

Learning the right way

by BRIAN LOCKHART

A few years after purchasing my home, I decided it was time to finish my unfinished basement and turn it into a usable living space.

I was in no hurry, and the project took a couple of years before it was completed. I would save up some money, then make a trip to the home building centre to buy whatever supplies I needed.

I am a fairly capable person when it comes to things like home repairs and renovations, so I was pretty sure of my skills when I started the project.

The carpentry was easy for me as I had previous experience working with wood. I made all the walls and did the ceiling to cover the ductwork.

Doing the drywall was a bit of a challenge. The pros make it look easy by spreading the joint compound in one easy stroke. The reality is it takes some real technique to get it smooth.

Doing the stucco ceiling also took a few attempts before figuring out the best way to do it for the proper results. The floor was fairly easy, although hard on the back and knees.

The electrical work really wasn't a big deal. I needed to add a few outlets and connect two basement lights to work together with a single switch.

After speaking to a friend who had done his own electrical work and doing some research, I figured I would be able to do it. I didn't have to work with the main fuse box or anything like that, so all was okay.

I got the outlets installed properly and up to code. Then, I installed a light switch at the bottom of the stairs. The goal was to connect two independent lights on a pull string to the single switch so both lights would come on at the same time.

The problem was the two single lights had the incoming power cable coming from different places. I spent considerable time trying to figure out how to get this job completed, but none of it made sense to me. Electricity requires an 'in' and an 'out' wire, and this situation just didn't provide the solution to this dilemma.

I decided to consult an expert in the field.

One day, I was sitting at my desk at work, and the building electrician happened to walk by. I knew him well and asked if he could help me.

I drew a diagram of what I was trying to do and the existing wiring. My electrician friend drew a diagram detailing how to wire the two lights together with the one switch.

It was an easy job ? if you knew how to do it.

This man had years of experience and know-how behind him. He knew everything there is to know about electricity, how it works, and how to safely wire a building ? and he didn't have a degree.

I could have consulted a 'highly educated' friend who has advanced degrees in political science and business, yet with all his education, he wouldn't have been able to help me.

I always hear people being referred to as 'educated,' generally meaning they have gone to school in a classroom setting.

The problem here is some people think you have to attend school to be qualified as 'educated.' While there's nothing wrong with attending classes, education is a lifelong process, and yet, quite often, credit is not given to people who are educated in other ways.

There was a funny episode of The Big Bang Theory, the TV show about highly educated and smart people working at a university.

In one episode, the gang had car trouble.

'Does anyone know anything about an internal combustion engine?' lead physicist Leonard asked.

The rest all scoffed because it was such a low-level question ? of course, they knew how an internal combustion engine works.

The next question was, 'does anyone know how to fix an internal combustion engine?'

In this case, a qualified and educated mechanic would trump a team of highly educated physicists and engineers.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with going to school, but at the same time, you can't discount the education people get from everyday life and on-the-job training.

You should probably take lessons if you want to learn to play the piano. You can learn music theory and how to read music.

However, eventually, the only way you are going to improve is by practicing on your own and learning and educating yourself along the way.