

SESSION 10. ONE THING YOU CAN'T HIDE

Audio Transcript

I'm sure you'll agree that we acquire the skills of living successfully through knowledge. Knowledge, properly applied, is power – and knowledge is available to everybody.

The degree of a person's ignorance will determine his place in the world. Everyone is born ignorant and must, for a time, live in ignorance. But remember this: Anyone who remains ignorant has only himself to blame.

In our society, an illiterate person is in the lowest level our social heap. From that starting point, think once again of society as that pyramid, with a broad base, gradually rising to a high point. We know that the great majority of people are to be found in the bottom, large layers of this pyramid. The higher you go, the smaller the layers. At the very peak of the pyramid, you'll find the world's most brilliant people. We may not have the native equipment to reach the pinnacle – although we certainly might – but we do control where we will live between the very top and the very bottom. We can, most assuredly, get into the top 5 percent.... And from there, we can live well and successfully all the days of our lives. It isn't that we want to be over anyone; it's just that we have the ambition and good sense not to settle for anything less, to want to live the best we can.

Remember, the higher you climb on a pyramid, the farther you can see, the fresher the air, and the less crowded it becomes. Another rewarding thing about climbing is that as we climb, we help most of those associated with us to climb, too.

One of the most important ladders leading to the top is knowledge. The more we know, the higher we can climb. But where does a person begin? No one person can know everything – in fact, our store of knowledge is growing far too fast for anyone to keep up with it. It's like walking into the Library of Congress, with its millions of volumes, and trying to decide which single book to read first – knowing that even if we lived a thousand years, we couldn't read them all.

Fortunately, the answer to this perplexing problem is known: A person should begin with the study of his language, and then study his general area of interest. Those two steps, in that order, can move us right up there, to the top of the pyramid.

First, the language – in our case, English. Not enough people realize that it is our ability to use our language that will determine our place on the social pyramid – and that will also control, to a great extent, the amount of money we will earn during our lives.

A person may dress in the latest fashion and present a very attractive appearance. So far, so good. But the minute he opens his mouth and begins to speak, he proclaims to the world his level on our pyramid. George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, which was later adapted into the musical comedy *My Fair Lady*, is an extreme example of what I'm talking about.

Our use of our language is the *one thing we can't hide*.

Many years ago, the graduating class of a large university was given an examination in English vocabulary. The test scores were graded into groups of 5 percent – the top 5 percent, and so on to the bottom. At regular intervals during the next 20 years, questionnaires were sent to the surviving graduates, asking them their occupations, incomes, and so on. Without a single exception, those who had scored the highest on the vocabulary test were in the top income group, while those who had scored lowest were in the bottom income group.

Reader's Digest published an article by Blake Clark titled “Words Can Work Wonders for You.” In it, he wrote: “Tests of more than 350,000 persons from all walks of life show that, more often than any other measurable characteristic, knowledge of the exact meanings of a large number of words accompanies outstanding success.”

In his article, Clark also mentioned the work done in this field by scientist Johnson O'Connor, and he gave O'Connor's best illustration of the importance of vocabulary: Tests were given to executive and supervisory personnel in 39 large manufacturing plants. The results showed that every one of the people tested rated high in the basic aptitudes that go with leadership. Differences in their vocabulary ratings, however, were definite and dramatic. Presidents and vice presidents averaged 236 out of a possible 272 points; managers averaged 168; superintendents, 140; foremen, 114; floor bosses, 86. In virtually every case, vocabulary correlated with executive level and income.

Children with the best vocabularies get the best grades in school.

A salesman in his 50s who scored in the bottom 5 percent in vocabulary worked himself into the top 45 percent, and he is now vice president of his firm.

“An encouraging fact to keep in mind,” Blake Clark went on to say, “is that when we master one word, we find that we have added several others. It's as if the new one is a nucleus of thought around which whirl numerous related ideas that we now come to understand. Deliberately learning 10 new words, we pick up probably 90 more, almost without realizing it.”

You see, understanding our language is the key to studying and learning everything else.

Literally millions of people are being held back in life simply because they've never taken the time to learn their own language.

Let's face it: From the earliest times, the favored class of people has always been the educated class. They can make themselves recognized instantly, anywhere, by the simple expedient of speaking a few words. Our language, more than anything else, determines the extent of our knowledge.

You see, everything in all the vast storehouse of knowledge has a name, a label. These names, these words, make up the language. The more words we know and can properly use, the more knowledge we have. Of this you can be sure: A person's knowledge and his vocabulary go together. It's almost impossible for one to be greater than the other...

Make it a point to acquire books that will help you improve your vocabulary. You'll find them valuable additions to your library and an enormous help in your career.

In addition to vocabulary, effective English usage is important. This entails learning the parts of speech, what they mean, and how they should be used to construct sentences. Your usage, too, is a reflection of your present knowledge.

Right now, mentally rate yourself on your knowledge of your language. Would you say your rating is "excellent," "good," "fair," or "poor"?

If you rated yourself "excellent," you're in the top 0.1 percent of the population. If you said "good," you're already definitely in the top 5 percent. If you rated yourself "fair," get a good book on English at your bookstore, and study it. And if you rated yourself "poor," take a home-study or night course in English. Many excellent courses are available.

Impress on your youngsters the importance of knowing their language, the importance of speech.

More people speak English now than any other language on the planet, with the possible exception of Chinese. English (and American) literature, from Chaucer to Eliot, from Shakespeare to Hemingway, is the richest and most extensive on earth. So when you're studying English, you're studying one of the world's greatest languages and most interesting subjects.

If you think you don't have time to study, listen to what Louis Shores has to say: "Each of us must find his own 15-minute period each day for reading. It's better if it's regular. The only requirement is the will to read. With it, you can find 15 minutes, no matter how busy the day. That means you will read half a book a week, two books a month, 20 a year, and 1,000 in a reading lifetime. It's an easy way to become well-read." And it takes just 15 minutes a day.

Now let's discuss our second area of study: our general interest. Everyone has a main interest. This is true of the salesperson, doctor, architect, executive, or student. Reading in this area is for profit. We should read for pleasure as well.

Once we have a regular program to improve our knowledge of our language, we should begin a systematic study of the field that interests us most and that will help us reach our goal just that much sooner.

I received a letter from a woman who listens to my radio program. In her letter, she said it was her ambition to write poetry. There was a telephone number on the letterhead, so I called her. I asked her how long she had been studying poetry, and what kind of a collection of published poetry she had. She told me she didn't have a single book on poetry and had never read it as a study.

I mention this because it's so often the case. People will say they want to do a particular thing, but a bit of questioning quickly reveals that it's a whim – not a real and important goal to them.

If we're interested in boating, we subscribe to boating magazines, and usually have a collection of books on boating, stories of the sea, a collection of the works of Joseph Conrad, and we usually

know, down to the bilge pumps and mooring lines, exactly the kind of boat we want. I know, because I have such a collection. I also have a wonderful collection of books on English, including several excellent dictionaries, a number of books on writing and style and mistakes to avoid, as well as poetry, great fiction, the Great Books of the Western World.

Our company has published one of the finest audio programs on vocabulary building ever produced. And you can listen to it, and repeat the words, as you drive your car. Other motorists might think you're a bit batty, but you'll be learning in the best way possible – by listening to and repeating a fine vocabulary of the English language.

Most languages can number their words under 200,000. The English language has more than 600,000 and is still growing every day. None of us can learn them all, although professors of English come very close. Incidentally, the person who ranks second in the country in the use of his language is the corporation president, and that's no accident. Our ability to translate our thoughts and ideas into words, in a powerful and effective way, is inextricably linked to our growth in the world of business, or any other organization.

In addition to English, each of us should have a good working knowledge of world history and, especially, the history of our own country and the history of the idea of human freedom. Millions of Americans don't know how truly fortunate they are to be able to openly criticize their government and its leaders, to be able to bring suit against public officials, to call an attorney of their choice in case of arrest, and to be judged by a jury of their peers.

Do you know that as far as is known, there has never been a verdict of innocent in a Soviet court? If you go to trial in the Soviet Union, believe me, you're found guilty, and you're going to prison or a work camp. In hundreds of countries, you could be subjected to torture without recourse.

Some years ago, my wife and I were talking to a couple in South Africa, a white couple, and they said to us, with feeling, "My God, when the plane lands in the United States, you can smell the freedom."

Most Americans, believe it or not, don't know anything about the idea of personal liberty, or how difficult it was to come by, or how precious it is. Nor do they have the foggiest notion of their true options and opportunities.

I think a good personal library is essential. It should contain good books and a dozen or so excellent audio programs. The audio program is the greatest innovation in learning since the invention of the printing press. It's effortless, yet so effective. When you listen to the human voice, you're learning in the way you learned most of what you know. It's the most natural way to learn. And while a book is often read only once, audio programs can be easily listened to over and over, months and years later. You can listen to them while you're doing other things – dressing in the morning, driving the car, having a snack, or sitting at the dinner table, so that the entire family can soak up some information.

Those without a good library – and they don't even build bookshelves in American homes anymore, unless they're specified by an architect – are seriously handicapped. They miss so much of

the fun, the joy, of learning the things we want to learn. Books and audio programs are not an expense item. They're an investment – and, as far as we know, the best investment on earth. They pay us dividends out of all proportion to their small cost – and not only in pleasure and knowledge, but also in cash, in income.

As someone has written: “Books extend our narrow present back into the limitless past. They show us the mistakes of the men and women before us and share with us recipes for human success. There's nothing to be done which books [and let me add audio programs] will not help us do much better.”

To try to live without constantly expanding our knowledge is to close our eyes – not just to the whole purpose of life, but to the facts of life as well. Never before has the world moved so rapidly as it's moving today. We must make up our mind to move with it, to stay up with it, to grow and prosper with it, or to just fall by the wayside. It's not only because expanding our knowledge is the best way to our goals, but also because it's the way to really enjoy living – as the skillful sailor enjoys the sea.

So often, a person will live in the shallows from force of habit – or because those around him are wasting their time – without realizing that only a thin screen of reeds separates him from the fine, deep ocean beyond. He can sail to any chosen port – if he has taken the time and expended the effort to build a good boat.

Now let me make an important point. The person who knows where he is going, and who has made up his mind to get there, is going to make the grade, regardless of education. If an education is necessary to the accomplishment of his goal, he will get it. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence and determination.

Yet I think it's important to succeed in every department of our lives, and becoming well-educated is one of the most vital. What good is a large material success if a person has remained too ignorant to enjoy it? Or to administer it?

Now let's recap:

Knowledge is power. The greater your knowledge, the more power you can exercise over your life and your future.

Think of human society as a pyramid, composed of layers – beginning with a broad base and narrowing to a pinnacle. Pick the place on the pyramid you're going to shoot for, and start climbing.

Since there's far too much knowledge for any one person to assimilate, where can you start? First, with your language, and next, with your general area of interest – two subjects that can keep you growing and interested for the rest of your life.

Remember that your language is the one thing you cannot hide – except by silence. Bring it up to the point where it can do the job you want it to do for you.

To a surprising extent, your ability to use your language and the extent of your vocabulary will determine your income and your future.

Listen to our excellent audio programs on vocabulary building, and spend at least 15 minutes every day reading something not only interesting, but also calculated to stretch your mind a little more. Remember that a mind stretched by a new idea can never again return to its original dimensions.

It's estimated that the average person adds only five words a year to his vocabulary. That's not nearly enough for this day and age. You should add that many words to your vocabulary each week. Many popular magazines publish features that will help you in this area.

And, finally, realize that graduating from school is just the beginning – the commencement – of your days and years of learning. And with wisdom will come kindness, patience, love, understanding, and success as a person. It's never too late to begin.

Exercises — Write your answer in the space provided below

1. Rate your knowledge of the English language. Is it “excellent,” “fair” or “poor”?

2. Set goals for improving your vocabulary and usage. (Include books to read, audio programs to listen to, courses to take, a number of new words to learn each week.) Make a list of them here.

3. Set goals for increasing your knowledge of your area of interest, for upgrading your job skills. (Include books and periodicals to read, audio programs to listen to, courses and seminars to attend.) List them here.