Five Verbs for Professionals

Idea In Short

Professionals grow through five verbs: ask questions, do deliberate work, write to clarify thinking, teach to master your craft and enjoy the journey. Each verb applies differently depending on career stage, from new hire to director to solo consultant.

The Five Verbs That Keep Professionals Growing

Jim Rohn said you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. Spending 20 years with smart, ambitious and coachable people reinforces certain habits. Five verbs keep appearing across this collaborative learning journey: ask, do, write, teach and enjoy. Each applies differently depending on whether you are a new hire, a director or a solo consultant.

Ask

Asking is a superpower that pulls out what someone else is thinking. This is what babies and children do naturally, and it remains the human edge and the crucible of learning. Lovely thinkers, philosophers, bankers, consultants, attorneys and advisors all ask great questions.

New hires should get good at asking questions while doing the pre-work to find simple answers themselves. Do the hard work first, build enough rapport to earn the right to ask and have the courage to do it. People skills are real skills, so do not fall for the trap that you can do all your work through texting and chat tools.

Directors should ask strategic questions about their S-curve in life, career, family and health. What is winning now? How are you using your gifts and unfair advantages? Beware of the plateau, because tomorrow does not have to look like yesterday. Executive coaching can be a real unlock for directors who need help probing for answers.

Solo consultants should use large language models more aggressively. 1 notes that professionals who master focused, deliberate work outperform those who piddle away their time. Customize your AI tool instructions to be concise, structured and useful. This Harry Potter microwave saves time and is better than you fear.

Do

Professional services is a practice and an apprenticeship built on actions rather than excuses. It is cerebral and fun, but it is about exposure. Do the work, get reps and practice. Get in the game, because activity without thoughtful productivity does not count.

New hires should do deliberate work and learn to bake bread the old-fashioned way. Put in the sweat and tears so you have stories to tell. Demonstrate grit and learn how not to give up. The old-fashioned approach builds a foundation that shortcuts cannot replicate.

Directors have already done a lot of work and are climbing the competency framework. For those in their 50s, some of the most important work might not be career-related at all. Check your health, blood pressure and medications. Evaluate your relationships, family, friends and financial security. Directors should do fewer things better, because strategy is what you choose not to do. 2 argues that white-collar workers piddle away time on small distractions that never reach the top of the Eisenhower matrix.

Solo consultants should experiment more because the corporate world is getting flipped by GenAI. Technology diffusion used to take time because technology was scary and for risk-takers. Now, not adopting GenAI is the scary choice, and luddites will lose. Marketing is about finding customers inclined to love your work, making it easy to buy and creating a virtuous cycle of referrals.

Write

Writing has been an enormous unlock because the ability to put thoughts on paper brings clarity. Late at night with a spinning mind, thoughts are an uncomposed mess. At a desk with coffee, they make sense. Joan Didion said she does not know what she thinks until she writes it down.

New hires should use pen and paper to slow their squirrel mind and process what they hear.

Find ways to memorialize learning, because brains function more like filters than sponges. Write down key takeaways immediately after listening to a podcast, before forgetting sets in.

Directors with 20-plus years of experience often have nothing written down. No portfolio exists after millions of miles of flights and thousands of hours of deliverables. This is urgent and not acceptable. In the age of GenAI, content is becoming a commodity, but distilling your own thoughts on your own paper is gold. Ask yourself what people keep asking you for help with, then write about that.

Solo consultants should treat their portfolio as a passive net that catches willing fish. Half of clients can find you through blog posts, LinkedIn or other content floating on the web. If you have been writing already, you are winning. If not, start now, because professional services is about pulling in demand rather than selling supply.

Teach

We do not truly learn something until we try to teach it. Reading 10 books without practice leaves head carbs. Teaching requires knowing your audience, choosing the right content and packaging it in an easy-to-get, easy-to-remember way. Benjamin Franklin said tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.

New hires have a chance to reverse-mentor. Your manager likely knows less than you about AI notebooks and new tools. You are a digital native in a sweet spot where everyone is a newbie in GenAI. The playing field has never been flatter for learning, experimenting, documenting and teaching others.

Directors have so much to share and are who people should apprentice with. Deep work gives you a mature passion about a topic because you can be present, see adjacencies and innovate. 3 describes giving massively before asking for a sale. Offer to lead brown bag lunches, join mentor programs and participate in strategic initiatives to share insider knowledge.

Solo consultants should recognize that sales is teaching. Create content that potential clients benefit from. In marketing, you jab generously with value before throwing the right hook of a sale. Demonstrate credibility, character and competence with your content. Create

how-to videos and build a subscriber base of people who learn from you and recommend you to others.

Enjoy

Over-achievers are uniquely bad at enjoying the journey. Many would benefit from trading 10 IQ points for 10 points of gratitude. Life is short, so remember memento mori. When flustered or disappointed, ask whether this will make the top 10 things you regret in your last week of life. Invariably, the answer is no.

Few things make the list other than health, family, self-worth, learning and fun. Enjoy your road to mastery and your hero's journey. The grind lets you say something like, when I was young I thought one thing, but discovered another, and it was hard, but then a lucky break helped me, and that sacrifice led me here. Work-life balance is difficult, but enjoyment is not just time you are not working. Many people you respect enjoy their craft, put in their hours and take pride in their work.

- 1Cal Newport's Deep Work
- 2Deep Work By Cal Newport
- 3Gary Vaynerchuk's Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook

Summary

Pick one verb to focus on this quarter. Ask great questions, do deep work, write down your thoughts, teach what you know and enjoy the road to mastery. These five verbs compound over a career. Life is short, so make the grind pleasurable and let gratitude guide your priorities.