

Small But Mighty

Changing the World Through Consulting

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Get Learning: Three Coursera Courses You Need to Take

October 17, 2016 | Gary Romano



No matter how big your team gets (or how small it is) – YOU are probably the most crucial resource in your enterprise. Just as there is a need to develop your team’s skills, YOU also need to develop your own skills in order to be continuously learning and growing.

First and foremost, this self-directed learning should build your capacity in a way that is strategic. That is, it should be about one of the following:

- **Filling a Capacity Gap** - giving you knowledge or a skill that you know your consultancy needs, but doesn’t have. This could be related to direct service or operations, such as learning about basic bookkeeping.
- **Formalizing Something You Already Know** - many of us know more than we have been formally taught. But the reality is that having some certification or formal acknowledgment of this knowledge can be critical in communicating that to customers and consumers. As well, it can be a helpful way of gaining a framework or the jargon needed to share your existing ability.
- **Anticipating the Future** - the world in your markets is always shifting so it’s important

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to also proactively think about the skills you may need a year from now. Having these skills ahead of time means you are not only ready to roll when changes happen but it also can show your thoughtful anticipation of them (“I was ready for this a year ago...”). In addition, gaining knowledge about your field and trends will help further prepare you for the future.

In my book, [Small But Mighty](#), I recommend a number of options for anytime/anywhere self directed learning. There a lot of options out there including formal online classes with colleges and universities, (e.g. EdX, and Udemy), but my favorite is Coursera. If you aren't familiar with it, Coursera was one of the first providers of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs - pronounced ‘mooks’). MOOCs are online courses that are typically offered open source (e.g. for free) or very low cost. They partner with leading universities from around the world for course content and offer everything from free certificates of completion to, in some cases, low-cost college credit. They have also been grouping courses in an effort to provide specialization certificates in particular disciplines.

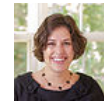
As a user, I like [Coursera](#) because they are “Goldilocks” courses - not too long, not too short – and they hit an array of topics. Each course requires some work, but not enough to delay participation. They also have easy access from laptop to smartphone and are open 24 hours, 7 days a week, allowing you to learn on the go at your convenience (like in bed after the kids are asleep or on a flight to a business meeting).

I've always had a love of learning, but Coursera's ease of use and variety has made me a MOOC junkie. You can see a number of the ones I've completed on my [LinkedIn profile](#) (which is also a way to project what you have learned, but we'll cover LinkedIn in a future blog).

As of 2015, Coursera offered almost 1,500 courses. Even with their catalog system, it could take some time for you to sift through it all, so I'd like to suggest five that I've done and can personally recommend.

- [University of Michigan- Successful Negotiation: Essential Strategies and Skills](#) – Negotiation is a core skill in most businesses, but especially for the consultant who has to negotiate on projects and fees regularly. As well, many of you may engage in negotiation on behalf of your clients - in some cases you may not even realize it. For example, maybe you have to put together a partnership of organizations to deliver a social program. The effort of figuring out their roles, share of resources, and responsibilities is all negotiation. Accordingly, having strong skills and continually honing them is beneficial to every consultant. This course is the best introduction to negotiation I have ever seen and goes far beyond the basics by providing valuable content for both novice and experienced learners alike. The course is rooted in the [BATNA](#) system introduced in [Getting to Yes](#) (which I recommend as well) but also goes beyond it into even greater detail on tactics and challenges (such as cross-cultural negotiation). The course is rooted in the latest negotiation practice and psychological science and it is always accessible.
- [University of Virginia- Grow to Greatness: Smart Growth for Private Businesses. Part I](#) – It pains me as a [Hokie](#) to admit, but this UVA course is incredible. The course focuses on the challenge every organizational leader faces – whether in a small nonprofit or the largest corporation – when and how to grow. Many voices, especially in for-profit business, call for constant growth (see Ram Charan's books for example). However, in reality, if growth is undertaken too quickly or unwisely, it can lead to a quick demise. Accordingly, Professor Hess takes the stand that the first question with regards to growth is “Should you do it at all?” Hess uses a case study method (i.e., examples from real small and medium businesses) to help learners understand what factors are crucial for growth and how to assess when they are ready to grow. He also covers how to create a solid, achievable plan for growth.
- [University of Pennsylvania- Social Impact Strategy: Tools for Entrepreneurs and Innovators](#) – In [Small But Mighty](#), I touch on the need to develop new services and products over time. We will, in a future blog entry, delve more deeply into the process of creating and testing new offerings, but if you get restless in the meantime, take this course. Intended for new social programs and ventures, this course is perfect for the consultant serving nonprofit organizations who needs to keep many of the same principles in mind. The course takes you from identifying need to building a business model and identifying your initial pathway to growth. As with all the courses above, this

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could guides your own enterprise and is helpful in your efforts to support your clients' organizations.

Again, this is but a sampling of what Coursera (and other MOOCs) has to offer. But none of this is worthwhile UNLESS YOU DO IT!

Go online now and get started...seriously, go...what are you waiting for?



[Gary Romano](#)

With more than 15 years of management and consulting experience, Gary has the expertise and skills to help public serving organizations move from vision to implementation. He is currently CEO of [Civitas Strategies](#), where he helps clients establish realistic strategies that connect to communities' needs and strengths.

Gary has consulted with a wide array of organizations including: the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Take Stock in Children, The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, and SmartStart Georgia. Gary has also been a line manager in science and engineering firms, (the Battelle Memorial Institute and Shaw Environmental & Infrastructure) and WestCare, Inc., a regional substance abuse prevention and treatment agency. Gary has lectured on human services project management at Boston College and the future of early childhood education at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



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