

I have always been a fan of learning and I think I knew very early in life that learning was something that takes place all the time, everywhere. We just have to be open to the possibilities.

I'm not sure everyone looks at learning in this way. In a word association test, most people would respond with "school" when the word learning comes up on the list.

Years ago that was certainly the case. People spent their learning years, usually grades one to 12, in the school system, cramming in the knowledge they would need to succeed in life. When school ended, life began.

These days we have a broader view of learning. The campaign to change our thinking began in earnest about 20 years ago when people started to talk about "life-long learning." Even then it was still tied to the concept of learning in an educational setting. It meant going back to school for advanced training and education to get a better job or to update your work skills.

Every once in a while a story about a grandmother completing Grade 12 would appear in the local newspaper as a human interest story. What a great thing. The poor old lady, usually about 55, had found her way back to the classroom. That's another thing that has changed. the age thing, but that is a different topic.

Our current understanding of learning is both revolutionary and ordinary at the same time. We understand that we learn all the time. We understand that formal learning is a small part of learning. In the leadership literature the saying "Learning as a way of being" is a characteristic of a strong leader. Peter Vaill (1996) describes this type of learner as living authentically at work and in life, in thinking and in feeling.

In fact, it is an holistic approach that encompasses all aspects of the individual. Sounds like a tall order but actually many people achieve it by being open to life, to change, to love and, above all, to making mistakes. Making a mistake is one of our best opportunities to learn. Some

of the best learning comes the hard way.

Organizations strive to be learning organizations by providing an environment that is conducive to learning on all levels of the workplace. In this way, the organization itself is constantly learning and evolving to a higher level of practice. It is flexible and thinks in broad strokes as well as minutiae. The essential ingredient in a learning organization is human learners.

Learning as a way of being is really about the organic process of learning that is a moment-to-moment experience, connecting the dots from system to system. To a large extent, our attitude about learning is learned from those around us. If our families value learning, we most likely will see the value, as well. Being a learner is definitely an asset in new-world thinking.

Tune up your learning skills and see the world through a new lens.