

CAREER MIND

NEWSLETTER



R&D

He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly into flying." - Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosopher

Companies with Research & Development sectors tend to have something they're either protecting, creating or advancing. Significant resources go into R&D because, like the individual, a company needs to continue learning and growing to flourish in its environment.

Like the company, every person has their own R&D department. It's called education. Formal or self-directed, personal R&D is the sector where professionals show differentiation.

THE AGE OF THE AUTODIDACT

My forecast: self-directed R&D will be the competitive edge in the AI era. This is the age of the autodidact, a fancy word for self-directed learner.

Why? Information is abundant. Assuming access to the Internet, not even including generative AI, the digital playing field is flatter.

A Net surfer can look up the same website as you on the other of the planet and read the same information in their native language. Information is no longer as special as it used to be. Curated information is special.

In terms of appeal, what a person knows will be on par with or become subservient to **how a person can learn what they don't know.**

Unlike some animals that can just start galloping right out of the womb, not knowing something is the default state for the human baby. When born we're just about tabula rasa for the material world with a divine soul and instincts. Then we explore the world, grow in awareness, learn things and expand.

Arriving into learning something changes your state, changes you. Each time you learn something you're a new being. Allow that to sit within the psyche for a moment and truly understand what that means.

If you don't learn then you remain stagnant and move backwards; nature shows us this is opposite of flourishing as all in nature aims to expand and grow, even prompting decay so the old can make way for the new.

R&D FUNDAMENTALS

Autodidact learning has some prerequisite capabilities; one is curiosity of an insatiable breed, two is grit or endurance, three is cognitive horsepower. Contrary to popular thought, each of these can be cultivated to grow with the reality that people will differ in potential, scale and intensity.



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*****Side Thought:** I remember visiting my former university years ago and overheard a psychology professor tell his students the brain stops developing for everyone at age 25. As if everyone on the planet has the same brain that functions the same exact way, or that people even age at the same rate. Our organs aren't even the same size from person to person. Ignored neurogenesis, how we form new neural connections when learning, how epigenetics reveals our genes literally switch on and off based on environmental influences. Could go on and on.***

I bring that up because it's insatiable curiosity that empowers a learner to plough through statements like this and do the work to discover for oneself if something is true. The autodidact settles their understanding with no knowledge tyrant.

R&D for the individual requires a bit of walking on the edge, like a pioneer or traversing the frontier. It's being a mad scientist, stoic philosopher, life warrior combatant and artist all at once. Inevitably you reach a point where your concepts are solidified after roughing them up enough; you can then integrate and apply in the world.

Up to this point some of you may wonder how is this applicable to career development. I'll ground it with a practical example that could be applied to any area of study.

*****Second Side Thought:** I'm not anti-formal schooling; I have a master's degree. I'm anti-formal-school-hegemony meaning, the assumption that formal schooling will solely provide the rigor for a person to develop into a flourishing being I hold as false. It has its purpose but it's not self-actualization. The person has to actively own the process through some form of self-education committed to a lifetime not a few years in an organized institution. What exists currently is the linkage between obtaining a degree and education completion. Once the degree is achieved, there is a sense of education being "done."***

PUBLIC SPEAKING - R&D STYLE

Let's choose public speaking as the subject. First question is, "Why public speaking?" No one should answer that but you. If it takes 2 weeks to figure out with clarity why you should choose to learn public speaking that's how long you should take. When you have your answer you'll know it came from you and not from someone else saying you should do it.

For this example let's say you wanted to learn public speaking because it would help you with communication at work. You do plenty of presentations and right now you're feeling average, just getting by. You want to become better.

There are several options you have. All should be explored around creating your learning environment.

YOUR LEARNING LAB

Reorient your environment to feed you. You need a place or places to go where you're immersed in information about public speaking. It can be your residence or another location.

Some source where you're retaining original thoughts about the learning is important. That could be a journal, digital document. Useful tool if you like apps is [Just Press Record](#). It offers voice recording and written transcription of your words.

The Lab also includes self-discovery. Options include assessments, SWOT analysis, past feedback about speaking performance if available, asking confidants for feedback on public speaking ability. You're collecting anecdotal information about the skills you already have related to public speaking. Maybe you're already talented but unripened not practicing enough, or maybe your talent is subpar and have to work your way up.

IMMERSION

This is where insatiable curiosity shines. If this is a skill you want then you'll need to be enveloped in it in as many ways as possible. Some options:

Video: Find 5 well-made YouTube channels about public speaking. Subscribe and turn on notifications. If the channels are frequent posters, you just created your own on-demand course about the topic. You can browse through the uploads and receive their notifications when new videos come up. Treat them just like you would an institutional course. Make a schedule in your calendar to watch a certain amount. Create a metric goal.

Audio: Those public speaking YouTubers you like might have podcasts. Check and see. If not, do some research to discover 5 podcasts about the topic. Use a similar strategy as the video. Subscribe, browse and learn. You now have an on-demand audio course. Make a schedule in your calendar to listen to a certain amount. Create a metric goal.



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Micro Learning: Certs, courses, short classes, full-fledged programs, workshops, conferences, you get the point.

Literacy: This can include actual books but the overarching theme here is becoming literate in your field. You understand the definitions, terms, concepts, techniques involved in executing the public speaking craft. That can also come from articles, essays, reports, case studies.

Before evolving a domain you first have to understand its fundamentals to some degree. Know enough about its technicalities to be able to destroy it and reinvent.

An autodidact creates an advantage by reaching beyond the constraints of formal schooling's structures. It's in these somewhat chaotic spaces that synthesis can occur; you begin to link concepts from one domain with another that produces more original understanding. It's also the space where the majority in a domain might think you're rather insane for your novel ideas.

Someone who has a narrowed vision due to only being able to see from their craft won't be able to perceive the connections you make. Until you produce something that's practical to understand.

For public speaking, that could be merging ideas from neuro-linguistic programming (ways of framing concepts and understanding) with symbology (study of symbols and meaning) to produce a unique way of displaying slide presentation content when speaking.

COMMUNITY

A type of immersion involving people. You could find one or a few public speaking organizations or meetups where the literacy is commonplace. When you're around people who are more advanced than you in the field you want to improve in, assuming you're humble, it'll motivate you to improve. Just by relating to people who do what you do and do it better you begin to reshape your own capabilities.

*****Caveat here** for the "if you're the smartest person in the room" trope. Someone is going to be the smartest in the room eventually. It doesn't mean you're automatically in the wrong room; you're probably in the right room at that time and just have a different role, perhaps to mentor or share what you know in service.***

Being in community with other aspiring or established public speakers will help to hold you accountable and keep your flame for it kindled.

Here is where you put yourself to the test. Endurance required. You have to publicly speak. All of the curiosity and cognitive horsepower will be in vain if you don't actualize the understanding.

For this craft you could:

- Find small venues to speak at.
- Set up your own YouTube or Vimeo page to speak.
- Make your own podcast and speak.
- Take out your handheld supercomputer, open the Voice Record app and speak.
- Speak while you're alone at home.
- Watch your favorite speakers speak and mimic what they're speaking, while they're speaking.
- Ask Generative AI to give you different speeches and styles to speak.
- Speak while close friends listen to you.
- Speak while not-so-close friends and associates hear you.
- Speak at the communities you joined.
- Speak to people you don't know while out and about in the world.
- Find more opportunities to speak to people on the phone.

It. Doesn't. Really. Matter where you speak as long as you're doing it and practicing the techniques. Make mistakes. The learner's grit will help to set aside the self-consciousness around how others may perceive it.

Eventually you improve, either through the sheer amount of experience gained, because you realized you have a talent for it or some combination of both.

In our example, all of this is to be done outside of a formal educational program.

You could major in public speaking (is it a major?) and still commit to autodidactic learning or study another major and pursue this with the same vigor.

Applied to the work environment, you become intentional with the opportunities to display your enhanced skills.

An opening to present? You take it. Receive acknowledgment for your new skills, you own it.

Bashful about owning it? Have a read of my recent [reel on receiving compliments](#).





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Trent Rhodes is an autodidact, career development leader, polymath writer & educator. With a passion for martial arts, tea and tech, he's an avid reader and writes on topics bridging futuristic career education and self-directed learning. Discover more of his work on his blog, [Crown of Mind](#) and [MasterLearn](#).

