



HYPER- LEARNING

**HOW *to* ADAPT *to*
the SPEED *of* CHANGE**

EDWARD D. HESS

HYPER- LEARNING

This page intentionally left blank

HYPER- LEARNING

HOW *to* ADAPT *to*
the SPEED *of* CHANGE

EDWARD D. HESS



BK[®]

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Hyper-Learning

Copyright © 2020 by Edward D. Hess

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921



Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

Individual sales. Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; www.bkconnection.com

Orders for college textbook/course adoption use. Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

Distributed to the U.S. trade and internationally by Penguin Random House Publisher Services.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Hardcover print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-8924-6

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8925-3

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8926-0

Digital audio ISBN 978-1-5230-8927-7

2020-1

Book producer: Westchester Publishing Services

Cover designer: Howie Severson

To Mother, Father, and Katherine

and

*To you—wishing you Inner Peace and
the joy of Hyper-Learning*

This page intentionally left blank

C O N T E N T S

PROLOGUE 1

PART 1: HYPER-LEARNING REQUIRES A NEW WAY OF BEING

- CHAPTER 1: Achieving Inner Peace 23
- CHAPTER 2: Adopting a Hyper-Learning Mindset 57
- CHAPTER 3: Behaving Like a Hyper-Learner 91
- CHAPTER 4: The Susan Sweeney Personal
Transformation Story 134
- CHAPTER 5: The Marvin Riley Personal
Transformation Story 152

PART 2: HYPER-LEARNING REQUIRES A NEW WAY OF WORKING

- CHAPTER 6: Humanizing the Workplace 165
- CHAPTER 7: Creating Caring, Trusting Teams 185
- CHAPTER 8: Having High-Quality,
Making-Meaning Conversations 205
- CHAPTER 9: EnPro Industries: Enabling the
Full Release of Human Possibility 227
- CHAPTER 10: Hyper-Learning Practices 250
- CHAPTER 11: The Adam Hansen Personal
Transformation Story 276

EPILOGUE 290

NOTES 295

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 301

INDEX 303

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 317

This page intentionally left blank

HYPER- LEARNING

This page intentionally left blank

P R O L O G U E

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.

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."

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.¹ 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.²

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.”³

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 mean-

ingful 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, life-long 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.”⁴

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."⁵

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."⁶

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.”⁷

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?