



A New Perspective on Learning for All Ages

By Marcie Stern, Strategic Coach and Consultant



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Fall is back-to-school time for kids, and it's a good time for adults to think about life-long learning as well. For children, school provides an opportunity to learn — not only academically, but socially, emotionally, and physically as well. They embark on academic journeys, new friendships, sporting activities, and enriching extracurricular activities.

In my experience, most kids don't approach the beginning of the school year with enthusiasm or an appreciation of how school will expand their knowledge and view of the world. Consider the mixed emotions kids typically feel this time of year:

- 1) Excitement — the fun of picking out school supplies and selecting new outfits, of making connections with old friends
- 2) Apprehension — concern about teacher assignments and being judged by fellow students
- 3) Trepidation — worry about homework, studying, report card pressures

Kids have many perspectives on education, and these attitudes are often adopted from parents, peers, and society. Take my oldest son, for example. He is entering 5th grade and has an innate value for learning and education. Even so, when he is asked if he's excited about the start of school, his first answer will be a resounding "yes," but it is quickly followed by a hesitant, "but I don't want a lot of homework." His negative view of "homework" quickly diminishes his excitement and hunger for learning.

To develop a more positive and palatable attitude about homework, we work on creating a new perspective. For example, we try to think of homework as simply "practicing what you're learning," similar to practicing the clarinet or Tae Kwon Do.

If you have children, think about your

perspectives on learning, achievements, or mistakes — what messages do you pass on to your children? They will pick up on it if you are tough on yourself with these issues, even if you are patient and forgiving with them. This can lead to undue anxiety about school and homework, so notice how they see you react to learning situations.

One difficulty for kids is that they are forced to "learn" about subjects that they may not have any interest in, or particular skills for — they may feel like a round peg being forced into a square hole. Adults may be apprehensive about learning as well, but at least they are able to choose the type of knowledge they pursue. Since Fall is the time of year associated with the start of school, why not take this opportunity to model life-long learning, and learn something new yourself?

Learning, regardless of your age, is a way to keep life interesting and active. Shmuley Boteach, Host of TLC's *Shalom in the Home* in his book *Ten Conversations You Need to Have with Your Children*, says, "Intellectual curiosity is one of the great blessings. Boredom, on the other hand, is one of the biggest curses. People who aren't curious, people who don't hunger for life, are dulled by their lack of interest and appetite."

To get yourself on the path to learning, consider the following:

- What interests would you like to pursue?
- What activity or hobby have you always had an interest in or passion for?
- What might be keeping you from a new activity?
- What advice would you give a friend or child if they wanted to learn something new, but kept making excuses? Give yourself that advice!

Then set your learning goals. Here are some simple steps to get you started:

1. Make a decision to do it. For example, say to yourself, "I've decided I'm going to take that photography class I've always wanted to."

2. Commit to a time period for your goal. For example, "I will start a photography class by October 15th."

3. Set small goals that will help you reach your primary goal. For example, "I will research photography classes, make a decision, and register by September 30th."

4. Before you start a new learning experience, determine, on a scale from 1–5, how much you know about the subject or your confidence level with the skill.

5. When you've finished the learning experience, evaluate yourself, on the same scale of 1–5, on how much you learned or how confident you've become with the skill.

6. Celebrate your improvement and your courage to take a risk by trying something new!

While these suggestions address learning from a more traditional definition, remember that learning does not need to come in the form of academic training, classes, books, or a webinar. Learning comes in everyday life, as well — in the simple pleasures of noticing how children live in the moment; of engaging in conversations with friends, family or colleagues; of observing nature, or listening to inspirational music. From this perspective, learning happens without your even realizing it; so pause, notice it, and appreciate its presence in your life. By doing so, you will extract new meaning and find the world more wondrous and interesting — all without ever cracking a book or taking an exam!

I'd love to hear about your goals and successes as you embark on a new learning adventure. And, for more information about "Finding Your Voice" Programs, contact Marcie at mstern@vocalconsult.com.

Marcie Stern
Strategic Coach & Consultant
Vocal Consulting
mstern@vocalconsult.com
www.vocalconsult.com