

Let New Knowledge and Skills Expand Your World While Living Where You Are

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For many years, people have had to choose between living in a lovely place near their family and being able to interact with more people in less attractive, more crowded places to gain new understanding and accomplish more. Those who live in an idyllic place blessed with flowers, music, and good weather find considering the alternative is painful and unattractive despite the apparent advantages.

I've traveled to some of the most beautiful places in the world and have been thrilled to enjoy those lovely spots. After a few days, however, I've usually felt a little isolated as I've looked in vain for an interesting book store, a mind-opening lecture, or an engaging concert. By the end of the trip, I'm delighted to be going back to the challenges I love so much in my more stimulating, but less attractive, home grounds.

As a result, the choice of living in an idyllic place has often seemed less appealing to many than living in the more stimulating places. That preference may shift in the future.

With modern technology, stimulating choices are increasingly available no matter where you are. You can watch events live on the Internet from a remote location that would be impossible to see live if you were present there. For example, the Metropolitan Opera in New York now provides theaters around the world with live telecasts in a high definition video format of its sold-out performances.

Millions are taking courses online from high school through graduate school and are learning from world-class professors and teachers. With more and more material being provided in digital form, many distance learners don't ever have to visit a local library to do their research.

Having the best of the whole world at your fingertips will increasingly make the choice of living someplace great more attractive than living in a more crowded, bustling place where more people meet face to face. Just as beautiful sunsets create a perfect bridge between bustling days and more quiet nights, a balance between accessing the world and enjoying the best of where you are will provide a more beautiful and satisfying life.

Okay, some people have always found that they could engage in a career that could be performed in isolation. With that flexibility, living in a better place becomes possible. A painter could move from say crowded New York City to say lovely, uncrowded Taos, New Mexico and still be internationally successful because so many art lovers visit Taos.

What do the choices look like if you live in a more remote location? I think they are very good right now . . . and getting better.

Let's consider the encouraging example of Mr. Truong Chi Dung (whose name means "a heroic-willed person" in his native language) who lives in Dalat City, Vietnam. This

beautiful town of 200,000 overlooks a lovely hilly region and is filled with flowers and wooded parks that are favored by the perpetual fall-like chill from a mild year-round temperature of 18 degrees Celsius.

Tourists from around the world flock to Dalat City to enjoy its beauties and mild weather. While his three sisters and brother moved to the United States, Mr. Dung was happy to stay in Dalat City.

By studying at the town's fine university, he was able to complete his undergraduate education in physics. While learning about physics, he also studied painting, drawing on a love that he inherited from his mother. Dalat City provides many beautiful subjects for his paintings and short stories, activities that bring blessed balance to his life.

After graduating from college, he taught high school physics. Later, he taught elementary school teachers how to be effective with students.

Discovering computers some years later, Mr. Dung became fascinated by what computing could do and the role that database designers play in making computers more effective. He progressed rapidly in this field which he found to be quite compatible with his interest in creative writing. To Mr. Dung's mind, writing a software program for a database is an interesting challenge not too dissimilar in difficulty from developing an interesting short story, one of his favorite pastimes.

Because he was good at programming computers, Mr. Dung was soon aware that he might be able to learn more via computer connections than he could locally. Those ambitions had to wait for the development of a robust Internet structure in Vietnam.

When the right time came, he began looking for a distance learning MBA program that would complement his scientific and computer knowledge. After searching around and considering the choices, he decided it would be good to add a Western perspective through this education.

Many schools, however, only wanted to develop his analytical skills through traditional tests. Mr. Dung was also interested in developing his creative and practical intelligence. As a result, he was delighted to find that Rushmore University, an online graduate school, uses the Oxford tutorial method of learning which emphasizes students writing practical papers to solve practical problems by using what they have learned from reading, investigation, and analysis.

The initial MBA program assignments to set life goals and to establish a curriculum plan were quite a shock, but Mr. Dung quickly adjusted to these new ways of thinking that call for taking more control over your direction in life. Reading and writing in English further stretched his mind and talents. Benefiting from lots of interaction with his advisor, Professor Alan Guinn, to collaborate in building knowledge and communications about writing with his editor, Ms. Laurel Barley, to build cultural bridges, Mr. Dung was soon expressing himself in remarkable ways. For instance, he added a unique creative touch to

papers about how to succeed in e-commerce through offering out-of-season flowers from Dalat City to Europe by writing charming explanations for a fictional, modern-day Adam and Eve.

Since four months into his MBA studies, Mr. Dung has applied new creative and practical intelligence to his daily work by using the marketing, human resources management, accounting, organizational behavior, and e-commerce knowledge and skills that he developed through writing practical papers during his MBA studies. Previously, most of his attention had been taken up with IT issues, but today those concerns occupy only 20 percent of his time.

Since graduating with an MBA, Mr. Dung finds that he continues to benefit from these new disciplines. He changed employers and now has three jobs: One position is as a human resources project manager for a recruitment firm; another job is as an ERP consultant for an IT firm; and the third employment is an on-line language lead in customizing an ERP solution from English into Vietnamese.

The MBA learning enabled him to be effective in this broader span of work and helped him develop a taste for continually learning new things about business. The human resources job is the hub of these activities and provides a link to many industries and jobs. The ERP consulting work helps him organize the information he develops in business and is a complement to his human resources position. The language-related employment allows him to learn about many other industries and countries through reviewing drafts written by translators.

The change in his working focus was even more dramatic than that shift suggests. Here is what Mr. Dung had to say about the new direction for his work: “My daily life changed 180 degrees as result of my studies. Now I have become a professional problem solver and help many local companies to overcome their problems.”

Naturally, he gets to enjoy these changes in lovely Dalat City. The only change he sees in that regard is that he would like to travel a bit more with his wife to see other countries in Asia and to visit his siblings in the United States. With three jobs, such travel should become more affordable.

How has his personal life changed? The most significant shift is that his personal vision, mission, and core values have shifted. There is also a generational impact as his sons follow him in studying business (one is an MBA and the other is working on a BBA degree) much as he followed his mother in studying painting. Will painting be in the next generation’s future, as well? No one knows, but I wouldn’t count it out.

What are his educational plans for the future? In his words, here’s the answer: “I will return again to learn at Rushmore. I cannot predict the exact time but I will return one day.”

In the meantime, Mr. Dung shows us that East can meet West in new ways over the Internet that enrich through global e-commerce and education. When that happens, a new balance occurs that permits a whole person and a whole world.

What new dimensions can you add to your life by expanding your access to more parts of the world while you live where you are?