

How to Become Unbeatable: On Learning Strategy, Building Your Model, and Being a Learning Machine

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SUMMARY

The discussion emphasizes the importance of prioritizing mental energy when evaluating advice and developing expertise in specific areas. It encourages individuals to focus on one or two topics where they can invest their time and effort to build a solid mental model, rather than getting distracted by social proof or political biases.

- *Prioritize areas of focus to conserve mental energy when evaluating advice.*
- *Avoid relying solely on social proof or the political leanings of advice-givers.*
- *Build expertise by selecting curated resources and absorbing information without immediate criticism.*
- *Develop a personal model based on real-world application rather than templates or established norms.*
- *Fine-tune your model through practical experience and feedback from your work.*
- *Recognize that foundational principles often apply across different domains, enhancing adaptability.*
- *Over time, this approach can accelerate learning and improve decision-making in various fields.*

[Music] so as you look at some advice some perspective some tactics somebody shared and they said this worked really well for us going to 3 we Sprint duration works much better than 2 weeks or starting your presentation by presenting the conclusion and the recommendation in the first slide works really well versus leaving the conclusion and recommendation for the last slide or writing as a way of thinking works really well writing is clear thinking

whatever so we get bombarded with these types of messages from everywhere and what most people do is they look at the name of the sender of the message then they look up if they're not sure the LinkedIn profile of the sender of the message or the net worth of the sender of the message and they look for some markers of social proof then based on that they decide how much attention to pay to this these days people add one

other element to this it's self-destructive or at least it harms nobody but yourself which is O let me figure out what the political leanings of this person are and then based on that I will decide the validity of their business advice it doesn't harm anybody other than you to do that but people do it right people don't understand what's actually good for them what's truly good for them so instead of that approach if the question is really like well but how do I just

judge cuz it takes a really long time it's it takes a while to figure out the validity of this thing the usefulness of this thing that I'm encountering well here are two practical suggestions I will make that anybody can Implement

first let's take it as a fact that it expends just too much mental energy for to do this for everything you encounter let's just accept that we don't have that much mental energy it's finite so what does one do when we have a finite

quantity of something that we can apply towards a very large range of choices all PMS the answer to this question you prioritize you identify which one or two topics you will apply this energy towards so first I want you to just focus on that what are the one or two areas where you are going to apply this energy towards while for the rest I want you to continue looking at the profile picture and the name and the number of

followers and their net worth and how many companies they' founded and whatever else whether Elon Musk is following them or not blah blah look at all those signifiers for the rest I am asking you what are the one or two things where you won't do that where you feel like you can and should devote some of this finite mental energy to truly evaluate the message and properly evaluate it the answer might be different it actually frankly doesn't

matter what the answer is for you just take the answer for some people it might be you know what for me it's ux design or for me it's Enterprise sales for me it's product management oh no it's narrower than product management for for me it's about how to write great prds or for me it's about product strategy or for me it's about goal setting for me it's about leading complex cross functional initiatives whatever the heck it might be I have to believe that there

is something which you can identify so that's where I want you to start let let's take the example so I personally did this for the topic of uh product strategy this is 2016 2017 as I realized I need to get much better at product strategy and I'm not that good I've been fooling myself first saying product strategy is useless execution is everything blah blah all that nonsense at Google and then at some point I realized oh no actually this is an

important skill in fact it's an a crucial skill for what I wanted to do in my career okay I Now understand it's a crucial skill then the next step is like oh I kind of suck at this I spent one or two years convincing myself that of course I'm good at it because I'm so senior and I have such great jobs and you know people look up to me on all of these things but no I'm being honest I

kind of suck at this you have to understand I don't have any taste yet in product strategy cuz without core competence you can't have taste even with core competence taste is not a given but you can't build taste when there's no Foundation of core competence so I did not have taste I did not have the ability to discern like oh this is good this is not good so what I did was what anybody would do in this situation

which is oh let me just pick out the top books on this topic and let me pick out the curated resources on this topic which in my case was the hbr Howard Business Review Book on strategy which is basically just compilation of their most I guess popular hbr articles on the topic of strategy I bought that book cuz when you don't have expertise and you're trying to build some context you go to some curated resources so that's what I

did so now I'm reading this book and I'm very open to anything that I'm reading in this book just like oh yeah

this could be true this could be true this could be true sure yeah what I'm not doing and this is a mistake many people make what I'm not doing is doing a critical evaluation of what the author is saying it's like no this author is wrong in this point I see many people who are not yet by any means world class

in the thing but they point out like oh this part it's wrong or I disagree who cares that you disagree you realize you can silently disagree when it comes to product management 90% % of my feed on product content I I personally disagree in small ways or larger ways so should I just keep replying I disagree I disagree you can silently disagree but why disagree at all because even disagreement is a sign you you want to

put your stamp out there of course you'll tell yourself you're disagreeing so that the other people understand that this is not true you're doing it for altruistic reasons no you're not you're just doing it for catharsis and ego forget all that disagreement when you are reading this thing again you picked an area you want to become better at it forget disagreement just take everything as you take in this information now what is inevitably happening is inside you a

model is starting to get formed not too different from these llms that basically are the basis of all these great AI tools we use these days you're starting to form your own model in my case around strategy now the model is very poor right now because I don't know what the right answer is but at least now I have a model I can consider so what's the second step well I started actually working on formulating strategy from the

business I managed at stripe in this case so it was the right time that's why I even started looking at strategy because I knew I needed to create something and share it and get alignment on it across the organization so I have this poor model and now what I'm doing is I'm trying to formulate strategy this is the key I am not using somebody's template to create my strategy oh here's a strategy chart here's a strategy

canvas here's a strategy blueprint I'm not using anything like that I am using this model again it's not a great model but it's something as I use this model here's the interesting thing that happens now I'm relating the actual work I'm doing with the concepts and ideas and recommendations and suggestions from the model so now I'm getting real world input on where the model is failing and where the model is pointing to something interesting

something that's valid so what do I do I increase the weights of things that I find are valid and interesting and I mute the weights of things that the model is saying that might be irrelevant again just like how llms work at this point I don't even remember the source of this I don't know oh it's actually from Blue Ocean strategy which a lot of people say is a great book I don't think it's a very good book I wouldn't

recommend it among the top five Strate things you would read but frankly it doesn't matter the reason is sure there is one core idea but the rest of the stuff it's done to fill the book so it could have been one paragraph frankly the point is there are all these other things it says but I find that oh there's limited value to that cuz my human input and the actions I'm performing like the model is telling me

something and I'm like no no no but that's not working for what I'm trying to do I'm not doing it intentionally I'm just doing it instinctively so as I do this my model becomes better and I keep doing this over a period of few years and now my model is really good when it crosses a certain level of quality the next thing I do is now I open myself up to more inputs because there's only limited inputs I can get through my own

team's work that's when I start telling people hey if you want me to help you with your strategy just set up a thing on my calendar I did this at stripe some people took me up on it you would be surprised not many PMS took me up on it but some did now I'm spending more time with with other kind of diverse inputs to my model and prompts for my model which I organically wouldn't have had

through the course of my work so now it gets further better and its development accelerates you do enough of that and now you have something that is just world class where previously it was not present at all that's the example let's take it back to the core question which is I want you to pick a certain area broad or narrow I don't care in that area I want you to start evaluating whatever ideas you're running into and

creating some kind of model if you ask like oh but how do I create this model that sounds difficult no this is how you're doing everything in your life everything in your life is being informed by models you're creating around your experiences this is built into you right now what happens is there is a layer a destructive layer that sits in between your consumption of ideas and knowledge and the development of this model and that layer is your tendency

to want to feel smart your ego your insecurities your need for Optics you kind of have to destroy that layer cuz that's the only way you can create a faithful model I'll give you a concrete example say in the case of strategy what if I sat with the hbr book I'm being honest like I'm not very good at strategy by this time I'm leg director senior director level person but I'm not good at product strategy I'm being

honest with you most people at that level will not be honest but what if I then sat and said oh yeah this Michael Porter guy doesn't know what he's talking about early on later on fine but I'm saying early on if I said ah this Michael Porter guy like he doesn't know what he's talking about or he he did all his stuff in the 80s the world has changed all his examples are non- Tech and Tech is different right the tech

Dynamics are different and the tech industry changes and its Dynamic and blah blah blah that's that destructive layer once I've constructed this model and tweaked it and actually field tested it through my own work if I that point I say Okay Michael Porter doesn't know what he's talking about now in this case he does know what he's talking about he's one of the few people who knows what they're talking about but even like I did earlier which is like I don't

think Blue Ocean strategy is a great book I wouldn't recommend it even though it often gets recommended as one of the top books you should read on strategy if you're in Tech no you shouldn't absolutely you shouldn't but I did not conclude that the first time I was reading it because I was still developing my model afterward sure I want you to reject these sources in fact that was my point that sources of authority that are telling you things

that are just objectively incorrect but you can't recognize it because they're running a hundred billion dollar company so therefore their advice must be right so that's the process I would recommend going through and again the two steps are first just narrow the scope so that you can preserve your mental energy how you narrow it is up to you and what area you pick is up to you once you do that get rid of that destructive layer that

sits between the input and the model and let the model form now fine-tune that model based on actual work you're doing against the day-to-day work you're doing do that for a while and at some point this model will be pretty darn good and once this model gets pretty darn good you will very clearly see all the nonsense and the misinformation that is out there about topics within that domain once you're done with that move on to the next one once you practice

this enough on a few different areas the whole cycle gets quicker now you become more of a learning machine it doesn't take you years you might reduce the cycle time to like months maybe eventually weeks last thing I'll share here is another interesting thing that'll happen once you've kind of informed your model in many different ways is you'll realize that the basic principles are same across everything so you'll now start seeing those core basic principles those foundational principles

and once you start seeing that that's it now you are unbeatable because you can figure things out in a new area that many people who have 10 20 years of experience working in that area can't figure out a [Music]