

Range Summary

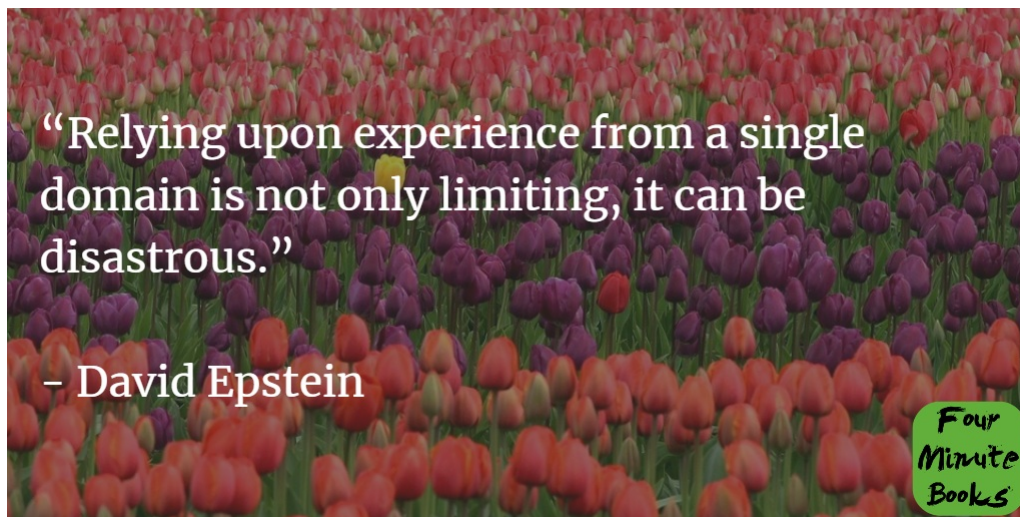


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1-Sentence-Summary: *Range* shows that having a broad spectrum of skills and interests, taking your time to figure them out, is better than specializing in just one area.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



In today's cut-throat world there's a lot of pressure to succeed. And for a lot of people, getting ahead means making sure you get a head start and specialize early. If you want to be the next Tiger Woods, you had better start playing golf at age 4. Honing in on golf at an early age worked for Woods. But if you look at the research, generalizing rather than specializing will prime you for the greatest success.

Granted, it might take longer to find your calling in life this way. But the advantage that comes from being a generalist is you can build more connections in different fields making you more innovative and creative. In David Epstein's book *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, he shares examples from pros in every field, from sports to science.

He also explains why cultivating a large range of skills will ultimately make you more successful. Rather than go with the fashionable choice of choosing your specialty early on, he encourages you to take your time and allow for more flexibility and creativity.

Here are 3 of the most life-changing lessons this book teaches about generalization:

1. To become excellent, don't specialize early in life, experiment with many different paths.

2. You will be better at innovating and more successful if you have a breadth of experience.
3. The more famous you become for being an expert in one area, the more likely it is that you will be terrible at making accurate predictions about your field.

Are you ready to feel some inspiration to take a chance at your long-forgotten passions? Let's get started!

Lesson 1: Testing many different options is just as good as focusing on just one area early in life.

Remember before when I mentioned Tiger Woods starting golf at a young age? Roger Federer, one of the best tennis players in the world and longtime friend of Woods', reached athletic stardom in quite a different way.

As a child, he dabbled in many other sports including skiing, basketball, tennis, skateboarding, and badminton. He believes trying this diverse collection of sports helped him develop the impressive hand-eye coordination and athleticism he has today. He didn't focus on tennis until he was a teenager, showing us it's okay to try things out until you find what you like.

This kind of sampling is even good in disciplines like music. Believe it or not, world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma actually first played the piano and violin. It was his distaste for those instruments that led him to the cello. In a study of British boarding school students, a music psychologist John Sloboda found that those who took music lessons early in development were categorized as average musicians, while those who tried out three instruments were often identified as exceptional.

Van Gogh of all people showed us it's okay to take your time and test the waters before you choose a specialty. The famous painter tried working in bookstores, art dealing and even preaching before discovering his true calling was to be an artist. **All of this goes to show that if you haven't yet found your life's calling, relax— experiment with many different things so you can find what's really best for you.**

Lesson 2: Having a wide range of experience will increase your chances of success in whatever field you are in.

When researchers wanted to see what made certain comic creators successful, they hypothesized the more comics a particular creator had published, the more successful their comics would be.

To their surprise, having made more comics or even having better resources weren't what made a comic creator more successful. What made them successful was a large breadth of experience in diverse comic genres. The more genres a creator had worked in, the more successful they were.

Having a breadth of experience is linked to being more innovative and successful.

When you compare Nobel-prize winning scientists to regular scientists, you will find that Nobel laureates are 22 times more likely to do something else too, such as being an amateur actor or performer of some kind.

Epstein makes a plea that hiring managers think outside of the box and avoid clearly defined job descriptions. There needs to be space for the people who don't neatly fit into one category because their range of experience will be an invaluable addition to the workplace.

Lesson 3: The experts that we listen to are frequently useless at making accurate predictions about their area of expertise.

Now that we understand how great it is to have a wide range of knowledge, let's look at the biggest disadvantage of specialization. During the Cold War, forecasting expert Philip Tetlock gathered the predictions of 284 experts and assessed them. His shocking conclusion was that your average expert is horrible at predicting anything. It didn't even make a difference in how many years of experience the expert had or even access to information that was classified.

When an expert said that something wasn't possible, it happened 15 percent of the time. And when an expert predicted an event was going to happen for sure, it failed to happen 25 percent of the time. Yikes.

Tetlock even found that the more famous the expert was, the less accurate they were. The more a particular expert was on the news, the more likely it was that they would be wrong. Next time you switch on cable news, maybe take that expert's advice with a grain of salt.

The problem probably stems from the fact that experts have too narrow a focus. They spend years and even their entire careers on a narrow subject. **Because of their narrow focus, they tend to have explicit theories about how things work, which leads them to cherry-pick evidence to support their existing beliefs.** AKA confirmation bias. So if you want a reliable forecaster, look to someone willing to question their own beliefs.

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Range Review

This book blew me away, I had no idea the effects of specialization could be so negative! While I think that there are a time and place for focusing on one area, the case Range makes for generalization is strong. This gives me hope because I can't seem to focus on just one idea, project, or career to specialize in.

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Who would I recommend the Range summary to?

The 43-year-old who has been working in the same field for much of their adult life and wants to try something new, the 24-year-old college graduate who is wondering how to find their purpose, and anyone who is looking for a more unique path to success.