

12 Things Top Authors Wish They'd Learned In School But Never Did

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#AlwaysLearning

One of the boons of being an adult is that you can do things your way. Eat what you want, stay up late, wear what you want, and choose to focus your free time learning just what you want. Complemented by readily accessible online courses, webinars, YouTube lecture series and much more, autonomous learning experiences reveal much about both our underlying desires and our educational systems' underlying deficiencies.

So, what do we choose to learn about when the choice is solely ours? With this question in mind, we asked a handful of the world's top bestselling authors one simple question: What do you wish you'd learned at school, but never did? Following, their answers and a complementary reading list we designed to match up with the skills they wish they'd learned.

1. Denise Lee Yohn – How To Be A Good Leader

Teacher! Leave those kids alone! In traditional education systems, there is a lot of emphasis on following, obeying, and conforming to the crowd. It's no surprise that two powerful personalities — Virtual Mentor Michael Hyatt and *What Great Brands Do* author Denise Lee Yohn — are both hankering for more emphasis on leadership in schools. Instill in children ideas about what makes a good leader and what leadership looks like at a young age, and they'll grow up with a better foundation for how to give and receive leadership, encouragement, and coaching. When thinking about learning better leadership skills, a great starting point is Daniel Pink's book *Drive* where he discusses the ins and outs of motivation and how to foster a growth mindset.

2. Ann Handley – How To Be Confident

A fierce wordsmith and brand marketing maven, it's hard to believe that Ann Handley has ever suffered with confidence levels, which makes it even more important that she spoke up! We could all use a little shoring up sometimes. If you'd like to boost your confidence when writing, check out Handley's book *Everybody Writes*. For more on confidence in general, check out *Don't Sweat The Small Stuff... And It's All Small Stuff* by Richard Carlson; a must-read for anyone who wants to improve their confidence and relationships with others.

3. Tim Sanders – How To Speak Another Language

Speaking different languages gives you new ways to understand the world. *Love Is The Killer App* author Tim Sanders wished he had learned Spanish in school, while crime writer Val McDermid opted for German. For tips on how to learn any language quickly and never forget it, check out *Fluent Forever* by polyglot Gabriel Wyner. A fan of rapid language learning, he nailed German in 14 weeks and perfected his French in 5 months. *Ja, oui, sí* — sign us up.

4. Amanda Palmer & Taylor Pearson – How To Be Compassionate

The quest for compassion was brought up by the inimitable [Amanda Palmer](#) and *End of Jobs* author Taylor Pearson but it's an idea that resonates with all of us. To understand how you can cultivate compassion in your life, check out [Twelve Steps To a Compassionate Life](#) by Karen Armstrong. A former nun, Armstrong set up the Charter for Compassion, which has been signed by hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Armstrong's book is a must-read for everyone looking to bring a touch of consideration and tolerance to their day-to-day lives.

6. Philippa Perry – How To Understand Individual Challenges

British psychotherapist Philippa Perry brought a personal bent to the conversation with her frank admission of how, growing up, she was made to feel inadequate by a limited education system that was ill-equipped to identify and deal with her dyslexia. Perry's book [How To Stay Sane](#) focuses on how to use stories to shape the way we view the world and suggests 30-minute exercises to help us to stay sane when the world seems to be shifting violently beneath us. For practical advice on how to address dyslexia in children with the power of music, check out [The Brain's Way of Healing](#) by Norman Doidge.

5. Adam Alter – How To Code

With a new digital economy comes a desire for new skills, and learning how to code is top of this list. [Drunk Tank Pink](#) author Adam Alter wishes he had been exposed to coding at an early age. What does this shifting emphasis mean for the future of the economy? Jaron Lanier's [Who Owns The Future?](#) helps put it all in focus.

7. Ben Greenfield – How To Meditate

Physical and intellectual growth are often considered the points of emphasis in a child's education, however mental and emotional development is just as important. This was high on fitness and health guru [Ben Greenfield](#)'s list. Don't just take our word for it; for an insight into the power of meditation from the point of view of a neuropsychologist, check out the blinks to [Buddha's Brain](#) by Berkeley professor Dr. Rick Hanson. This fascinating book extols the merits of meditation and backs it with neuroscience.

8. James Wallman – How To Be A Rock Star

Turns out, top authors want to be rock stars, too. James Wallman, author of [Stuffocation](#), can get a glimpse into the realities of the music industry in [How Music Works](#) by David Byrne of Talking Heads fame.

9. Brigid Schulte – How Important it is to Play

Brigid Schulte, author of [Overwhelmed](#), a trailblazer when it comes to envisioning alternative ways to cope with stress, tweeted about the importance of play as a discovery tool. Play is one of the most powerful means of discovery we have and it's a baked-in human urge, to boot. It encourages innovation and experimentation, plus, it eliminates fear. Schulte's emphasis on play also lines up with a chapter in Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner's [Think Like A Freak](#) that uses the power of play and free-thinking to explain why children are so much better at unraveling magic tricks than adults.

10. Richard Koch – How To Play Tennis (The 80/20 Way)

Tennis is a skill that *The 80/20 Principle* author Richard Koch wished he'd learned at school. This is pretty specific, but it *does* jive with the idea that regular physical exercise is key for a healthy, productive mind. As a follow-up question, we asked whether the 80/20 principle can be applied to tennis and Koch replied:

Game. Set. Match.

11. David Burkus – How To Actually Use Math In The Real World

David Burkus, author of *The Myths of Creativity*, operates in the world of creative expression, innovation, and entrepreneurship. At first glance, his learning wishlist may sound less than enthralling, but understanding statistics can help us to run experiments that illuminate the workings of the world around us and our own innerworkings, too. What's more, there is actually great beauty in mathematics as *The Magic of Math* shows. See? Your answer is not so boring after all, Burkus!

12. Austin Kleon – How To Embrace The World As Your Classroom

Austin Kleon, author of *Steal Like An Artist* needed just one small tweet to make a grand point: many of life's most valuable lessons are ones we'll only learn outside of classroom walls. A book with a supporting philosophy is Kio Stark's *Don't Go Back to School*. Stark shows how degrees are not the be-all, end-all for a successful life, presenting a strong case for independent learning along with principles you can use immediately to be successful with what you're working on outside of the classroom.

What do you wish you'd learned in school? What lessons do you wish you'd come to earlier in life? Tweet us and let us know with the hashtag [#AlwaysLearning](#), and we'll find the right book for you, too!

WHAT

WHO

ABOUT THE WRITER

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Sarah leads content marketing at Blinkist. She has been working with start-ups for over six years. She enjoys reading, writing, and researching publishing innovations. She is a fan of well-organised Google Docs and cheese jokes.

Sarah's recommended read is *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* by Marie Kondo.

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