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My New Goal: Follow Ben Franklin's Rule to Set Aside 1 Hour a Day to Learn

Meg K. Scharf
University of Central Florida Libraries, meg@ucf.edu



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My New Goal: Follow Ben Franklin's Rule to Set Aside 1 Hour a Day to Learn

By Meg Scharf

UCF Forum columnist

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Benjamin Franklin is famous as one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and helping to draft the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Franklin was a Renaissance man. Besides his career as a diplomat, public servant and accomplished printer, he is credited with discoveries about electricity and inventing bifocals, among other things.

How did he fit all of these activities into his busy life?

He was a self-taught man and constantly worked to improve himself. Franklin planned and managed his time and activities in a disciplined way. A tool he developed for himself was the five-hour rule. The rule dictates that five hours each week must be spent learning – one hour each day, excepting weekends. It sounds simple.

If you Google “five-hour rule,” you will find claims that many highly successful Americans (Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, etc.) abide by the five-hour rule. There are claims that this makes them better at what they do, more effective and more creative.

Can one hour daily be difficult? It seems like a great idea.

I work in higher education. Creating and providing learning opportunities for students is an important part of our work. We want to inspire our graduates to be lifelong learners.

I love learning! Am I a lifelong learner? Do I provide those opportunities for myself?

Well, perhaps. This requires a little reflection, one of the learning tasks that Benjamin Franklin often used.

Immediately the barriers to setting aside an hour for learning each day come to mind. I sometimes feel that I am not the master of my own time. I carry my cell phone with me everywhere – well, almost everywhere. I allow it to distract me when I am at home. I feel justified in allowing the distraction because I feel I must be immediately available to family members. Planning the space and time for focused learning appears difficult. But it is not so difficult to be out of reach to phone, computer and television for 60 minutes.

All the disruption has affected our attention span, another barrier to that focused hour of learning. But returning to the old habit of settling down at home to study or work is less of a struggle with time.

I think developing a deeper sense of curiosity can be a barrier as well. Some answers to questions can be found quickly in electronic resources, and we can be satisfied with a simple statement from an electronic reference. Developing the desire to dig deeper for more information, to learn something beyond the simple answer to my question is a habit worth developing.

To get started, what should we learn in our allotted one hour? Anything and everything.

Ben Franklin examined his work and his learning, planning his time carefully, practicing new habits and skills repeatedly. He regarded reading as an important vehicle for learning, and picking up a book that piques our interest can be a great way to start adhering to the five-hour rule. Get a title suggested by Goodreads book-recommendation site on the internet or recommended by a friend or your favorite librarian.

Or take a class. Learning online is available through many informal channels, like TED Talks, which strive to be provocative and instructive. Libraries sometimes make learning modules and other opportunities available. For example, UCF's John C. Hitt Library makes Mango available, which will teach you the rudiments of more than 50 languages using text and audio lessons. Many campuses and businesses make Lynda.com available. Lynda teaches hundreds of topics online at your convenience.

I am planning my hour-long foray into learning each day with increasing success. It feels like this time is for me.

I am almost done with my first learning experience: finishing a book called *On Kindness* by Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor in a thoughtful and reflective manner. I never considered the virtue of kindness to have a history before now. I selected this title because I thought it might have a message about our times. And it is not too long!

While not exactly a New Year's resolution, the five-hour rule could result in a feeling of peacefulness and accomplishment each day, not to mention personal achievement.

It's 2017 – time to learn!

Meg Scharf is associate director for communication, assessment and public relations at UCF Libraries. She can be reached at meg@ucf.edu.

