

The February Dispatch: Investing in Yourself

The Holidays are over; Springtime isn't yet upon us. How do you spend this time "in between?" In this issue of the *Dispatch* we suggest some ways to use this time to your advantage. Lance begins by exploring how deepening your self-awareness can bring unexpected benefits. Davon writes about the difficult subject of accepting correction from others, a theme we generally affirm in words though often avoid in practice. Finally, Bill picks up on what he calls the "Big Learning," where career-altering possibilities confront you. Let us know your reactions!

A Different Kind of Intelligence Lance Woodbury

The winter months in agriculture, with a slower pace and more limited outside activities (except calving!), provide plenty of learning opportunities. And with all of the video conferencing and online platforms, there's no shortage of chances to improve our knowledge and skills.

However, I'd like to suggest learning more about yourself this winter. Use the down-time to develop a better understanding of who *you* are: your values and guiding principles, your behavioral style or personality preferences, your strengths and weaknesses, and your impact on others. Here are three quick ideas:

1. Imagine you are writing the cover page of your last will and testament. Before all of the legal jargon, you want to convey to your kids, grandkids, and future family members what was most important to you as you lived. Write down five important principles that have guided your choices throughout life.
2. Take an online profile. The [DISC tool](#) offers useful insights on your preferences. The [Kolbe profile](#) helps identify how you are wired to solve problems. The [StrengthsFinder](#) test helps articulate your gifts. The [Enneagram system](#) describes nine personality types. (These are just a few of the dozens of assessments.) For an even better experience, take any of these profiles along with your spouse or business partners and compare the results.
3. Ask some of your closest friends to describe your [Unique Ability](#). The idea comes from the [Strategic Coach](#) program, where they encourage you to send an email to 8-10 people asking them to reflect on your skills, passion, and energy. I did this over 10 years ago, and I still have the responses. They provide confidence when I'm struggling, and affirmation when I'm uncertain.

Any of the activities above will provide useful and enduring insights that will help you in your family relationships and business roles. You'll learn something important without spending any more time at a conference or on Zoom!

On "Learnable" and "Teachable" Moments Davon Cook

Steve Longbrake, Director of Culture at [Silveus Insurance Group](#), has led a varied life of business leader, athletic coach, minister, and executive coach. As he shares lessons learned from a career packed with personal interactions and observations, Steve makes a distinction, important for this essay, between a person being "learnable" and "teachable." Both can be useful, but they aren't the same thing.

Being learnable means we absorb and try to use new knowledge. We read business books, we attend trainings, we scour the internet, we observe others. Hopefully, we apply that knowledge. But too often for me, I absorb a compelling book or podcast but don't prioritize actually trying the new practices. I like the advice in *Crucial Conversations*, but I don't always remember to use it in the moment of stress. What we learn from outside sources is limited by our commitment to putting it to use.

Steve says being teachable, however, means being able to receive a strong rebuke and apply it. The rebuke may be hearing difficult feedback or correction from someone in your life. Do you accept it and change the behavior? Do you ignore it? Do you resist it? The rebuke may also be in the form of a failure or very stressful experience—we call these crucible moments. Do you repeat the mistake ten years later, or do you spend time identifying what will prevent it, and build a system to do so? Or the rebuke may be rejection in a business or personal relationship that you weren't expecting.

I think being teachable means being able to improve from a tough situation. Such challenges, whether external or self-imposed, are what really teach us lessons that stick. A quote from [Rumi](#) on my desk says, "If you are irritated by every rub, how will you get polished?" The more teachable we are, the more we internalize learning and act differently because of it – and the more polished we become.

The Big Learning

Dr. Bill Long

Lance and Davon have skillfully treated common, though centrally important themes in our life. In this essay, however, I want to take the concept of investing in oneself in a new, and perhaps initially frightening, direction. I call it the "Big Learning," and it can best be illustrated through a story.

I have a very-accomplished friend in his early 60s who is a surgeon. A lot has happened in surgery since he went to medical school in the mid-1980s. When he turned 50 he said to me, "Bill, I am facing a career-altering decision. The wave of the future is robotic surgery, but this development came after I finished school. Learning it in the full pressure of a medical career is challenging, time-consuming and a bit scary. You have to learn precision in a completely different way. I don't know if I am up to the challenge."

For the next year I hardly saw him at all. Two or three nights a week he was involved in training sessions. Reading took most of the rest of his time. He later told me that he almost gave up on several occasions. The point was, he wryly told me, patients and their families just won't understand it if you get their loved one's robotic surgery 80% right.

Well, he eventually mastered this new skill, and people benefitted from his decision. But he got there only because he didn't back down from the most daunting decision of his career. Are there things that beckon you like this? Not just reading a book, but learning a completely new skill or mastering knowledge that will aid you and others? Until you look into this, you won't know the exhilaration, or the fear, of climbing a big mountain in the middle of your days.