

The background of the entire image is a stack of books. In the foreground, an open book is shown from a top-down perspective, with its pages fanned out. The pages are aged and yellowed, and some text is visible on the left page. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a sense of depth and texture.

HOW TO BATTLE AND OVERCOME THE

Knowledge Seduction

Dan Oblinger and Allan Tsang

Knowledge is power.

You cannot help but read this phrase if you spend any amount of time on the internet, especially on LinkedIn!

Who would quibble with such a simple, powerful, and empirical truth? We would.

Knowledge may be the single greatest obstacle to becoming a great practitioner. As coaches of one of the most intense, intellectual activities that humans perform, we have come to see knowledge as a seductive obstacle for many of the students in our negotiation coaching programs.

We see clues to this counter-intuitive reality all around us!

- Backdrops of books in pictures, videos, and on Zoom calls, most of which the owner has not read.
- Endless podcasts, webinars, and other mass media designed for consumption of knowledge, not development of capability.
- Masterminds, workshops, and “bundles” featuring workbooks, books, magazines, and DVDs or digital downloads designed to let the knowledge buyer “get rich quick” or “hack” their way to wealth.
- The “contrapreneur” industry of knowledge dealers and grifters and their high glitz merchandise and seminars.

Beyond these social and cultural clues, we have seen more compelling proof that knowledge is not necessarily powerful: the struggles of our students. They are often seduced by their quest for and storing up of knowledge. They want to “know” everything before they “do”.

ANALYSIS PARALYSIS



A common phenomenon in human decision making is the effect of overloading an actor with data. The abundance of knowledge often leads to analysis paralysis. We get so focused on making sense of everything, we do nothing!

The causes of this disability are complex. Partly, this is caused by fear of failure, embarrassment, or loss. We falsely deduce that there is “*N*” amount of knowledge we must acquire before we mitigate all risk and victory is assured. If we study long enough and hard enough, we can achieve perfection.

That’s not how human performance arts like negotiation, dancing, sports, martial arts, painting, singing, or just about any worthy activity works! Getting stuck in intellectual study prevents us from going dynamic with our learning. This is certainly the case in studying negotiation habits and theory. Putting the knowledge to work and discovering what theories do when attempted against an uncooperative counterparty are a critical component of mastery.

THE PROPER USE OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is not useless. In fact, it is necessary! It's just that knowledge is not sufficient for anything worthwhile. Knowledge is best used to identify the chief tasks or activities we must master to become reliably successful in a



craft. Core skills, best practices, strategies for improvement, and case studies can all be identified through study. Once we know what it is, we should be mastering in terms of skill, and once we understand the options for rehearsal and coaching in these areas, the need for active and exclusive knowledge gathering ends. The time for skills-building and risk-taking begins.

Without this shift, we cling to knowledge. We cite books, theories, studies, and Ted Talks, without ever testing whether these bits of knowledge work! It's safer and feels better to droop knowledge rather than throw down in a sparring session.

WHEN KNOWLEDGE GOES IT ALONE

As practitioners and coaches for negotiation, we often see students deploy material they have acquired as knowledge and never developed into a skill or habit. These attempts to regurgitate knowledge nearly always lead to failure and confusion. This is because the student is mimicking a technique or tactic without understanding the proper use and limitations of the method in an actual negotiation with an actual person who probably didn't read that book to know how they were supposed to respond!



When placed under stress, knowledge flees. You've heard of and probably experienced "drawing a blank". That is because knowledge is not resilient. Habits are. No one ever developed a good habit from reading a book. It takes performance under near reality conditions and solid coaching to accelerate the habit formation problem.

THE ANTIDOTE



The antidote to knowledge addiction is a healthy balance of knowledge and skill-building exercise. Stop buying books you will never read! Start reading the books you have, and then seeking mentors or coaches who can help you do what the book says!

Intentional rehearsal means filtering the knowledge for actionable, practical guidance and then putting it into motion. For instance, in negotiations we often encourage students to recognize all the opportunities for negotiation around us. Then, taking these opportunities to try things out and observe results. This process repeated over and over can eventually lead to an amazing habit. Want to supercharge this effort? Add a coach who is a practitioner. One who has already taken risks, had success, and overcome failure. Someone with a depth and a breadth of experience. Perhaps with 10,000 repetitions under gameday conditions or a decade of continuous service in a high-value activity like negotiations.

SEDUCTION

Knowledge seduces. It draws us in through the promise of intelligence and wisdom. It blunts our passion for performance and causes contentment with amusement and pridefulness through the parroting of wise sayings. Unfortunately, those that give in to her seductions will find it hard to take the plunge into the risky and often embarrassing world of skills-testing or coaching.



Resist the seduction. Learn the foundation and the best practices and then develop the discipline to go out and test them! Try new things and closely observe so that you can keep what works and discard what doesn't. In so doing, you develop an authentic and effective style. You'll need this to

forge habits that last and won't let you down when the going gets tough.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Converting knowledge into capability is a crucial aspect of the craft process. In the end, we hope to produce amazing culture and resilient habits from that spark of knowledge. We think workshops and coaching are great ways to begin to build a bridge from knowledge to these goals. Contact us for a free discovery session to find out what that might mean for your business and your life!

Knowledge is not power. It is potential power. Only the application of knowledge can produce anything of consequence. So, let's get busy!

What is Mastery?

Allan once had the opportunity to ask Jim Camp what mastery looks like. This was his response:

The ability to participate and function effectively in a human performance event with focus, clarity and emotional control, through effective trained decisions, solving problems as they arise while moving the event forward to a result.

READY TO HONE YOUR SKILLS?

Allan Tsang and Dan Oblinger are the principals and founders of Oblinger & Tsang, the premier consulting and coaching negotiations firm in the marketplace today. If you are in sales, executive leadership, procurement, or professional services and negotiate scope and fee, then you should make negotiation your craft. That means a hard look at your own habits in negotiation, listening, and discovery. We coach professionals to be excellent and resilient negotiators. It also means taking an honest appraisal of the negotiation capabilities in your organizational culture. We conduct audits and design and administer internal negotiations programs. In gratitude for reading this paper, please email us to book a free 30 minute consultation to offer your perspective on the issue and explore some options in being coached!



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