We can train ourselves to be much smarter than we currently are

Stance: Agree

There are a variety of situations where someone can call another person ‘smart’. There is no formal definition to being ‘smart’, and therefore no formal way to become ‘smarter’. Instead, I’ll provide 3 situations that an individual can be called ‘smart’ and provide evidence that we can improve the skillset that is associated with the attribute. I’ll go over book smarts, street smarts, and creative smarts. These three renditions of ‘smart’ are not exclusive with one another, but I will be looking at them individually.

One of the most common situations that someone would be considered ‘smart’ is when looking at school grades. Someone who receives grades consistently in the 90% range would be considered ‘smarter’ than someone who consistently gets in the 60% range. We’ll call this ‘book smarts’ and define it as doing well on tests. To do well on tests, one should have good memory of the material. Gais et al. conducted a memory experiment with high school students comparing the results of those with ample sleep and those who lacked enough sleep. They found that “sleep after learning” had a beneficial effect to decrease the amount of words forgotten in a vocabulary test. In this sense, we could train ourselves to be more ‘book smart’ by strategically sleeping.

Another sense of ‘smart’ is when we call someone ‘street smart’. My rough operationalization is that ‘street smarts’ results in higher quality decisions in uncertain environments. For example, Poker players would exhibit street smarts. They are consistently in unpredictable situations and must analyze the environment to find the best strategy to win. Linnet et al. conducted a study that analyzed various biases of experienced and inexperienced poker players. The study found that experienced poker players were able to make better decisions then inexperienced poker players. This is evidence that we can improve our ‘street smarts’ by gaining experience.

Finally, we have ‘creative smarts’. This involves thinking “outside of the box” to come up with novel ideas. This kind of creativity can be found from artists to advertisement agencies. A study by Capurso et al. was done to analyze the effects of meditation on a creative task. They found that open monitoring meditation produced more original responses in a creativity task. This suggest that ‘creative smarts’ can be bolstered by meditation.

I hope these simple examples have demonstrated ways that we can become ‘smarter’. And it can be as simple as sleeping, living, and thinking.