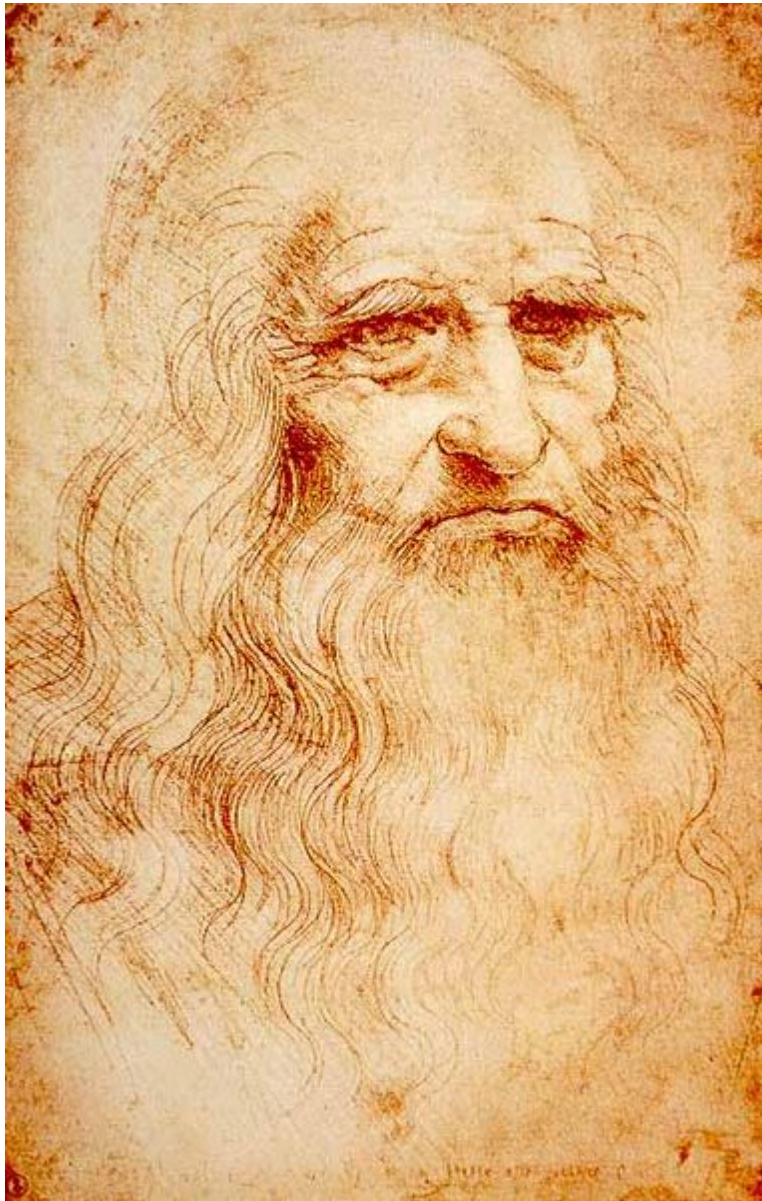


Personal Development for Polymaths



Hunter Nuttall

"A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects."

Robert Heinlein, *Time Enough for Love*

Introduction

My name is Hunter Nuttall, and I guess you could say I'm a little unfocused.

I considered majoring in biology, chemistry, economics, or psychology (possibly with a minor in English or art history), before finally majoring in math. But close to graduation I switched to computer science, barely getting into grad school without the prerequisites.

Today I write software for a living, but I don't specialize in anything. On any given day, I might use some combination of C++, C#, VB, Java, JavaScript, T-SQL, Perl, PHP, Crystal Reports, Silverlight, and whatever else is needed. And I've never considered my job to be more than a small part of my identity.

I often play four tables of online no-limit Hold'em and one table of chess or Go, while watching a comedy or sci-fi movie on AMC.

I've trained in taekwondo and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. I'm currently training to do the splits and run a marathon.

I meditate by juggling five balls in a half lotus position. I can solve Rubik's Cube and write with both hands. I appreciate surrealist and Renaissance art.

I wrote a novel about mesothelioma, which I adapted into a screenplay. I've written blog posts about everything from Abraham Simpson to zodiac signs. I write haiku for people when prose doesn't feel fancy enough.

I lend money to entrepreneurs in developing countries. I make awesome sausage-stuffed mushrooms. I study things like the Riemann zeta function for fun. I set fashion trends with my socks and shoes.

I don't belong to any political party, because I agree with points on each side. I don't practice a religion, because they feel artificially constraining. I don't adhere to a fixed life philosophy, because I think it's best to be adaptable.

And because of that, I've often felt like a square peg being forced into a round hole.

Maybe you've felt this way too. Maybe you don't define yourself by your job title, despite the widespread expectation to do so. Maybe you find it strange that people always ask "What do you do?" when the obvious answer is "It depends on the circumstances."

People used to get by just fine with a scripted life plan. Get a good education, get married in your early 20s, women focus on raising their 2.5 children, men do the same work at the same company until age 65, and they all live happily ever after.

But the reality is that the world is vastly more complicated and unpredictable today than it was in the 1950s. The traditional life plan doesn't work anymore. You have to write your own.

Enter the 21st century polymath.

“Polymath” comes from the Greek word “polymathēs,” meaning “having learned much.” Also known as a generalist, Renaissance (wo)man, jack (jill) of all trades, scanner (as opposed to diver), Homo Universalis or Uomo Universale (universal person), this kind of person traditionally has significant knowledge or expertise in a variety of fields.

I’m going to broaden the term and say it also refers to having diverse interests, hobbies, and concerns. It’s the opposite of a “monomath,” someone who’s obsessed with one thing and doesn’t pay much attention to anything else.

Polymaths and monomaths are at opposite ends of a long and nebulous spectrum, impossible to define and pointless to even try. These terms are really just conceptual and not meant to actually label people. I’m sure not going to provide a Cosmo-like quiz to help you tally up your points and classify yourself.

A common misconception is that polymaths are supremely well-rounded superhumans who can do everything under the sun at a world class level. Let’s clear this up right now. No one ever has or ever will even come close to being good at everything, and that’s just fine.

Leonardo da Vinci (yes, that’s him on the cover) was the prototypical polymath: artist, inventor, painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, mathematician, physicist, philosopher, humanist, alchemist, biologist, naturalist, anatomist, geologist, technologist, astronomer, cartographer, botanist, cryptographer, geometer, draftsman, designer, scenographer, stylist, musician, and author, among various other things.

He was an outlier among outliers, the archetype of the Renaissance man at the height of the Renaissance. The geniuses’ genius, perhaps the most diversely talented person ever to have lived, with unquenchable curiosity and feverishly inventive imagination.

Yet despite his undeniable brilliance, we hear nothing about his breakdancing ability, his 40-yard dash, his tennis serve, his ski jump, his triangle choke, his slapstick comedy routine, his opera voice, his guitar playing, his lion timing, his hostage negotiating, and so on, and so on.

He did everything he wanted to do, not everything there is to do. So the modern day polymath can cut themselves a little slack. Everyone has major holes, but trying to fill them all means ignoring your passions and strengths to work on things you hate and suck at. How can that possibly be a good thing?

Don’t hold yourself to an impossible standard. Remember that times are different now, and the extreme (though still mortal) example of Leonardo bears little resemblance to the polymath next door.

Do you have intense interest or significant proficiency in areas that are usually considered unrelated? Do you struggle with finding something to focus on, because you think you’re supposed to? Would you find your life to be empty if it was all about one thing? Do you think specialization is for insects? If so, you might be a polymath.

And if you're drawn to multiple things, you should pursue multiple things. I'm not saying that it will necessarily result in more money (though it might), or greater simplicity (it certainly will not), or improved social standing (your results may vary). But if you're wired that way, the polymath approach will let you get a lot more out of life.

But how can you be sure? How do you know you aren't really meant to be a monomath? Because if you were, you wouldn't have to ask. It's not a choice, so don't fight it. You have to just dive in, and see how deep the rabbit hole goes. Let's begin now.

The Stu Ungar Story



Do you ever think that your life would be perfect, if you could just find one thing to focus on and become world class at? Well, it doesn't always work out that way.

Stu Ungar began playing cards as a kid in his father's bar in the early 1960s. He quickly found that he had a knack for it with his photographic memory and genius IQ. He won his first gin rummy tournament at the age of ten. After his father died, he dropped out of school in 10th grade to play gin full time to help support his mother and sister.

As he began winning tournaments regularly, he developed a reputation of being one of the best players in New York. Before too long, he was able to demolish any challenger. He took on Harry Stein, who was widely regarded as the best gin player of that generation, and won 86 games to 0.

He was so good that he soon had a hard time finding willing opponents, even though he offered handicaps to level the field. Casinos asked him not to enter tournaments because too many people said they wouldn't enter if he did.

He had the same problem with blackjack. Casino owner Bob Stupak bet him \$100,000 that he couldn't count down a six-deck shoe and tell him what the last card was. Stu won the bet, but now being a known card counter, found that no casino would let him play.

Fortunately for him, there was still plenty of action in poker, the game he's best known for today. He quickly became a dominant force, tearing his opponents apart with unprecedented aggression and a hand reading ability that seemed to border on clairvoyance.

In 1980, he was dubbed "The Kid" for being the youngest person to ever win the World Series of Poker main event (and its \$365,000 prize). He won again in 1981 (for \$375,000), got married in 1982, and had a daughter that same year.

Sounds good, right? But you're only hearing part of the story.

You see, despite all his brilliance at card games, Stu wasn't very good at much else. He was shockingly ignorant of how the world works, found it difficult to get along with people, and consistently showed poor judgment and eccentric behavior. Some examples:

- When applying for a passport, the agent said that he could have it faster for a small fee (referring, of course, to the official expedited processing fee). Stu coolly slipped the agent a \$100 bill and was nearly arrested for attempting to bribe a public official.
- His Mercedes broke down because he let it run out of oil, not being aware that cars need maintenance. Perhaps because of that, he rarely drove, and used taxis to go almost everywhere.
- He never had a bank account, and instead kept his money in hotel safe deposit boxes because he thought it was ridiculous that banks weren't open at midnight. He also didn't understand that you can't write a check unless you first put money in your account.
- Personal hygiene didn't come naturally to him. He rarely washed his own hair, and instead paid a stylist to do it twice a week.
- When going out to dinner with friends, he would call the restaurant ahead of time, place the orders and tell them to have the food ready when he got there, inhale his meal as quickly as possible, and be ready to leave when his friends had barely started their drinks.
- After being fined \$500 for allegedly cheating in blackjack, he successfully had the fine dropped - after spending \$50,000 in legal fees and travel expenses.
- In 1981, he was nearly banned from the World Series of Poker for spitting in a dealer's face.
- He was notoriously arrogant at the card tables, berating people every chance he got. Fellow poker player Doyle Brunson said, "I've never hit anyone in 40 years of playing poker, and I almost hit Stu at least 5 times."

Being so obsessed with cards, he was a fish out of water anywhere else. He suffered from a severe lack of social skills, emotional control, and common sense. His life was completely out of balance, and he would pay dearly for this in the coming years.

Fast forward to 1997. Stu was divorced, he had neglected his daughter, and his son had killed himself. His face had caved in from years of cocaine abuse, and he wore large blue sunglasses to conceal his collapsed nostrils.

Despite having made an estimated \$30 million from poker, he had squandered his fortune

on drugs and betting on sports and horses. He was now deep in debt and on the verge of homelessness.

Some aspects of his life may have been beyond repair, but he still had a chance to at least fix his financial situation. He pulled himself together enough to win the World Series of Poker main event tournament for a third time, becoming the first (and still only) person to do so.

His new nickname became "The Comeback Kid," and he had his half of the \$1,000,000 first prize (split with his friend who fronted the \$10,000 entry fee). More importantly, he had a chance to rebuild his life.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Within a few months, he had spent all his winnings on drugs and reckless sports betting. Now physically unable to snort cocaine, he had switched to smoking crack. Although he was expected to defend his poker title in 1998, he felt that showing up in his condition would be more embarrassing than not showing up at all.

On November 20, 1998, Stu was found in a cheap motel room, dead from coronary atherosclerosis at the age of 45. His friends chipped in to pay for his funeral.

The year before Stu's death, an interviewer had asked him about his personal problems. Stu's response summed up his life perfectly:

*"There's nobody who ever beat me playing cards.
The only one who ever beat me was myself."*

Be Like Water



You're well aware that Bruce Lee was one of the most influential martial artists in history. But why? In large part, it was because of his holistic approach to training and developing his own style.

Whereas most martial artists spent almost all their time practicing their fighting skills, Bruce thought it was essential to work on physical conditioning. So he created a training routine to develop his whole body.

He built up incredible strength in his fast twitch and slow twitch muscles through weight training. He gained amazing endurance by running, jumping rope, and riding a stationary bike. He achieved terrific flexibility through stretching exercises. And he toughened his fists by repeatedly plunging his hands into buckets of gravel.

He believed that a high-performance body needs the right fuel, so he paid lots of attention to nutrition. He lived on a diet free of baked goods and refined flour, and heavy on raw and juiced vegetables. He boosted his metabolism by eating four or five small meals a day, along with small healthy snacks. And he added extra nutrients to his diet with protein drinks and vitamin and mineral supplements.

Bruce originally trained in Wing Chun, a close-range form of kung fu, but he eventually ran into its limitations. He decided that traditional martial art styles were not practical because

of their emphasis on flashy techniques and artificial point systems. He wanted to create a style focused on combat realism, designed for the spontaneity of a real life self-defense situation.

To do this, he had to step outside all boundaries. So he experimented with every style that might have something to offer, from Wing Chun to boxing to fencing. He was looking for whatever worked, wherever he could find it.

He wanted his new style to emphasize directness, simplicity, flexibility, speed, and efficiency. By being open-minded and immersing himself in many different styles, he figured out how to blend together different techniques to achieve those goals.

His new style would cover all four ranges of combat (kicking, punching, trapping, and grappling). It would unite many important concepts such as simultaneous attack and defense, controlling the centerline, and being a half-beat ahead of your opponent. It would truly be the style of no style.

But it was never his intention to just lump together every possible move, and slap a label on the resulting bloated mess. He needed to decide what to keep and what to cut out, so that everything would fit together and flow well. So he worked like a sculptor, starting with a lump of clay and hacking away at what wasn't needed.

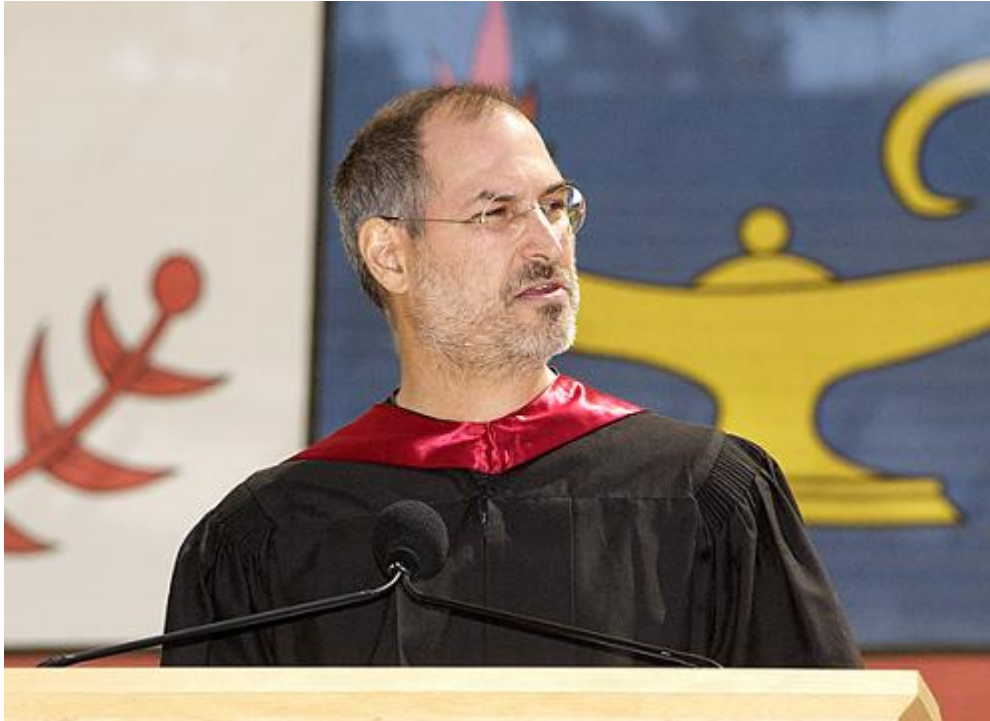
He called the end result Jeet Kune Do, or Way of the Intercepting Fist. But that name was just a label for convenience and not meant to imply yet another fixed style. He would often refer to it not by name, but as "the art of expressing the human body."

The term Jeet Kune Do refers not just to his style, but to the process he used to create it. He didn't want his students to simply imitate him. He wanted them to develop their own style through extensive study and personal experimentation, absorbing what is useful and disregarding what is useless based on critical self analysis.

In other words, he wanted them to be like water. His advice:

*"Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless, like water.
If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup.
You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle.
You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot.
That water can flow, or it can crash.
Be water, my friend."*

Connect the Dots



OK, you're like water. Now what? Now you connect the dots.

At his 2005 Stanford commencement address, Steve Jobs told a story about connecting the dots. He was talking about following his curiosity and intuition, finding that some of his seemingly random experiences would later prove to have an unexpected but priceless significance.

The example he gave was how dropping out of Reed College gave him the freedom to ignore degree requirements and take whatever classes interested him. He dropped in on a calligraphy course that seemed totally impractical at the time, but ten years later he would use this knowledge to build beautiful typography into the first Mac, and by extension, all personal computers.

He said that you can't connect the dots looking forward, so you just have to trust that they'll one day connect looking backwards. Well, that's true when you're hoping to find practical applications from dots out of left field, but if you're a bit more flexible and you pick your dots well, you might be able to connect them looking forward, or at least increase their chances of connecting someday.

Steve's personal library wasn't heavy on management and technology books. He read the classics, poetry, and books about spirituality, enlightenment, and vegetarianism. Why? Because he was always looking to connect the dots, which undoubtedly helped him create Pixar, the iPhone, and other things, as well as giving his life a wonderful balance.

So then, how do you go about connecting your dots? Well, it will be different for everyone, and I can't possibly give you a complete step-by-step guide. But I can certainly give you some ideas to start thinking about.

Follow your curiosity and intuition

Do what Steve Jobs did, and move in whatever direction you feel drawn to. Take up a new hobby, read a book outside your usual genres, audit a class that looks interesting, talk to people who seem very different from you.

Will everything turn out to be worthwhile? Of course not, but you can quickly decide whether you made a wrong turn, or found something you want to pursue. You can't always tell in advance which dots will connect, but at least you can have fun along the way.

Out of ideas? Try reading [random Wikipedia articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Random) (bookmark "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Random"), and see where that takes you. (Maybe limit yourself to three a day, to avoid getting lost down the rabbit hole.)

Be open to cross-pollination

Sometimes different things are out there, just waiting to be combined.

Elvis Presley fused white country music with black rhythm and blues to become the King of Rock and Roll. Pablo Picasso combined Greek, Iberian and African art to pave the way for Cubism. H. B. Reese put chocolate in his peanut butter, creating a confectionary icon.

But sometimes the sources aren't so obviously related. Leonardo da Vinci's paintings *Mona Lisa*, *The Last Supper*, and *Virgin of the Rocks* are considered masterpieces not just because of his artistic techniques, but because of his detailed knowledge of anatomy, light, botany, geology, and the way people show emotion.

Decades ago, it was likely that someone's occupation would require them to do just one thing. But more and more often, people are needing to borrow from other disciplines. And for good reason - they often have something to add because of an underlying connectedness.

Game theory, a branch of mathematics originally meant to solve economic problems, is turning out to be directly applicable to foreign policy and evolutionary biology. Fields such as psychology and behavioral sciences are finding new applications in human-computer interaction. New interdisciplinary fields keep popping up, including nanotechnology, quantum information processing, bioinformatics, and sustainable development.

Solving global problems such as economic collapse, peak oil, the water crisis, species extinction, and climate change will surely require thinking outside the confines of any one discipline.

So whenever you feel pulled towards something, even if it doesn't seem all that relevant, don't resist. You never know what you might find.

Fix weaknesses, but only when it makes sense

The better you get at something, the harder it will be to show continued improvement. But if you work on something that you're not very good at, there's a good chance you can make significant progress quickly.

At the same time, trying to fix all your weaknesses is a sure way to waste a lot of time being miserable in a hopeless pursuit. Lack of experience can be easily overcome, but lack of talent and interest cannot. If you don't show some promising signs early on, there are probably some underlying issues that will be too hard to fix.

Bad example of fixing a weakness: You've never played the piano before, but you think you should learn in order to be well rounded. You don't particularly like classical music, you find practice to be really boring, you find it nerve wracking to play in front of other people, and it really aggravates your carpal tunnel syndrome. But no pain, no gain, right?

Good example of fixing a weakness: You're horrendously out of shape and on the verge of type 2 diabetes. While looking into various solutions, you develop a mild obsession with cooking low-glycemic meals and going on long, easy bike rides. You figure you'll never win Iron Chef or the Tour de France, but you look and feel good, and you have plenty of time for other things.

Outsource the dots you don't want to connect

When you're sick, you think "I need to see a doctor," not "I need to go to medical school." Unless you happen to be a doctor, you would never think of trying to treat a significant medical issue yourself.

So why not outsource more of the things you don't want to handle personally, freeing up your time and energy for what you want to do? Personal assistants can handle large amounts of ongoing work, contractors can tackle projects as they arise, and sites like [fiverr](#) let you outsource an enormous array of small tasks.

Be a jack of related trades

Despite the term's popularity, no one has enough time on this planet to be a jack of *all* trades. But you can easily be a jack of many trades by staying within the same general family and taking advantage of transfer of learning.

Shel Silverstein did just that. Mystery fiction editor Otto Penzler wrote: "The phrase 'Renaissance man' tends to get overused these days, but apply it to Shel Silverstein and it practically begins to seem inadequate. Not only has he produced with seeming ease country music hits and popular songs, but he's been equally successful at turning his hand to poetry, short stories, plays, and children's books...His unmistakable illustrative style is another crucial element to his appeal. Just as no writer sounds like Shel, no other artist's vision is as delightfully, sophisticatingly cockeyed."

Shel had a very broad range within a loose collection of fields, but it's not like he was starting over from scratch with each new venture. He had a unique style that he developed by deliberately ignoring the work of others, and enhanced it through his diverse experiences. He was always tweaking it to fit his current project, but by finding common ground with his previous work, he was easily able to adapt to something new.

Be a jack of unrelated but specialized trades

An alternative to the previous approach is to branch out to much more distant dots, but stick to a specialty within each one.

Let's say you want to be a part-time jazz musician, and your favorite instrument is the tenor sax. Should you stick to that one instrument, or succumb to the temptation of also playing the other kinds of sax, not to mention the trumpet, trombone, clarinet, double bass, piano, and drums?

You'll surely find that focusing on the tenor sax will give you almost all of the benefits of being a jazz musician, but with better results and in much less time than trying to do everything. Then instead of investing your extra time in another instrument, you can satisfy a different set of urges by doing something else entirely.

Different niches within a field may seem similar, but sometimes they actually require very different skills, which don't always naturally occur in the same kind of person. So you have to question whether you really need to kill one bird with two stones.

On the TV show *So You Think You Can Dance*, people saw how rare it is to be a well-rounded dancer, when styles were assigned by the luck of the draw. You had to feel sorry for the ballerinas who attempted krumping, or the breakdancers who were forced to do a Viennese Waltz.

A kitchen staff operates within the brigade de cuisine hierarchy, where each position requires different skills and different specialized training. People go to culinary school and become an apprentice to learn how to be a saucier (sauce cook), pâtissier (pastry chef), rôtiisseur (roast chef), or one of the other traditional specialties, or they may study a particular ethnic cuisine.

Poker players know that the cold-blooded calculations of limit games are different from the sick bluffs and hero calls of no-limit games, while the risk management of cash games is different from the all-in-and-pray mentality of tournaments.

Singers are classified into different voice types based on qualities such as vocal range, tessitura, timbre, and vocal transition points. Some people can accommodate a few different types, and others will find their type changing over time, but everyone gets the best results by staying within their natural range. Singing a role for the wrong type can damage the vocal cords and end a singing career.

Boxers don't choose a style so much as they adopt the one that fits their talents. Out-fighters rely on reach, hand speed, reflexes, and footwork. In-fighters absorb blows while moving in for short-range attacks with nonstop aggression. Punchers combine elements of both, though they can't beat either style at their own game. While each style has an advantage against one and a disadvantage against the other, boxers know they're locked into their style and can't effectively change it to fit their opponent, as much as they would like to.

If you have two stones, just ask yourself...do I want a slightly better chance of killing one bird, or a good chance of killing two?

Be a macro-generalist and a micro-specialist

These are terms that Tim Ferriss used in his [jack of all trades](#) post, where he claimed that it's possible to become world class in almost any skill within one year.

Prior to setting a world record in tango and getting to the semi-finals of the world championship, he had no experience in any kind of partner dancing. So he practiced 6-8 hours a day for 8 months to learn what he needed. He got there, then he moved on.

For 8 months, he was most definitely a tango specialist. But this was just one of his dots, and once he had gotten what he came for, he went back to being a generalist, looking for the next thing he wanted to temporarily specialize in.

While the point of this is to experiment and have fun along the way, you may stumble upon something you'd like to settle down with permanently. If that happens, you might decide to drop the generalist approach. But only by trying out a lot of different things first can you be a specialist with no regrets.

Keep your own da Vinci notebook

Leonardo was notorious for not finishing things, even when he was paid to do them. His many notebooks contain enough unfinished material to fill many lifetimes.

But the fact that many of his ideas and projects were unfinished certainly didn't make them worthless, either to him or the people who followed in his footsteps. (Codex Leicester, one of his 30 scientific journals, was purchased by Bill Gates for \$30.8 million, making it the most expensive book ever sold.)

You can use a notebook to record the many ideas that flow through that beautiful brain of yours. Moleskine is a common brand for this purpose, as it resembles a style that was very popular in 19th and 20th century Europe and used by Oscar Wilde, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, Henri Matisse, and Bruce Chatwin.

Very often you'll get an idea that you can't devote enough attention to right now. By writing these things down, you'll know your ideas are safe and you can free up your mind for other purposes. Your notes may also kick off a brainstorming session that leads you to unexpected places.

Your notebook can hold your thoughts until you're ready to act on them, until you see how they fit into the big picture, or until you're ready to hand them off to someone else. Just remember that your notebook is a brain dump, not a to-do list.

“The good enough job”

Life coach [Barbara Sher](#) coined the phrase “the good enough job.” (She also coined the term “scanner,” a near synonym for the kind of person I'm calling a polymath.)

The idea is that polymaths tend to expect too much from their jobs, wanting to find complete fulfillment and freedom of self-expression with infinitely flexible assignments. I came across a blog commenter who said something like, “For everyone who thinks this is realistic, try searching monster.com for an opening for ‘jack of all trades.’”

While some people have found a job that provides everything they need, it's probably a lot easier to find a job that's not the answer to all your problems, but good enough to keep doing it while you seek fulfillment elsewhere.

Say you have a job with an easy commute, with pleasant coworkers, that doesn't take more than 40 hours a week, that doesn't force you to eat lunch with one hand while frantically sending out emails with the other, and that doesn't have you tearing your hair out. It might not be the job you've always dreamed of, but isn't it good enough?

Because unlike a lot of people, you won't be so drained at the end of the day that you can't even think about doing something more taxing than watching TV. You'll be able to go home each day with free time and free energy, and then the world is your blank canvas.

Maybe you can't have what you want through your job, but that doesn't mean you can't have it at all. When you lower your expectations just a bit, you'll see that it's perfectly fine for your job to be just “good enough.”

Get your nectar, but then move on

Another idea from Barbara Sher is how polymaths resemble bees. Bees visit flowers for their nectar, but while they're there, they get some pollen on them. When they go off to another flower, they transfer the pollen, and the cycle of life continues.

It is not in anyone's best interests for the bee to just stay with the same flower forever, overfilling on nectar while not delivering the pollen. But that's what you're doing when you stick with an activity after you've gotten your fill. If you're no longer getting as much out of something as you'd like to, it's time to move on.

While others may see that as quitting, you know better. Maybe you've gotten the 80% of the benefit that comes from 20% of the effort, in accordance with the Pareto Principle. Maybe you're going for mastery rather than perfection, since you're well past the point of diminishing returns.

If another flower's nectar looks sweeter, go for it. Enjoy both the journey and the many destinations.

Your mind as a computer

Personal development blogger [Steve Pavlina](#) has used the metaphor of the mind as a computer. Your computer can run a web browser, but it itself is not a web browser. It can run a word processor, but it itself is not a word processor. Your computer runs these programs and controls their execution, but you would never confuse a program for the computer itself.

Your mind is capable of holding different points of view, but it does not have to identify with them. They are just programs that can be loaded, unloaded, and tweaked as needed. Your mind can run any program it wants, but it should always remain in control, and never become the program.

Labels aren't always as black and white as they seem. If someone asks if you're a Democrat or Republican, for example, what are they really asking? Whether you're registered as one or the other? Whether you have an unbroken history of voting as one or the other? Whether you agree with every decision that all the leaders of one party have ever made?

Any program can become a virus that takes over the computer, and then the label drives your mind. You think, "I'm a _____, so I believe in _____ and I have to _____ and I can't _____." That's completely backwards.

Every label, every point of view is an abstraction of the truth. It makes things much easier to conceptualize, but it's inherently limiting. The minute you say "I am a _____," you buy into these limitations. While you may decide to subscribe to a particular viewpoint, don't

accept the false choice of having to either identify with it or reject it completely.

You can try out a raw food diet without declaring yourself a raw foodist. You can read a book on Taoism without registering as a Taoist. You can ponder the Freudian interpretation of a dream without being a Freudian.

But then you need to ask yourself whether you want to continue running the program as is, make some tweaks, run it at a later time, or try something else. You may find that there is no one program that completely solves every problem.

And then you see why asking "Are you a _____?" is often a flawed question.

Conclusion

A wise man once said, "An expert is someone who learns more and more about less and less, and eventually knows everything about nothing."

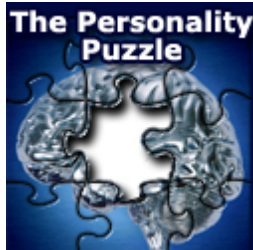
If you're personally bringing us closer to a cure for cancer, then I think you should focus on just that, and we thank you for your sacrifice. Otherwise, maybe you're meant to branch out more.

The world needs specialists, but that doesn't mean you have to be one of them. Someone made from the polymath mold is not a failed specialist, but a different creature altogether. If you want to move in multiple dimensions, don't ever let anyone hold you back.

Feel free to send this ebook to someone who might enjoy it, and come visit [Personal Development for Polymaths](#) the blog, where we talk about life, the universe, and everything.

Be like water. Connect the dots. Be too complex to categorize.

Also by the Author



[The Personality Puzzle: Understanding What Makes People Tick](#)

"Hunter has put a lot of effort into making this book fun...but it could also help save a marriage or avoid conflict with a co-worker...If you are like me you will find the book fascinating...I certainly wasn't disappointed with the insights this gave me about myself."

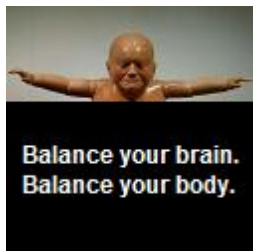
- Peter Clemens, [The Change Blog](#)



[Greatness Without Genies: The Law of Attraction for Realists](#)

"I have believed in the Law of Attraction, although not in the simplistic way it is portrayed in *The Secret*. I think Hunter's book is a great way for folk who don't have great spiritual beliefs to take advantage of the positive benefits of the Law of Attraction."

- Cath Lawson, [Boldpreneur](#)



[Ambidextrous: A Guide to Developing Two Dominant Hands](#)

"Cultivating ambidexterity is one of the greatest ways to stimulate your brain. With this ebook, he not only tells us all the facts and myths behind ambidexterity, but also shows us how to actually become ambidextrous. Whether you want to avoid RSI injuries, better use your brain capacity, or just have fun, this ebook is for you."

- Luciano Passuello, [Litemind](#)