Knowledge isn?t enough to advance our species

by Mark Pavilons

Knowledge itself is power, and it's also not free ??ou have to pay attention!

Adam Growe, Canadian comedian and host of the TV quiz show Cash Cab, is my companion on quiet Sunday mornings.

I cheer for the contestants and celebrate my own knowledge of general trivia.

For some reason, we humans relish in facts and factoids, even if they're elusive. We are glued to the set for shows such as Jeopardy, Who Wants to be a Millionaire and Weakest Link. Along with the brain teasers, the show hosts and contestants provide us armchair trivia buffs with endless entertainment.

Our magical brains can access, interpret, process and store limitless amounts of data. We are walking super computers, capable of millions of computations per second.

All of our brain is constantly in use and consumes a tremendous amount of energy. Despite making up only two percent of our body weight, it devours 20 per cent of our calories.

Our brains boast some 100 billion nerve cells and many more contact points between them provide our brain with capabilities that no supercomputer can match. One of its most important characteristics is its ability to learn.

It's estimated that our brains transmit 200 million bits of information every second! Most of us can't even visualize a number that big.

While we have yet to unlock the hidden secrets of the human mind, there's no doubt we are waking, talking creative bipeds, unlike anything else in the expanses of the universe.

That makes us pretty special. And no two of us are alike. That makes us rare.

Special, rare, capable of complex thoughts ? boy, you would think we are the ultimate mammal. But alas, despite our unfathomable potential, most of us are under-utilized, not unlike our robo vacuums or smart doorbells.

As the amino acids (proteins) race around our bodies, we go through life rather easily, doing most tasks without really thinking about them. A simple thought sets in motion everything from skipping and scoring goals to calculating pi or the trajectory of Mars.

Our brains, unfortunately, are limited in that we have to learn and retain knowledge. That takes a willingness on our part, and, as most coaches will tell you, practice, practice and more practice.

The very first time our ancestors drew on the walls of a cave was the first time we used mind-expanding technology. Drawing was not only a way to communicate, it was a way to remember and unload our memories onto a vessel much more durable and reliable than our brain. Every time you write down a quick note on your smart phone, you are using mind-expanding technology that multiplies the ability of your brain to remember information, and give it some sort of context and priority.

Our vast human knowledge is not the product of specific stream of information. Knowledge and ideas are gained and shared by some, then enriched by others, and finally passed on.

We have overcome historic limits and with the handy, dandy, Internet to connect all our minds, we can share knowledge without any

limits or hesitation.

The ?Knowledge Doubling Curve? shows that until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every 400 years. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today, human knowledge is thought to double every 12 hours.

That's a lot for our noodles to handle. And more than enough to fill encyclopaedias daily.

As an armchair fan of history and ancient civilizations, I'm fascinated by what our ancestors knew and accomplished. And, it's also a mystery how some of this knowledge was lost.How did they build the pyramids??Why did the Mayans create pyramid-shaped temples??How did humans survive several extinction-level events and ice ages?

There are so many bucket-list worthy sites to visit, it boggles my mind. Some of my favourites include Machu Picchu, Petra (Rose City), Pompeii, Stonehenge, Angkor Wat, Mesa Verde, Derinkuyu, Göbekli Tepe ? this list goes on and on.

Our ancestors were a remarkable bunch who were survivors. But they were engineers, clerics, mathematicians, astronomers and builders. Not only did they create the great wonders of the world, they left plenty of mysteries behind for us to figure out.

Strange, that given our propensity for knowledge retention, we didn't hang on to the tidbits our ancestors possessed. It would definitely come in handy these days, let me tell you.

I think the worst comment on humankind is that while we are the smartest creatures in our solar system, we don't always put our brilliance to the best use. We pervert scientific discoveries into weapons. We use new communication methods to relay TV?reality shows. We build cars, smart phones, music apps and beauty products, instead of solving homelessness, sickness, world hunger, human conflict and aggression.

It seems our collective IQs do not reflect the greater good, and our memories are quite selective. We have not learned from history. We have not taken notes on human compassion. We have not pursued luminosity.

We hopelessly search for the fountain of youth, instead of finding ways to produce better food and saving our environment. We look to politicians instead of toward the skies, for answers.

Aristotle once said that educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

I agree. Alas, there are no courses on self-esteem, compassion or emotional health in any curriculum. Maybe there should be.

Hopefully, one day our planet will unite and every country and its people will share the world's knowledge.

If we combine our talents ? intellect, compassion, curiosity and desire to improve humankind ??here's no stopping us.