

# **HYPER-LEARNING**

# Hyper-Learning

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# **HYPER-LEARNING**

## PROLOGUE

# How to Adapt to the Speed of Change

Why should you read this book? Because it's about your future and the future of your children and grandchildren. The underlying question is: How will you and they pursue a meaningful life when smart technology takes over most of the jobs and skills that humans currently do? How will you and they keep up with the pace of technological change in order to stay relevant in the workplace?

The answer I propose is Hyper-Learning.

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The word “hyperlearning” has been used by other people and organizations in the technology area and in the area of providing courses to students for standardized test preparation. It has also been defined in the education field as a categorical leap beyond artificial intelligence resulting from the uniting of technology trends. This book takes a different approach by creating a hyphenated word, Hyper-Learning, and defining it as the “human capability to learn, unlearn, and relearn continually in order to adapt to the speed of change.”

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### **Hyper-Learning is continual learning, unlearning, and relearning.**

By *hyper*, I do not mean the modern connotation of being excitable, manic, nervous, or fidgety.

I use the term to reference the original Greek meaning of “over” or “above.” Hyper-Learning is learning that is *over* and *above* what is typical. It is an overabundance of continual, high-quality learning.

Hyper-Learning requires a radical **New Way of Being** and a radical **New Way of Working** than you're probably used to.

This book explains *why* and *how* to become a Hyper-Learner. Before proceeding, please take out a notebook that you can use as a **Learning Journal** for recording thoughts, reflecting on the content, and completing included workshops while reading.

## **A CHALLENGING NEW ERA FOR HUMANS**

We've been in the midst of the digital age arguably since the introduction of the personal computer, but much of the populace is only now beginning to understand and predict the consequences of the relentless technological progress that characterizes

this era. The continuing advance of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, virtual and augmented reality, quantum computing, and big data is challenging humankind on a scale analogous to the species-altering habitat migration our ancient ancestors faced. Environmental destruction forced early humans to leave the relative safety of their African rainforest habitat for the much more dangerous open savanna.

While the savannas offered new sources of food in the form of meaty animals, they also made humans less hidden and more vulnerable as prey to those often faster and bigger meaty animals.

In effect, our ancestors had to learn how to survive and thrive in a completely new environment. Our ancestors had to unlearn and relearn. And I submit to you that that is what we all have to do in the digital age, over and over again.

**I believe we can continue to have meaningful work in the digital age only if we can add value by doing the tasks that technology can't do well.** At least for the near future, those tasks are exploring the unknown and novelty by being creative, imaginative, and innovative; engaging in higher-level critical thinking; making decisions in environments with lots of uncertainty and little data; and connecting with other human beings through high emotional engagement and effective collaboration.

All of those tasks are heavily influenced by the uniquely human way we approach and engage in learning. Contrary to the bits and bytes fueling smart technology, human thinking and learning are driven by a complicated and integrated interplay of our minds, brains, emotions, and bodies. **How well we think, learn, and engage in the human tasks of the future depends on how well we manage and optimize what's going on with our minds, brains, and bodies—** for example, how well we leverage the power of our subconscious, imaginative, and creative minds and how well we connect emotionally to other humans through trusting, caring relationships.

**A key human uniqueness as compared to smart machines is our emotional and social intelligence.**

## **THE NEED TO EVOLVE**

Our early ancestors survived being forced onto the open savanna by becoming hunter-gatherers—not alone but in cooperation with others. They survived by creating small teams that worked together to find food and safety and to care for offspring. They survived by sharing the bounty that individual team members found. They prospered because they collaborated, learned together, and shared resources.

Now we are on the leading edge of an era in which technology has the potential to both advance and destroy civilization. The McKinsey Global Institute predicts that by 2030 over 25 million jobs in the United States will be automated.<sup>1</sup> Research from

Oxford University predicts that within 15 years there is a high probability that 47 percent of U.S. jobs—including professional jobs—will be automated.<sup>2</sup>

We now face an existential question. How do we live meaningful lives and have meaningful work in a world where familiar jobs and skills continue to be automated by smart technology?

I believe the dramatic changes our species will experience as the digital age continues to advance are akin to the changes our ancestors faced when they left their personal rainforests for the open savanna, and similarly, we will have to evolve. Over the next few decades, we will have to become the **digital age's hunter-gatherers**. Many of us will have to become entrepreneurs, selling our skills to people as they need them. Some of us will have to band together to earn money. Some of us will continue to have highly desired skills and full-time employment, but that security will last only as long as our skills stay ahead of the advancing technology. We will have to constantly adapt to ever-changing circumstances and excel at lifelong learning. We will have to become Hyper-Learners.

**“Most important of all will be the ability to deal with change, learn new things, and preserve your mental balance in unfamiliar situations,” says leading thinker and futurist Yuval Noah Harari. The point, he stresses, is “not merely to invent new ideas and products but above all to reinvent yourself again and again.”<sup>3</sup>**

Let's stop here for a moment.

Let's *make meaning* together. In your Learning Journal, please write down what Harari's words “reinvent yourself again and again” mean to you.

How do you interpret those words?

How would you reinvent yourself?

To me, Harari's words mean that I will have to constantly upgrade my approach to daily life—my mental models, scripts, and stories about how the world works—and learn new ways to add value and have a meaningful life. To me, having a meaningful life means having meaningful work that supports my loved ones and meaningful relationships, and that means continually learning new skills and knowledge, improving how I think and emotionally connect and relate to people, and adapting as technology continues to advance. I will have to work hard every day on becoming my **Best Self**. I will have to embrace a **New Way of Being and Working** to become a **Hyper-Learner**—a continual, high-quality, lifelong learner.

Many of us working now may have been taught to believe that the most important learning occurs during the first 20 to 30 years of our lives. After that we can go out into

the world, find a way of life that generally works for us, and do that thing over and over, maybe in different contexts, until retirement. That game is over.

As the digital age continues to advance, I think humans will have to spend their entire lives learning to become and maintain their Best Selves cognitively, morally, emotionally, and behaviorally.

Harari states:

**“Change itself is the only certainty. . . . To stay relevant—not just economically but above all socially—you will need the ability to constantly learn and reinvent yourself. . . . As strangeness becomes the new normal, your past experiences, as well as the past experiences of the whole of humanity, will become less reliable guides.”<sup>4</sup>**

Let’s think about that last part: “your past experiences . . . will become less reliable guides.” What does that mean to you? Let’s make meaning again. Please write down in your Learning Journal what it means to you.

To me, these words mean:

- Change will be constant. What worked for me yesterday may not work for me today. I can’t get complacent.
- I have to constantly ensure I am not missing something. I can’t afford to believe that I know for certain what works.
- I have to be very aware of how my environment is changing and figure out (with the help of people I trust) what I need to do to stay relevant in order to add value.
- I have to be observant and seek out different perspectives. I have to become an explorer, seeking out the new and the different, looking for novelty.
- I have to stay current—upgrading how I live my life and do my work. I have to constantly upgrade myself just like I upgrade my technology devices with new software. That means I have to be a proactive learner who is curious and aware.
- I need to seek out the opinions of experts and thought leaders and new knowledge from lifelong learning opportunities and from smart people who are in different occupations than mine.
- I have to look for and anticipate change. I have to ask myself each day, what is different or new here?

## **SO, WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?**

Let’s just adapt and become Hyper-Learners, you might say. Let’s just get on with it.

Unfortunately, humans have two main obstacles to becoming Hyper-Learners. One comes from the way we’re “wired” and the other comes from our typical work



environments.

First, our wiring. The **science of adult learning** shows that our brains and minds are geared to be efficient; confirm what we expect to see, feel, or think; protect our egos; strive for cohesiveness; and operate much of the time on autopilot. We are creatures of habit. As for our thinking, psychologist and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman says, “Laziness is built deep into our nature.”<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence, we have many ingrained biases that guide our thinking, and most of us are cognitively blind—we won’t even process information that disagrees with our mental models. We have confirmation biases, meaning we automatically prioritize information that confirms what we think we already know, and we rarely look for reasons why we may be wrong. We also have cognitive dissonance, which means that even when we do let contradictory information into our minds, we rationalize it to fit within our existing beliefs.

And we all struggle to manage two big inhibitors of human learning: our *egos* and our *fears*. We underestimate the magnitude of our ignorance, and we have been educated to avoid making mistakes, which means we tend not to take risks in exploring what is new or different.

Ego can get in the way of learning because it can lead to closed-mindedness, arrogance, defining oneself by what one knows, poor listening skills, and viewing collaboration as competition.

Fear hinders learning because people are fearful of making mistakes, fearful of being wrong, fearful that they will look bad or not be liked or offend someone by asking hard questions. Many people are scared of working on any new project or engaging in discovery and experimentation because they’ve been taught that making mistakes is how you lose your job. And many people are fearful of speaking to power. In many work environments, it might be wise to fear these things. But going forward, organizational leaders and every individual will need to get over these fears to stay relevant and engage in Hyper-Learning.

### **The science is compelling. We are all suboptimal learners.**

Yes, some of us are better than others, but few if any of us can reach the level of excellence increasingly needed in the digital age by ourselves. As Chris Argyris, a renowned expert on organizational learning, says, “Defensive reasoning encourages individuals to keep private the premises, inferences, and conclusions that shape their behavior and to avoid testing them in a truly independent, objective fashion.”<sup>6</sup>

**As a result, we need others to do our best learning, because others help us to:**

- See what we don’t see
- Challenge our thinking

- Update our mental models (a necessity for learning) by bringing forth their own mental models and differing interpretations, concepts, and data
- Pick up emotional cues we might have missed

My psychology mentor of almost 40 years, Dr. Lyle Bourne Jr., said to me a few years ago:

**“All learning occurs in conversations with yourself (deep reflection) or with others.”**

Think about that statement. Conversations are how we make meaning of the need to change—to learn—to do something new or different. They are how we verbalize a new story and begin to embed it into our cognitive and emotional systems. It is how we rewire our brains by creating new associations that expand the connectivity of our internal databases.

If you want to be a Hyper-Learner, you’d better excel at having meaningful learning conversations with others, and you’d better excel at listening. You’d better learn to listen in a way that leads to understanding a speaker’s position and consider his or her views rather than automatically judging or arguing against them or automatically defending your own view or ego.

Dr. Barbara Fredrickson’s positive psychology research, which is highlighted in her books *Positivity* and *Love 2.0*, is foundational to higher levels of human performance. She has said,

**“It is scientifically correct to say that nobody reaches his or her full potential in isolation.”<sup>7</sup>**

What this means is that all of us need to learn from others, from people who have different backgrounds, training, and experiences. We need the input of people with different mental models to help us challenge our own views. That is why as the digital age continues to progress most cognitively based human work increasingly will require collaboration among small teams or groups (just like the hunter-gatherers).

In other words, Hyper-Learning is a team sport in which every person is a Most Valuable Player.

So we humans have to accept the science that our default way of being is suboptimal for learning and that we need the help of others to truly become Hyper-Learners.

Note the two crucial implications of this. We need to learn *how to learn* and *how to collaborate* better. Both of those things require us to better manage our thinking and emotions, take experimental risks, and be vulnerable. They require us to be open-minded, manage our egos and fears, have candid and difficult conversations, be

authentic and transparent, reflectively listen, and connect, relate, and emotionally engage in positive ways with team members.

Let's pause here.

Do you accept the science?

On reflection, do you accept or agree that you are a suboptimal learner?

Can you say out loud, "I am a suboptimal learner"?

Did you do it? How did it feel?

Weird? Liberating? Uncomfortable?

Think about this. Each morning when you wake up, consider practicing the following statement:

**I am a suboptimal learner, but I will optimize my learning opportunities today in every human engagement.**

**To rehash, our brain prioritizes and seeks, and our organizations and social and cultural norms and structures support and reinforce:**

- Efficiency
- Speed
- Confirmation of what we believe
- Affirmation of our egos through cognitive and emotional self-protection
- Cohesiveness of our inner stories (mental models)

All of that hinders Hyper-Learning.

**As the relentless changes of the digital age continue, we must learn to manage our minds and brains to enable Hyper-Learning by:**

- Seeking novelty, exploration, and discovery
- Asking questions: The three Ws (Why? What if? Why not?)
- Deferring judgment: a "Yes, and" not a "Yes, but" approach
- Embracing ambiguity and not rushing to the safety of making premature decisions

- Having High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations with others
- Taming our egos and our fears
- Generating and sharing positive emotions

For most of us to do all of that, we need to adopt a New Way of Being and a New Way of Working.

## **A NEW WAY OF BEING**

Hyper-Learning is cognitive, behavioral, and emotional.

Managing your thinking, behaviors, and emotions in order to engage in Hyper-Learning is about becoming your **Best Self** cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally. Operating at your Best Self requires three main steps.

### ***Step 1: Achieving Inner Peace***

Inner Peace is based on science and ancient philosophies and is the foundational building block to becoming a Hyper-Learner. What I mean by Inner Peace is a state of inner stillness and calmness that enables you to embrace the world with your most open, nonjudgmental, fearless mind. For many people the ability to enter a state of Inner Peace requires a significant personal transformation.

**Inner Peace comprises four key elements: a Quiet Ego, a Quiet Mind, a Quiet Body, and a Positive Emotional State.**

By cultivating these four elements, you are better able to manage your thinking, behaviors, and emotions; engage with the world outside of you with more open-mindedness, awareness, and willingness to see other perspectives; and change your mental models in order to learn.

A state of Inner Peace does all this by mitigating the two big inhibitors of learning: ego and fear.

Inner Peace enhances your ability to tap into the power of your subconscious, reflectively listen, and positively connect and relate to others.

Chapter 1 explains the science and philosophy behind cultivating Inner Peace through those four elements. It explores research on self-mastery and self-control, mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation, the power of generating positive emotions and managing the kinds of emotions that inhibit Hyper-Learning, emotional synchronicity with others, and the importance of deep breathing.

With the included workshop you have the opportunity to create a checklist of Daily Intentions for cultivating a state of Inner Peace and your Best Self.

### ***Step 2: Adopting a Hyper-Learning Mindset***

Behaviors are how people make their priorities and intentions known to the world. But in most cases changing behaviors requires changing your mindset first—your internal story of who you are and how the world works. Before you can change your behavior in ways that enable you to become a Hyper-Learner, you have to create the right mindset—a personal story of *why* you should change.

In chapter 2, to help you begin to cultivate a Hyper-Learning Mindset, I share ideas and theories from ancient and modern philosophers, psychologists, social scientists, leading academics, and noted business leaders that align with underlying principles of Hyper-Learning.

This chapter ends with two workshops. First, I invite you to take your learnings from chapters 1 and 2 to discover your own reasons for *why* you need a Hyper-Learning Mindset. Then you have the opportunity to create a personal list of Hyper-Learning Mindset principles that you can easily refer to daily to help reinforce your Daily Intentions toward Hyper-Learning.

### ***Step 3: Behaving Like a Hyper-Learner***

This book focuses heavily on behaviors. It is through behaviors that we engage with the world and others. It is through behaviors that we truly become Hyper-Learners. Behavior change requires the utmost self-discipline and daily effort and vigilance. The advancing digital age will test you, but it will also give you a choice. Will you take your way of being and learning to a higher level or will you be left behind?

What are key Hyper-Learning Behaviors? In my experience there are too many for any organization or person to work on at any given time. One must prioritize down to a manageable number—seven or eight behaviors that are the foundational building blocks of your Hyper-Learning activities. That is the start.

Then those Hyper-Learning Behaviors must be *precisely defined* so you can assess your current state of competence and what aspects of that behavior you need to work on. Very importantly, you then have to assess your performance daily by getting feedback and measuring your rate of improvement. And when you have improved those behaviors, you should pick two more to improve and so on.

Precisely defining behaviors is drilling down to and identifying observable sub-behaviors that evidence the desired behavior and observable sub-behaviors that evidence the lack of the desired behavior. Getting this granular is key. **It gets at how you talk, the words you use, your tone, how you connect to people, your facial expressions, your presence, how you listen, how you collaborate, how you think, and how you deal with emotions and disagreements.**

Chapter 3 includes a workshop on identifying **Hyper-Learning Behaviors** and a case study concerning W. R. Berkley Corporation, a very successful public insurance company that used this same behavioral approach to empower all employees to become innovators. The chapter ends with an opportunity to take a **Hyper-Learning**

**Behaviors Diagnostic**, which I have used with over 3,000 executives and leaders, and to create a Hyper-Learning Behaviors Development Plan. Through this exercise you can choose the Hyper-Learning Behaviors you want to work on and determine an objective way to measure your progress toward becoming a Hyper-Learner.

Another crucial step in developing and making Hyper-Learning Behaviors habitual is to engage in **Hyper-Learning Practices** on a daily basis. Chapter 10 provides guidance on how to do that. It discusses activities that you as an individual can infuse into your daily life to help you become a Hyper-Learner and that organizations can facilitate and embrace to enable all their people to Hyper-Learn.

## ***Personal Transformation***

To see many of these steps in action, this book introduces you to three senior executives—Susan Sweeney, Marvin Riley, and Adam Hansen—who share their amazing personal transformation stories in the pursuit of their Best Selves and Inner Peace.

## **A NEW WAY OF WORKING**

To be a Hyper-Learner requires not only a New Way of Being but also the ability to work in an environment conducive to Hyper-Learning. Unfortunately, many of our workplaces were designed in ways that inhibit Hyper-Learning. That is not good. That has to change. The digital age increasingly will require it.

**Hyper-Learning requires a humanistic and emotionally safe and emotionally positive work environment.** Hyper-Learning requires an environment in which people can be fully engaged cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally and that requires an emotionally positive environment where people feel safe and valued; have caring, trusting work relationships; and can bring their uniqueness to the pursuit of meaningful work.

Recent research by Gallup showed that 85 percent of global employees are not engaged in their work or appear not to have great jobs.<sup>8</sup>

That is a WOW! Let that one sink in.

Are you in the 15 percent or the 85 percent?

Admitting to being in the 85 percent is nothing to be ashamed about. Likely it says nothing bad about you personally. Likely it's the fault of the business environment you find yourself in—one that devalues and fails to meet the emotional needs of workers and isn't conducive to people bringing their Best Selves to work or finding meaning and purpose. An environment like that will not have engaged employees or Hyper-Learners.

Hyper-Learning happens in *idea meritocracies*—environments where the best idea wins and where people feel safe to speak to power. It happens in environments that minimize internal competition, elitism, political games, hierarchy, and a survival-of-the-fittest mentality. In other words, Hyper-Learning occurs best in environments free of the two big inhibitors of learning: ego and fear.

## ***Humans Are Not Machines***

Most organizations today strive to be rational, anti-emotional machines. By definition, organizations are designed to drive predictable, standardized results by turning human resources into human machines.

We now know that as the digital age continues to progress, most tasks requiring predictable, standardized results and operational excellence will be automated. Smart machines eventually will replace all the human machines.

The whole concept of managing others must change to produce the higher levels of human performance increasingly demanded by the digital age. Command/control and directing others will, in most cases, be obstacles to success. **You cannot effectively command and control or direct a person to do the kinds of jobs and tasks that will be left for humans, which require innovation, creativity, and emotional engagement with others.**

Gary Hamel, one of the giants in the field of business management thinking, says,

**“Humanizing the language and practice of management is a business imperative (and an ethical one).”<sup>9</sup>**

And

**“Put simply, you can’t build an organization that’s fit for the future around an ideology that *preemptively* and *structurally* empowers the few while disempowering the many.”<sup>10</sup>**

This New Way of Working is illuminated in chapters focusing on Humanizing the Workplace; creating and being a part of Caring, Trusting Teams; engaging in High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations; and adopting Hyper-Learning Practices as the daily way of working.

## ***Humanizing the Workplace***

It is time for the old ways of working to die, because our traditional workplaces, cultures, and policies inhibit Hyper-Learning, and they inhibit employees becoming their Best Selves at work.

Chapter 6 explains how this New Way of Working requires a new way of organizing, managing, leading, and behaving that maintains organizational rigor and discipline but is significantly more caring, compassionate, and emotionally positive.

It explains why the old ways must be replaced by a **humanistic system that liberates people** to think and emotionally engage at their highest levels, that gives them the courage to innovate and create, and that allows them to thrive in an idea meritocracy. And that system must enable continual human development cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally because Hyper-Learning requires it.

### ***Caring, Trusting Teams***

The highest levels of human performance in the digital age increasingly will come from what I call Caring, Trusting Teams.

Studies show that the highest levels of human performance occur on teams in which all members have a common purpose and values, deeply care about each other as unique human beings, have compassion for each other, and trust each other. Trusting each other means believing that no one on the team will do harm to the others and that everyone is totally invested in each other's personal development and success.

With trust, teams can cultivate candor, mutual respect, exploration, making-meaning conversations, and open dialogue in search for the truth or in search of the new and different. Only then will the two big inhibitors of learning (ego and fear) be mitigated.

With a Caring, Trusting Team, people can bring their Best Selves to the conversation and the highest levels of human thinking can occur. Each team member can bring his or her creativity, imagination, and unique human value to the conversation and contribute to meaningful and purposeful work. As Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue says in his book *Anam Cara*, **“Imagine how lovely it would be if you could be yourself at work and express your true nature, giftedness, and imagination.”**<sup>11</sup>

Chapter 7 provides guidance on how to create a high-performing Caring, Trusting Team, how to become a valuable member of one, the biochemistry of generating positive connections and emotions with others, and the science of collective intelligence.

### ***High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations***

One of the processes crucial to Hyper-Learning and the journey through this book is the making-meaning process. Making meaning with other people goes back at least to our species' early days as hunter-gatherers, when after the discovery of fire people would sit around those fires and talk. Talking was how learning was shared. Talking was how people came to understand each other. Talking was how social and behavioral norms were created.



**High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations are not about advocacy, self-promotion, or competition. They are about seeking mutual understanding.**

**In such a conversation you are seeking to understand others, and you are seeking to be understood by others.**

It is through having High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations that we can explore, discover, and resolve misunderstandings and differences. It is through making meaning that the real purposes of the meeting or the conversation, the meaning of key words, and the real reasons people are espousing the positions they are espousing are illuminated for all to consider.

**It is through High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations with Caring, Trusting Teams that we can have a chance of experiencing what I call *collective flow*, which I believe to be the highest level of team engagement.**

Collective flow reflects a team becoming one—an emotionally integrated group of people devoid of fear and self-centeredness, totally engrossed in the common task. It is then that individual contributions can emerge leading to “wow” engagement, innovation, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving. It is then that the unique strengths of people can flourish because of the chemistry among them and the interaction of their hearts and minds (not just minds). **Collective flow is magical!**

Chapter 8 discusses how to cultivate High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations.

### ***EnPro Industries: Enabling the Full Release of Human Possibility***

To see an example of this New Way of Working in practice, chapter 9 discusses EnPro Industries, Inc., a global, engineering-based, special-component manufacturing company that has adopted the following dual bottom line philosophy:

#### **Dual Bottom Line**

**“Our purpose is to enable the full release of human possibility.**

“As a Dual Bottom Line company, human development carries equal importance to financial performance.

“There is no trade-off between the two, and we measure both. People who are focused on developing themselves pursue excellence, and when excellence is pursued, financial results are superior.

“Our human development philosophy is evident in our daily behavior and supported by an education system built on everyone teaching and learning from others. We recognize people learn and change from the inside of themselves on their terms, consistent with their beliefs.”<sup>12</sup>

Chapter 9 brings to life how EnPro promotes and operationalizes this philosophy through its stated values, corporate mindset, emphasized behaviors, and 25 company practices.

## **PRACTICAL GUIDANCE**

This is a *how-to* book.

It is an active-learning book. It is a behaviors-based book.

**I want you to walk away with a personal, implementable plan for becoming a Hyper-Learner, including a way to measure your progress and get feedback from trusted others.**

Through Reflection Times and workshops, you have the opportunity to begin your own Hyper-Learning journey. As advised earlier in this prologue, I highly recommend that you start a Learning Journal for completing the exercises and taking notes while reading the book and for continued use and reference after.

This book and the model of Hyper-Learning I developed are based on the best relevant research and applied sciences from 500 leading academic articles and more than 180 books, and from 17 years of my own work in the areas of organizational and individual performance and leadership. I have primarily focused my time in academia on cracking the code of human excellence. This book is a continuation of that professional journey and my personal journey in striving to become my Best Self (I am still on it).

**At its core, this is a book about how to continually learn, unlearn, and relearn.**

**It is a book about how to optimize your uniqueness as a human being—what makes you different from the smart machines—so you can continue to stay relevant in the digital age.**

**It is a book about the power of human emotions, choices, and behaviors that enable the highest levels of human cognitive, emotional, and behavioral performance.**

**You cannot take comfort in the experience and skills that you now have. You will have to continually reinvent yourself, and that requires Hyper-Learning.**

Having to become your Best Self to engage in Hyper-Learning is not just about virtue—it's not just a nice thing to do once you've become successful—it's necessary to continually hone relevant and valuable skills.

## **OUR LEARNING JOURNEY**

I invite you to dive in, and just like being in the ocean, you may feel battered by the waves of the new, the different, and even the weird. But just as in the ocean, when you dive down under the waves, you will find calmness when you reflect deeply about the key points in this book and have High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations with trusted others.

I hope you embrace the learn-by-doing Reflection Times and workshops included in the chapters. May your read be joyous and liberating, and may it propel you on a meaningful journey toward becoming a Hyper-Learner.

## **PART 1**

# **Hyper-Learning Requires a New Way of Being**

# CHAPTER 1

## Achieving Inner Peace

**Inner Peace is the foundational building block of becoming a Hyper-Learner.** To engage in Hyper-Learning requires your Best Self—your highest-quality performance emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally—and you cannot operate at that level until, as a baseline, you cultivate a state of Inner Peace.

Inner Peace is an internal quietness or stillness, which I define as being fully present in the moment with an open and nonjudgmental mind and a lack of self-absorption. It's a state of positivity with limited stress and fear. **With those internal qualities, you are more open to:**

- Learning
- Stress-testing your beliefs (not values)
- Listening to learn, not to confirm
- Embracing opportunities, differences, novelty, and the unknown
- Considering opinions that differ from yours
- Building caring, trusting relationships
- Having High-Quality, Making-Meaning Conversations
- Attaining states of flow and collective flow with colleagues
- Cultivating openness and trust with others
- Managing your fears and insecurities

**With Inner Peace, you're more able to exercise choice in your thinking, emotions, and behaviors.**

You can decide between allowing your mind to wander and being present.

You can either engage with the negative emotions that hinder learning or take steps to mitigate their impact by taking deep breaths to relax or by actively thinking

about something else or by reframing the situation. For now, the key point to recognize is that you can *choose* to let emotions control you, or you can *choose* to manage your emotions. You can choose to actively generate positive emotions and “own” your emotions, or you can give others the power to determine your state of mind or state of heart by allowing their behaviors to heavily influence you for long periods of time.

**Inner Peace can help you mitigate natural tendencies that can get in the way of Hyper-Learning, such as:**

- Being risk-adverse and insecure
- Wanting to be liked and fearing exclusion from the “right” groups
- Wanting too much to win and generally viewing others as competition in a zero-sum game
- Being heavily influenced and consumed by your ego and constant mind chattering
- Overestimating the importance of “smarts” and underestimating the power of the heart
- Overvaluing logic, speed, and efficiency
- Undervaluing slowing down to really engage and really listen with a nonjudgmental, open mind
- Undervaluing the power of emotions and the power of your subconscious
- Undervaluing just being rather than always doing
- Dismissing the need to master self and emotionally invest in building trusting relationships

**Another way to think about Inner Peace is as the foundation of certain powers.**

### **The 10 Powers of Inner Peace**

- The Power of Serenity
- The Power of Humility
- The Power of Slowing Down
- The Power of Presence
- The Power of Reflective Listening

- The Power of Positive Emotions
- The Power of Reflection
- The Power of Emergence
- The Power of Being
- The Power of Owning You

**Cultivating Inner Peace can help you remove internal noise and distraction and help you align your inner world—your mind, body, brain, and heart—so you can better engage with the outer world. From this quiet state, you can allow your uniqueness to emerge.**

This chapter describes the four underlying elements of Inner Peace—a **Quiet Ego**, a **Quiet Mind**, a **Quiet Body**, and a **Positive Emotional State**—and provides practical guidance on how to cultivate them.

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### *Reflection Time*

Reflection Time means taking your time to think deeply—reflect and illuminate, illuminate and learn.

Please take your time and reflect on the questions I pose below.

Please think back to a recent time when you had back-to-back work meetings. Did you walk into each meeting with a calm, quiet mind?

Were you fully present or were you thinking about something that occurred earlier in the day or about what was coming next?

In each meeting, were you in a listening mode? Or were you critiquing or making judgments while another person was talking?

Was your body relaxed or did you feel tightness? Did you feel some nervousness, fear, or anger? Were you even aware of your body? Your breathing?

Did you spend time thinking about whether you looked good or appeared smart or were well liked by the others?

What does internal noise mean to you? Does your mind “talk” to you? Does it critique your performance? The performance of others? Does your mind like to judge others?

Did you know that with training you can quiet your mind?

Did you know that with training you can influence how you feel?

Did you know that your mind, heart, and body are all influencing each other?



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## THE SCIENCE OF US

To fully understand the power and necessity of Inner Peace for Hyper-Learning, you need to have a basic understanding of how the human brain, mind, and body work together. It's beyond the scope of this book to explain in detail the science of human thinking, emotions, perceptions, and behavior, but the following is a high-level summary of what the research says and how it challenges common beliefs. Making you an expert on brain science is not the object of this book. The purpose is to give you some background on how your thinking, emotions, and perceptions emerge so you have a sense of your starting point.

Each human being is a complex adaptive system influenced materially by his or her genes, social environment, and past experiences.

Humans are wired to seek safety and to *fight or flee* when survival is threatened, but we're also wired to make meaning and connect with others.

**Evolutionary science and psychology have also shown that we are social animals at our core. We survived as a species because we learned how to work together to adapt to volatile changing circumstances.**

**Research into our history and biology shows that we are not primarily competitive but have deeply ingrained tendencies to cooperate with others.<sup>13</sup>**

We have our brains and our bodies—made up of physical matter, chemicals, and electrical parts. And we have our minds—mental phenomenon and experiences created by complex neurophysiological processes.

### ***Our Brains and Our Bodies***

The human brain makes up only about 2 percent of the body's mass but uses 20 to 25 percent of its energy. For that reason, it has to work efficiently. Rather than lying dormant until triggered by stimuli to react or perceive the world, your brain is intrinsically active at all times, predicting what to do next to keep you alive and well.

It is constantly guessing which combination of past experiences and prior knowledge this current situation or sensation is most like in this context and what



should be done about it. Neuroscientists describe this process as one of *active inference* according to Bayesian probability.<sup>14</sup>

Your brain isn't just making predictions about what you will experience, however—it's actually constructing your every experience. Because the brain can't experience the world directly, it has to constantly create a simulated model of those experiences based on the bits of information it receives from internal and external sensations. Your brain makes meaning of that information—both anticipates it and explains the consequences of it—based on the data it already has from your past experiences and social and cultural learnings.

**In other words, your brain is always predicting what you will see, feel, and do well before you have conscious awareness of those predictions, and then based on those predictions, your brain actively constructs every thought, perception, and emotion you experience.**

**Put simply, your brain does not experience reality, it constructs it.**

As neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett explains it, “Your brain is wired for delusion: through continual prediction, you experience a world of your own creation that is held in check by the sensory world. Once your predictions are correct enough, they not only create your perception and action but also explain the meaning of your sensations. This is your brain's default mode.”<sup>15</sup>

To keep you alive and well, your brain has to anticipate and make sense of what's happening externally (in your environment) and internally (what's happening with your organs, tissues, nervous system, heart, hormones, immune system, etc.). The state of your physical body and the accompanying sensations (what is called *interoception*) are key to your brain's predictions and thus key to every thought, perception, and emotion you have.

Most of the time your brain makes the right predictions about internal and external sensations. When actual stimuli do conflict with a prediction, however, your brain can either update the prediction (i.e., it can learn or update its mental model) or it can ignore the conflict. The latter happens far more often than you're probably aware of, because your brain likes cohesive stories that fit within the mental model it already has.

Your brain likes efficient shortcuts and assumptions and is operating mostly outside of your awareness, so it takes immense motivation and effort to update your mental models—to recognize your own biases, challenge your own assumptions, think outside of the box, and learn something new. **This is why scientists say that we actually “see what we believe” rather than the reverse.**

In fact, research suggests that because children have fewer prior experiences and assumptions to draw from, they are better learners of novel information than adults and are more receptive to updating their beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

**Because of brain plasticity, however, the opportunity exists for all of us to continually rewire our brains, update our mental models, and improve our thinking.**

For example, you can expand the range of experiences your brain draws from to interpret and predict what you perceive, think, and feel. Expanding your perspectives and knowledge is one of the purposes of Hyper-Learning.

### ***Our Subconscious and Conscious Minds***

If our brains and bodies are our hardware, then our minds are our software, and many of us have an unrealistically positive view of our software's ability to process information. Our conscious minds can only process about 40 bits of information per second—about a short sentence. Our visual system can process 10 million bits per second, but only a small portion of that goes into our conscious minds.<sup>17</sup>

**As Edward O. Wilson says, “In our daily lives we imagine ourselves to be aware of everything in the immediate environment. In fact, we sense fewer than one thousandth of one percent of the diversity of molecules and energy waves that constantly sweep around and through us.”<sup>18</sup>**

The subconscious mind processes far more information than the conscious mind and plays a large role in every conscious thought, perception, and feeling. Contrary to dualistic perspectives, however, the distinction between our conscious and subconscious minds is not clearly delineated, nor can we say that one is better than the other. We actually operate at multiple fluid levels of awareness, and we engage in various types of thinking. For example, we can have highly focused, task-oriented conscious thoughts, and we can have spontaneous, meandering, and imaginative mostly subconscious thoughts, such as when we're daydreaming or dreaming while asleep.

**Our minds actually wander a lot—according to research, about 50 percent of the time.** When our minds are wandering, we aren't focused on the present moment, and we can get stuck ruminating about the past or obsessing about the future. As a result, mind-wandering can inhibit learning, reflective listening, emotional engagement, and effective collaboration. We all have an inner chatterbox—a constant self-talker, self-evaluator, or commentator of whatever is going on in our lives. It is this “monkey mind” that is constantly worrying about what other people think of us. (Well, they are probably not thinking about you because they are thinking about what you think of them. That is how the self-referential monkey mind plays.)

But mind-wandering can also be a great aid in thinking of new ideas, imagining different futures, and sensing new insights from data. Have you ever awoken in the

middle of the night or in the morning with a cool new idea? I bet you have. Where did that come from?

Have you ever taken a break from work and gone for a walk outside in nature, just resting and enjoying the smells, the quiet, and the colors, and a new idea or an answer to a current problem you were working on pops into your mind? That is the power of your subconscious, which is key to your ability to create, innovate, and imagine.

**Understanding the interplay between conscious and subconscious thinking and knowing how best to manage and leverage that interplay is becoming a very valuable human skill in the digital age.**

## ***Emotions***

How do emotions emerge? It seems obvious, doesn't it? Someone acts in a certain way or something happens that automatically triggers an emotional response and then a certain behavior. That is what I was taught. According to the latest science of emotions, however, your brain constructs an instance of something you've learned to call a particular emotion based on your past experiences and knowledge and the social and cultural norms that you've internalized. It may feel automatic to you, but your brain is, in effect, guessing that the situation you are in now with this set of factors and these sensations is like another situation in which you'd constructed an instance of a particular emotion. But again, your brain is sometimes wrong, such as when it constructs an instance of anger but you're actually just hungry, or when you experience what you believe to be warranted frustration, but really, you're just sleep deprived.

Like most people, you probably experience your emotions as inevitable, but it turns out that you (your brain) orchestrates them. That means you can choose to drill down and consider if a particular emotion you're experiencing is in fact appropriate in this instance, and you can choose how to behave in response. **You can slow down, turn off auto-pilot, and prevent inappropriate or unproductive emotional reactions.** One way to regulate your emotions, according to research, is to get really granular about how you're truly feeling and to label that sensation—deconstruct it. You can also pause to ask yourself if the facts truly warrant the emotional response predicted by your brain. These kinds of steps can help you manage your emotions in the moment, but they can also help rewire your brain so that the next time the situation comes up, your brain has a better prediction.

## ***Brain-Body-Mind Connection***

What the science is clear on is that our brains, bodies, minds (including all our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions) are profoundly interconnected. When I studied cognitive psychology decades ago, I was taught that humans have a rational side of the

brain and an emotional side and that being rational does not involve emotions. Well, modern science has proven that way of thinking to be wrong because our emotions are involved in every part of cognition—what we perceive, what we process, how we process it, how we file data, and how we recall data. Our emotions are integral to how we think. Our body is integral to our emotions and how we think. And vice versa. Later in the chapter, I'll explain the importance of positive emotions to thinking like a Hyper-Learner and to overcoming our often overactive physiological fight-or-flight response that can impede Hyper-Learning.

**The body plays an integral role in how we make social connections as well. We communicate with other people through our facial expressions, tone of our voice, and body language. If we truly trust the person we are interacting with, we often mirror his or her body language and can sync up physiologically, releasing oxytocin, a neuropeptide that plays a role in social bonding and is often called the trust or cuddle hormone.**

The brain-body-mind connection is why taking care of and listening to your body is so important to operating at your best. That brings nutrition, quality preventive healthcare, sleep, and exercise into the journey to your Best Self. Nurturing the body with sleep, taking work breaks (especially walks in natural settings), and not abusing the body in terms of food and drink are also crucial. You want a body that is sending positive signals to your brain.



I have posed the following questions to more than 2,000 senior executives:

- How do you think?
- How do you emotionally connect with others?

Very few can explain. Most say, “It just happens” or “I just do it.”

Now is the time to truly understand how it happens and to actively manage your human hardware and software.

**You can learn to take better control and more ownership of YOU—how you think, how you manage your emotions, how you behave, how you influence your body chemistry (I am not talking about drugs or alcohol), and how you overcome your ingrained automatic responses.**

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### ***Reflection Time***

What did you learn from reading the summary about how your brain and mind work?