Roper Miller

Advanced writing and research

Brother Allen

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Why you should learn a language!

Hola! Como esta? Como fue su dia? If someone reached out to you and had said this, what would you do? Would you panic? How would you respond if you did not know what that person said? How would you communicate to them that you did not understand? Language is the foundation of human relationships. Communication in every form is vital to the making or breaking of every human relationship. Sounds important right? Learning a second language can open the gates to a whole new part of life— through creating new job opportunities, challenging your brain in new ways, and opening your horizons to forming new relationships with people you otherwise would not have ever known!

The 2nd most spoken language in the United States is Spanish, a multicultural country and an ever expanding multicultural world. With international trade and businesses moving more and more work out of the country-- those who speak another language are increasingly becoming essential in every work environment. According to the World Economic Forum, “approximately 20% of people learn a second language”, with the work force needing more and more bilingual workers doesn’t it seem like it is time to pick up a language learning course?

One thing agreed on in the scientific world is that learning another language does wonders for your brain. One study found that while children who spoke both English and Spanish were slower to pick up English grammar—they were better at being able to multitask in any given situation (National institutes of health). In yet another study conducted at Northwestern University by Doctor Nina Kraus and her colleagues gave the test subjects a selective attention test. In the test the subjects were asked to click a mouse when a 1 was shown on a screen and not click when a 0 was shown. The results concluded that those subjects who were bilingual or multilingual outperformed those who were only monolingual. Doctor Kraus added, “Bilingualism serves as enrichment for the brain and has real consequences when it comes to executive function, specifically attention and working memory,”(National institutes of heath). There are plentiful ways to train your brain for sure, however adding a minimal amount of study each day of a language of your choice can only improve your brain so why not give it a shot?

No really, why would you not want to learn another language? There are a few reasonable arguments to why you should not learn a language, lets talk about them. Number one, you may not like traveling and thus it may feel like a waste of time to learn another language that you will never use. Number two, learning a language can be expensive if you lack the right resources. Lastly number three, you may have tried to learn a language before and it was just too difficult for you. These are all reasonable and logical arguments, but I want to show you why these things should not stop you from expanding your horizons! First, there are other reasons to learn a language than just to travel, we have already touched on work scenarios, but what about the people from other countries who travel here to the United States for work or school? If you learned a language I can guarantee you that somewhere here in our own country there are people who speak it that would have some impact on your life if you just knew how to talk to them! Second, it is true that there are a lot of expensive courses online or in schools that teach languages. Yet for every expensive option there are two free options if you are willing to deal with ads. Good examples would be apps such as Duolingo which claims to be the number one language learning app in the world and can teach you about almost any language! Another is Rosetta Stone which also has many languages that are free to learn. There are also language specific apps such as Bunpo which helps the user learn Japanese! Lastly the idea that a language is too hard for you to learn is simply not true! You can do it! In an article written by Jeffery D. Karpicke PhD for the American Psychological Association called “A powerful way to improve learning and memory”, he shares insights on the importance of continually retrieving information from our brain to train our memories. In the article he shares multiple tests done on how it is not how long we practice something but how often that strengthens our memories. I know what it is like to struggle with language learning, it is hard to commit time, energy, and brain power to something that you may feel you will never use. Believe me I have been there, I want to share a story with you as I lead into my final point.

I had tried for two years in high school to take Spanish classes. Yet each year I could never get very far, it was just too hard I believed. I gave up and said that learning a new language was not for me. Fast forward to graduation I was called on a mission for my church and would need to learn Spanish! I was distraught to say the least, I began practicing for months before and it still was just not coming to me. However everything for me changed when I met this older lady named Miriam. Miriam lived in an assisted living home all alone where no one spoke Spanish. She had been there for two years and with no one to talk to had felt increasingly lonely. Miriam became my “why”. I believe is that if you can find a reason, a “why” to what you are doing, that you can accomplish anything. As soon as I had found my why to learning this new language I worked extra hard so I could be there to talk to Miriam. As I practiced day after day I was not prepared for what I was going to unlock with knowing Spanish here in the United States. It opened my life to new, amazing, and life altering people. Learning a new language will give you the ability to associate with people you could never have known otherwise who may change your life just like Miriam and all the wonderful people I met did for me! Pew research Center is an organization that does research on migration to the united states. According to them in an article written by Phillip Conner, “By a wide margin , the United states has more immigrants than any other country in the world.” (Conner) Approximately 50.6 million citizens of the Unites States have come from other countries. With all of this in mind, think of how much you could impact significant portions of those people by spending just a bit of time each day learning a language—I promise you that you will not regret it! Today I still keep in touch with Miriam, had I not began to practice I would have lost out on so many vital experiences that I have had just for knowing another language!

Learning a new language is well worth your time, it can expand your job opportunities in a world of ever increasing need for bilingual and multilingual workers, a new language can train your brain and strengthen your focusing skills and memory. A new language does not have to be expensive to learn, or take more than fifteen minutes a day to practice. It will help you meet new people—new friends who will change your life and will give you insights into other cultures and backgrounds. Learning a language is for you, me, and for everyone!

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