

# The Key to Powerful Learning: Slow Down to Speed Up

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## SLOW DOWN TO LEARN FASTER? HOW?

*Once you've read this free chapter, Clarify Your Goals: Aim High and Aim Low, we're sure you'll understand how!*

*Reading the full book, The Key To Powerful Learning: Slow Down to Speed Up, will:*

- *Help your brain become clearer and function more effectively;*
- *Help you set manageable goals to achieve success faster;*
- *Make your learning experiences even easier by offering practical Action Guides at the end of each chapter;*
- *Take you on a journey that is interesting, powerful, joyful and wonderfully satisfying.*

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Clarify  
Your Goals:  
Aim High  
*and*  
Aim Low

*Aim for the right goal in Life, because  
some moments can't be relived.*

*— Anonymous*



We are making a shift, now, from purpose to goals. Purpose is all about meaningfulness – why something matters. Goals are about specifics – doing or mastering something in the real, everyday world to give effect to your purpose and live your dreams. Just remember, however, that dreams and goals are different. It's exhilarating to dream of being a star on Broadway or a world-class scientist or a great communicator. Getting there calls for smaller, attainable goals.

The challenge is to aim just right. Not too low because that's not really a challenge and a part of us won't take it seriously. And not too high because that just puts it out of range and makes us feel inadequate. There are exceptions. Some people naturally and appropriately aim for the stars. That's them. It does not work for most of us.

The fact is that we're all different, and so we need to set goals that work for us, and not for anyone else – not even to meet someone else's expectations. This can be particularly difficult for kids and their parents, but that's just the nature of the challenge. As much as possible allow the goals to be the goals of the learner.

So what's the secret? How do we aim just right?

## THE SECRET OF SETTING MANAGEABLE LEARNING GOALS

The key is to imagine that we're two people, not just one. We are going to aim high and aim low at the same time! The way to do that is to tap into the part of us that is an adult – and also to the part of us that is a child. Here is an example.

*Executives and senior management need to know basic accounting, and one of the little secrets that many of them share is that some of them don't actually have a clue. So a program called "The Accounting Game" was developed. The serious, adult participants gather in a room. And then, after some introductions and so on, the room is suddenly transformed. They find themselves being invited to be young again, and to set up a sidewalk lemonade stand. And the task? To master basic accounting (including accounting statements) by taking basic steps like buying lemons and setting the price for a glass of lemonade. All the simple things that kids can easily learn how to do. The bigger principles and ideas develop from these basic everyday actions. (The process is now in a book that you can buy on Amazon with the same name.)*

## GOAL-BASED SCENARIOS

Behind the example above is something more generic. You are framing your learning goal in terms of a meaningful context. (Remember how much meaning matters.) Another term for this is what Roger Schank, one of my favorite educators and a leading figure in the development of artificial intelligence, called a goal-based scenario.

*Schank figured that the best way to help college students was to put them in an authentic situation where they had to acquire authentic skills by learning in real time in the real world. An example? In a course on radio journalism the students were asked to run the university radio station. They gathered information, operated the station, prepared the news and read it on air. In short – they were dropped into a goal-based scenario: a real world situation with a purpose and function that called for real world skills. And the learning, though immensely challenging, was phenomenal.*

Let's look, now, at some of the elements that made the process work.

### **1. The setting is a “whole” situation.**

The learning occurs in a scenario, a project, a game. Since, as we saw in Chapter 2, the brain/mind processes parts and wholes simultaneously, organizing the stuff to be mastered by the whole concept makes the learning far more natural.

### **2. The setting is simple but not trivial.**

Even though the example of the lemonade stand may be framed as if it involves kids, the entire situation is still meaningful. The goal is to make a profit, so the participants have to know how to measure and “account” for that. But it's a game so taking a loss carries almost no risk. That means that the adults can work at a manageable level but still grasp the fact that this will help them in more complex situations.

### **3. It's playful but serious at the same time.**

This state of mind is very powerful. It's the difference between being child-like and childish. More formally, my wife and I call it a state of relaxed alertness. It's engaging and interesting, without being threatening or too stressful.

#### 4. The situation allows for quick victories.

No matter how much we want to master some skill, it's a great feeling and a great comfort to have some early and quick successes.

Everything – every subject and every skill – can be framed so that the challenge is manageable: Not too big, not too small, but just right. Here are some more examples:

- Sometimes adults have an urge to study music theory or finally learn how to read. One little trick is to expand, blow up, enlarge key elements such as the size of the letters or notes of music. Sometimes the basic, ordinary form of something is just too small for comfort - the whole thing looks and feels too complex.
- In learning to cook, find a very, very simple recipe for something that is very tasty. The first time I ever did this was in college many years ago. I came across *The I've Never Cooked Before Cook Book*, and it was fabulous. In fact, decades later, it is still going strong. This is one of the ways that I began to cook again when my wife and I needed it.
- Follow the design of online games. There is an entry level and then additional layers, waiting to be discovered and mastered as players become more proficient. Many other activities are very game-like – trading baseball cards is a great example. Just think of all the different subjects and skills that can be incorporated naturally into the game and business of trading cards!

## ACTION GUIDE

1. Rethink the skill or skill set that you want to acquire. This time, make sure to keep it simple. Instead of becoming a great communicator, perhaps you could begin by being a better listener to your spouse or partner and/or your kids.
2. Paint a scene. Your scene. A clear scene. See it and, as much as possible, hear it and feel it in your bones – like leading your team out onto the field, or listening in a way that genuinely helps the kids in your school. In addition to writing a bit about it, draw it, or look for photographs that convey the scene that you can put on your wall or create a space in your house that gives off the “vibe” of this skill and setting.
3. Simplify the scene or project or setting. What would it take to make the goal smaller and the setting easier to deal with?
4. Slow down to speed up. For some people, time is of the essence. But remember the old question: How come we never have time to do it right but we always have time to do it over? Give yourself all the time you need, and then even more. This is not always possible, but it’s often much more possible than we think it is.
3. Sit back. Relax. And enjoy the journey. If the dream doesn’t stick immediately, or there are doubts, or it’s not as clear as it might be, join the club. These things take time and the key is just to begin. It’s called setting the stage.

# About the Author

Geoffrey Caine has spent his life learning about learning and listening, both in the course of his career and as abiding interests. Amongst other things he has been a professor of law, education services manager for a software company, education consultant, and process coach. He spends most of his time writing, speaking, conducting workshops on deep listening and deep learning, and enjoying the arts loving mountain village of Idyllwild, California, where he lives with his wife, three cats, and four glorious seasons.

Geoffrey has written two e-books in his *Listening to Life* series, both available on Amazon Kindle. *They are 9 Skills for Listening to Life and 5 Essential Elements for Creating a Culture of Listening.*

Geoffrey and his wife, Renate, have also written nine books and many articles applying their synthesis of the research on learning from psychology and neuroscience to help improve teaching and enhance education at all levels. Their two most recent books on education are:

*Strengthening and Enriching Your Professional Learning Community: The Art of Learning Together* (2010, ASCD).

*Natural Learning for a Connected World: Education, Technology and the Human Brain* (2011, Teachers' College Press).

**You can find Geoffrey on-line here:**

[www.Thewayofthelerner.com](http://www.Thewayofthelerner.com) goes in depth into the inner shifts that learners need to make in order to see the world and themselves in new ways.

[www.Cainelearning.com](http://www.Cainelearning.com) is a living archive of the Caines' work and writings on learning, listening and education for the last 25 years.

[www.thts-n-pieces.net](http://www.thts-n-pieces.net) features Geoffrey's whimsical, semi-spiritual writing on invented topics.

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