Why You Shouldn't Get Married… To Your Ideas

In David Epstein's book "Range: Why generalists thrive in a specialized world", he dives into the pros and cons of being a generalist vs a specialist. We'll explore these concepts to see how Epstein challenges the conventional wisdom that success can be achieved only through hyperspecialization.

Do Head Starts Matter?

For every person who succeeds because of a head start, you can find a late bloomer who succeeds without it. Let's take Tiger Woods and Roger Federer. They are both arguably the best in their sports, yet their path to success couldn't have been more different.

Woods' father recognized him at the young age of two as a golf savant. Due to his father's devotion and Tiger's deliberate practice, Woods is a perfect example of a specialist.

Now let's look at Roger Federer. He had a much later start, only getting into tennis seriously at the age of 12. When he was young, he was into a lot of different sports. It wasn't until he recognized his talents with tennis that he found his life's path. This is the more common arc.

Experience doesn't always lead to expertise. For every person with a head-start, there are more success stories from the late-bloomers. We just don't celebrate them.

Modern World Complexity Complex

"Great rewards will accrue to those who can take conceptual knowledge from one problem or domain and apply it in an entirely new one." - David Epstein

People who live in modern society think differently. The introduction of computers, software, and digital devices has expanded our knowledge of the world. The onset of the internet exposes us to new ideas and new problems to solve.

Epstein argues that modern tools and experiences help guide us in ***how*** to think and not just ***what*** to think. These tools help us think critically and digest the overload of information constantly presented to us.

If we want to solve complex problems in a modern world, we need a range of tools and experiences, coupled with critical thinking skills.

Sample Wide

"The sampling period is not incidental to the development of great performers—something to be excised in the interest of a head start—it is integral." - David Epstein

When I was young, I played the clarinet and saxophone. Neither resonated with me, but drumming is where I found my passion for music--though teachers told me I first had to understand music theory.
I learned that my path to music came from a sampling period. Once I found my way to the instrument, I needed a tutor to structure lessons and expose me to the range of activities and music in order to explore drumming more fully.

The most accomplished musicians typically play three instruments. Yo-Yo Ma, for example, went from the violin to the piano before strumming on the cello.

Epstein argues that sampling periods are crucial. They allow the sampler to organically discover what they love doing.

Learning Spaced

“Nobody's ever had their life changed by a book they skimmed.” - David Perell

We want instant gratification. When you read a self-help book, you instantly feel like it should solve the problem you have. You take a writing course, and you immediately want to write like David Perell.

Spacing is one concept that Epstein talks about. Splitting up your practice or learning into a few different times instead of cramming it all in at once. Sahil Bloom recently posted about Spaced Repetition, which is a proven method of learning and retention. The core method is consuming information at increasing intervals until it’s committed into long-term memory.

Have you ever tried to cram for a test the night before, only to miserably fail? What if you digested the material over a period of time instead? Spacing your learning can help with this.

The most effective learning strategies can be slow and paced.

Thinking Outside The Internet Box

“In a wicked world, relying upon experience from a single domain is not only limiting, it can be disastrous.” - David Epstein

What happens when you come across a problem that you have no experience with? Today, we have Google. We can rely on outsiders’ points of view to help us have a more informed perspective on any given problem. By looking at the outside POV, we can make better decisions to solve our problem.

Let’s take writing this listicle. I’ve read the book Range, but in order for me to explore the book through other readers’ eyes, I needed to do research. Hearing different points of view on this book helped me formulate my ideas on the subject of each chapter. Like the sampling period described in the section above, I sampled articles from **The Atlantic** and **NPR**.

Consider outsiders' views when formulating your perspective.

Too Much Grit is Bad?

“What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?” - Vincent Van Gogh

A lot has been written about the power of grit and pursuing passion with perseverance. But is grit always good?

Van Gogh spent most of his life as a failure. Surprised? He was a student, a bookseller, a teacher, an art dealer, and an aspiring pastor. It wasn’t until his late 20’s when he picked up a book called "The Guide to the ABCs of Drawing" where he found his “true” calling. What if he doubled down on teaching or preaching? There are walls in my house that would shed a tear.

It can be better to quit while you're ahead or if you’ve clearly taken the wrong path. Just don’t quit because it’s the easy way out.

Be a Dreamer

“Test and learn, not plan and implement.” - Herminia Ibarra

When we’re in our junior year of high school, part of the ritual was speaking with our guidance counselor about the future. We’re guided to take our SAT’s, apply to a few colleges and live our best collegiate lives.

What if we taught our children to be experimenters at a young age and explore throughout their youth? The best way to learn about yourself is constant exposure to real-life experiences. These experiences can teach us early how to navigate an increasingly complex world.

By the time we’re young adults, if we’ve taken a short-term, trial-and-error approach in life, we may be better equipped for success than a fixed path, long-term plan.

The Outsider Advantage

We tend to be too close to our own projects and creative endeavours. If we are too specialized, we may not have a solution to a complex problem. This is where an outsider can help.

20 years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster, ORSI (Oil Spill Recovery Institute) tasked InnoCentive, a crowdsourcing platform, to help find a solution. John Davis, a petrochemical chemist consultant, came up with a method to break the viscous shear of crude oil under cold weather conditions.

Never underestimate the power of bringing in the outsider.

If I can take away one major a-ha moment from Range, it’s to not get married to your ideas. A better approach would be to take different roads, explore them as much and as deeply as

you can. Once you exhaust that lane, switch it up and go down a different path. Embrace diverse experiences and perspectives.

I'm Danny Naz. I write, I travel, I eat and I'm hungry for more.

Expand thoughts here, extra notes below

Go out on a lot of dates, don't be quick to settle down. Start broad and embrace diverse experiences, and perspectives while you progress. The Next time you are interested in something seemingly irrelevant or find yourself wanting to change paths, remember this.

There's never been a better time to be a generalist and there's never been a greater need for people with Range.

Another book that really resonates with this concept is Ryan Holiday's The Obstacle is the Way.

The reality is, learning needs to be slow with great effort.

The speed at which the world is evolving and becoming more complex is quickening and the internet is exposing us to new ideas, new cultures and new and innovative ways to solve the world's old problems.