's keynote speakers,
sponsored by Hammermill Paper.
Everyone who registers before
the early bird deadline—or who
has already registered during
the Countdown sale—is entered
into a drawing to have breakfast
with Clinton Kelly. Hammermill is
sponsoring the breakfast for 100
lucky people!



IAAP International
Mission:

Enhancing the
success
of career-minded
administrative
professionals by
providing
opportunities for
growth through
education,
community building
and leadership
development.

Countdown to EFAM

Don't miss our Countdown to EFAM sale, which started March 21 at a \$50 savings off your EFAM registration. The sale runs for 50 days—through May 9. Every day that goes by you lose \$1 in savings. Register early to save big! [Register now](#) (after logging in, click "The Events Center")



On the fence whether or not to attend? Read why IAAP member Susan Spreitzer, CPS/CAP, believes EFAM is a valuable experience: [Why leave home for EFAM?](#)

*Countdown to EFAM ends May 9, 2011. Discounts decrease \$1 per day. Countdown to EFAM promotion is only available for the full-meeting package and can only be redeemed through online registration.

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If you already have a degree, the same thing applies. Get another one. To be competitive in today's job market, most people are going to need the training and recognition that comes from studies beyond the bachelors level. Usually a master's degree is a good choice, but there are [graduate certificate and citation programs](#) that can be excellent options. Even if you are pursuing a master's degree, a [graduate citation](#) can be an excellent stepping stone that gives you a way to quantify your education as you pursue your master's degree.



A resume that shows a graduate citation in X is better than a resume that shows you took some random classes.

When you get a degree, you are taking on the reputation of the school where you studied. The expectations that people have from a Yale graduate are different than the expectations of someone from a small community college. These expectations can strongly influence how people perceive you. If people think you are smart you will [appear smart](#) and they will think your ideas are good. (See this [experiment](#) for a better explanation

of this phenomenon.)

This means that where you go to school can determine your ability to get interesting work. Having interesting work can be one of the best ways to upgrade your brain because it keeps you mentally active. So choosing a school is about more than just the academics and the educational experience. It is also about what type of opportunities it will give you and how rich those opportunities will be.

In the same spirit, you need to choose a school based on what type of academic experiences you will have. Generally you want to attend somewhere that you will be in the middle to top 75%. If you are the best student, you won't have the same push toward your maximum capabilities. It is very healthy to have at least a few people in every class who can outperform you if you don't try very hard. However, you don't want to go to a school where everyone is so far above you that you can't take advantage of the special opportunities that surround the academic environment.

If you are getting your first degree and just [starting college](#), I'd suggest getting it in person at a traditional university—especially if you are a recent high school graduate. State schools offer reasonable tuition and can be very affordable. There is a local school here where one can pay for everything without loans while working full time during the summer and part time during the school year making minimum wage.

For your second degree, you may find that [online degrees](#) or some of the programs like an [executive MBA](#) are more suited to your social, family, career and employment situation. You have to be a bit more careful in selecting a school for an online degree as their [reputation](#) can vary much more than that of established traditional institutions. I would highly recommend pursuing something like my

[Master's Degree from Harvard](#). It was very cost effective, fairly flexible and Harvard generally keeps a good academic reputation particularly compared with the [reputation of some other online schools](#).

The real “brain upgrade” value of a degree is the way that it will force you diversify. You can't just study the stuff that comes easy to you. A degree from a good academic institution is a well designed package to give you a well rounded education including studying things that you might not study on your own. My undergrad degree is in music composition, but I had to take a lot of classes outside of the topic of music. At my school I even had to take a physical education class and run three miles each semester in less than 21 minutes. To graduate you also had to prove you knew how to swim well enough that you wouldn't drown should you accidentally fall in a lake. Obviously making sure I could swim wasn't directly related to music composition, but it is part of what the college decided a well rounded person should know how to do.

At Harvard, I was studying software engineering. One of the required classes was on computational theory. It studies the theoretical aspects of what type of problems can be solved by a computer and what type of problems can't. For the most part, it isn't something you need to know to write typical software. However, the real value is in the way it changed my thinking. It forced me to learn a different area of mathematics. I can point to turning point insights I've had in areas unrelated to software engineering that were only possible because of the different way of thinking I learned in that class.

Seek out new experiences

Our brains grow when we do something new with them. If you aren't doing anything new, your brain is not growing. Reading new books, studying new topics, going back to get another degree are all things that can help give your brain new experiences. But what about more mundane things? Here are some ideas of simple things you can do that will help give you new experiences.

1. Brush your teeth with your non-dominant hand a few times each week.
2. Read a section of the newspaper or a magazine that you'd normally never touch.
3. Go into a store that you've never had any desire to visit.
4. Draw pictures
5. Draw pictures with your non-dominant hand
6. Drive to work a different way.
7. Cook a type of food you've never had before.
8. Watch a few movies that are in a different language.
9. Attend a lecture on a topic you know nothing about.
10. Spend a few hours in municipal court as an observer.
11. Attend a city commission [meeting](#).
12. Go to a restaurant that is primarily frequented by people who aren't in your age group.
13. Learn to juggle. (I highly recommend this.)
14. Do your work outside for a few hours.
15. Strike up conversations with people you normally wouldn't talk to.

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

16. Visit a library you've never been in.
17. Browse a section of a library that you've never been in.
18. Attend an art display in a style you don't particularly care for.
19. Attend musical recitals for different instruments and a modern composer.
20. Take the stairs in a building where you've only taken the elevator.
21. Listen to a different radio station.
22. Spend some time reading in the room in your house where you spend the least amount of time.
23. If you have land or a yard, go stand in part of it where you don't think you've ever been before.
24. Try out a different operating system. (Many can run from a CD. See [Haiku](#) and [Ubuntu](#))
25. Go to a school board meeting.
26. Go star gazing.
27. Write a letter to someone you've never written to before.
28. Ask an older relative about the things they remember when they were your age.
29. etc.

None of those activities are likely to be life changing. However, each one will change you just a little bit and each one will give you brain something new to think about and process.

Think

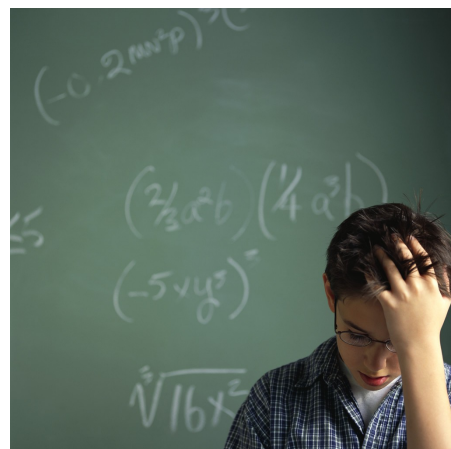
We think all the time, but most of us don't spend any structured, intentional time just thinking. We think just enough to start our next action. There is great value in taking the time to deliberately sit and think. One of the reasons we don't do this is because it usually just becomes day dreaming. Day dreaming isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it isn't as directed as what we are trying to achieve by sitting and thinking.

The funny thing about thinking is that there really isn't that much information on how to go about doing it. There are books like [How To Think Like Leonardo da Vinci](#) that are interesting but tend to focus on how to be creative less than on how to just think. On one hand this is disappointing, but on the other it makes sense. Thinking is a huge category and it is going to be very difficult for one person to explain how they think to someone else. What I'm going to do here is to try to give you some guidelines for productive thinking that work well for me. Obviously you'll have to find what works for you and adjust things to fit your personal needs, but these should give you a start.

1. Decide what you are going to think about

To be really productive your thinking needs to be directed. Here are some things you might want to spend some time thinking about:

- Your career plans and how to get the most out of your current job.
- A business idea.
- Personal goals – clarifying what you want to achieve and life and how to reach those achievements.



2. Find a quiet place without a lot of distractions

What qualifies as a distraction is going to be different for different people and may vary depending on what you are thinking about. A distraction free environment for clarifying your personal goals might be a coffee shop, but if you are working on coming up with a mathematical theorem, the same coffee shop might be full of distractions.

3. Write down what you hope to accomplish

Without a plan you won't know if you accomplished what you set out to do. Get it down on paper to make sure you are clear what you want to get out of this "thinking session." Your goal can be as specific or as general as necessary, but try to choose something that you can tell if you succeeded or not. Writing down "think about businesses" isn't something that you can really quantify as having done or not—or at least it is hard to tell if you really accomplished anything. "Come up with 3 ideas for a business I can run from home" is a bit easier to claim success.

4. Take notes

This may sound funny. Why would you take notes of your thinking? Getting something down on paper lets you see your thought process much more easily than when it is just in your mind. Thinking is the process of interacting with information and getting some of that information out in front of you is a great way to focus and be creative. These don't need to be formal notes. You can jot ideas, draw diagrams, doodle pictures or create mind maps to help clarify what you are thinking.

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Practice

Musicians and sports figures constantly practice, but most other people never practice. If you can find a way to practice your skills, you can become better at what you do. Practice can make you faster, more efficient and better at your job. The trick is to find a small unit that you can repeat in a way that will increase your skill.

Here are some ideas of things you might be able to practice:

- If you are slow at typing, practicing typing for 15 minutes per day can have a great return on investment.
- Public speaking is something that can be practiced and good presentation skills are essential to many careers.
- Writing is a skill that can be practiced. Few people wouldn't benefit from being able to write a bit better.

Some fields even have competitions setup to help you practice. For example, [TopCoder](#) lets programmers compete to solve short programming challenges. Other disciplines have competitions or other ways that you can potentially practice.

Write

Writing is underrated. The discipline of getting thoughts from your head onto paper is very valuable and you can learn a lot simply by writing down your ideas and observations. Writing is the process of making your thoughts concrete and visible. It allows you to clarify what you are thinking and refine your ideas. Writing makes you smarter because it forces you deeper into a topic and shows you areas of your topic that you don't fully understand. For example, I recently wrote a post about [finite state machines](#) to help clarify my understanding and make sure I hadn't forgotten anything in the 5 years since I took a class on the topic. Not only was the exercise good for me by forcing me to think deeply about the topic again, but the interactions with people who read it and had suggestions, corrections or disagreements was personally rewarding.

I started Productivity501 in 2005 and the practice of writing on a regular basis has been extremely valuable to my career. I highly recommend starting at least a personal blog. A personal blog can cover pretty much any topic and gives you a way to get your content up where others can benefit from it and interact with you. It is a lot easier to have the motivation to write when you know someone might/will read it and a blog gives you that type of exposure without needing to do any type of extensive setup or expensive publishing.

Do things that are hard

I've talked about the importance of [reading things that are hard](#), but the same concept applies to doing [things that are hard](#). Doing things that are difficult raises your ceiling and increases your capabilities.

I've heard of basketball coaches that put a smaller ring inside of the basketball hoop during practice. This makes it a lot harder for players to make baskets during practice, but when the game comes and they are practicing on a normal sized hoop it seems much easier to make shots. They make practice harder in order to raise the bar on their performance when it really matters.

In some ways, this suggestion sounds like the suggestion to find things to practice and there is some overlap. However, doing things that are hard can involve doing big projects and larger scale work than finding something small that you can practice over and over again. If tackle writing a 100 page research paper, the 5 page papers you are subsequently assigned will seem trivial in comparison. A builder who completes a 10,000 sq. foot luxury home is probably going to find managing the construction of smaller sized homes much easier after they have stretched themselves to manage the larger construction project.

If you want your brain to be operating at its peak capabilities, you need to constantly be asking yourself, "When was the last time I did something where I felt truly challenged? When was the last time where I was seriously worried that I might fail?" If you haven't had any of those experiences recently, you may need to seek out a difficult assignment or project in order to make sure your brain isn't becoming stagnant.

Conclusion

Your brain is your most valuable asset. Many people leave their brain's development up to chance. If you want to safeguard against becoming stale and irrelevant you need to make a conscious effort to upgrade your brain, develop your skills and insure that you are moving forward—not backwards.





Tulip



Apricot Flowers with Bee



Sparrow

Photos by
Louise Davidson



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