

## In This Issue: **5 Ways To Get Smarter (For Real!)**

Test for Success

Tools, Tips, & Techniques for Avoiding  
Hiring Mistakes and Developing People

From Helm and Associates, Inc.

And Kurt Helm

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Barbara Otto, Editor, <mailto:botto@helmtest.com>

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I don't know about you, but I am a major skeptic about those ads that promise to "Increase your Brain Power" by playing a computer game or working crossword and sudoku puzzles. So when I came across a guest blog on the Scientific American website, my warning lights started to flash. "Oh no," I thought, "another one of those '5 easy ways to a smarter you' articles." I should have known better. Scientific American doesn't fool around with fluff.

The old view of intelligence was that it was fixed and unchangeable. You inherited a certain amount from your parents and what you got was all you were ever going to get. End of the story.

Then, along came a more enlightened view that said that what your parents gifted you with through their genes formed sort of a base amount of intelligence, but you could build on that base through education. Parents everywhere heaved a big sigh of relief, reassured that shelling out thousands of dollars for their kids' educations wasn't going to be for naught.

The guest blog at the Scientific American site, written by Andrea Kuszarski on March 7, 2011, reported on her most recent brain research and here's what I learned:

The blog article, titled "You Can Increase Your Intelligence: 5 Ways to Maximize Your Cognitive Potential," focused on the aspect of intelligence involved in learning new information, which brain researchers call "fluid intelligence."

When we are faced with a new problem, fluid intelligence is what we use to evaluate the problem, come up with possible solutions, pick the solution that has the greatest likelihood of solving the problem, apply that solution and solve the problem. Then we store that solution away in memory so that we can pull it back up when a similar problem

occurs in the future.

The really cool finding in the research Ms. Kuszarski reported is that fluid intelligence is trainable and that it cumulates – that is, the more you train your fluid intelligence, the more fluid intelligence you gain. Further, the research indicates that it is never too late to train your fluid intelligence.

So, you may be thinking, what’s the catch? With all this good news, what’s the bad news? The bad news is that training your fluid intelligence is not easy and it is not a one-shot deal. But that’s all the bad news there is. If you are willing to make a consistent effort, you can train your brain to think better. How? There are five strategies. Using any one of them will produce results. Of course, the more of the five that you use, the greater the results. Let’s look at these five strategies.

Strategy #1: Seek novelty – Look for new ways to get your mental gears going. Learn a new skill or a new language. Take a continuing education or college class in a new (to you) area. Learn more about things outside your area of knowledge. An easy way to do this is by learning acronyms. For example, the acronym for the names of the great lakes is HOMES (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior.) And now you have learned something new!

Strategy #2: Challenge yourself – Contrary to popular opinion, “brain training games” like Sudoku and crossword puzzles don’t make you smarter. They make you better at doing those games. The key to using such mentally challenging games to make you smarter is this: once you achieve a level of mastery at one of these games, move up to the next level or on to a new kind of game. Doing so keeps your brain learning and growing.

Strategy #3: Think creatively (and practically) – Practice thinking out of the box, but not too far outside the box. Look at unusual situations and problems and think about novel ways to deal effectively with them. The key word here is “effectively.” Make your novel solutions do-able. No magical or *deus ex machina* solutions allowed.

Strategy #4: Do things the hard way – Your brain needs regular exercise just like your body. Doing mental tasks the easy way lets your brain get flabby. For example, calculators are almost always available but always using them (to calculate the tip at lunch or to verify your change after a purchase) instead of using your brain lets your brain power get weaker. Don’t rely on calculators for everything; practice estimating instead and then check yourself. Don’t use your phone’s memory to remember and “dial” all your calls; store the numbers in phone memory, but dial them yourself from time to time.

Strategy #5: Network – Getting to know people and groups outside your area of expertise/knowledge exposes you to new ideas and fresh perspectives that can help you see your work in a new light. It will also help you practice the other four strategies and, at the same time, it is fun and interesting.

I had a physical education coach in high school whose favorite mantra, referring to physical fitness, was “use it or lose it.” What he was trying to tell us was that if we didn’t continue to work at maintaining our physical condition, it would deteriorate. And he was right. There is now evidence that if we don’t continue to work at staying fit, we will put on about a pound of body weight a year without being aware of it. That is, until we wake up one morning and discover that – surprise, surprise – we are now carrying around an extra ten or twenty pounds.

We are discovering now that the same sort of thing applies to our brain power. Have you ever had the experience of talking with a well-educated professional who seems less on the ball than you would expect from a person with a couple of college degrees? This might be someone who simply stopped working his brain. He let his brain develop a bit of a pot-belly, let it go all flabby and out of shape. Consequently, his brain no longer performed as well as it did when he was younger and expended more mental effort that kept it in trim.

Unfortunately, whether your brain is in good shape is something that you can’t accurately diagnose by yourself. Most of us feel that we are just as mentally sharp now as we were five years ago, just as we feel we are in just as good physical condition. Until we stop and see how many push-ups or sit-ups we can do.

I think the most effective way to approach the issue of keeping one’s brain in shape is to simply assume that it isn’t in as good a shape as you want it to be and look for ways to begin to use the five strategies I’ve listed above.

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Remember, People ARE your most important asset!

To Hire the Best, Test!

To Reveal Management Potential, Test!

To Diagnose Problem Behavior, Test!

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Kurt Helm - Helm and Associates, Inc.

Ph: Toll Free 800-886-4356

Email: [khelm@helmtest.com](mailto:khelm@helmtest.com)

P.O. Box 130  
Helmsburg IN 47435

Website: <http://www.helmtest.com>