Jim Kwik has helped countless students, CEOs, and celebrities improve their memories, increase their decision-making skills, and unleash their superbrains. During his keynote, Kwik will discuss his revolutionary strategies and shortcuts for supercharging your brain with simple, actionable tools to sharpen your mind, enhance your focus, and reach your fullest potential. Following a childhood brain injury that left him learning
challenged, Jim Kwik created strategies to dramatically enhance his mental performance. He has since dedicated his life to helping others unleash their true genius and brainpower to learn anything faster and live a life of greater power, prosperity, productivity, and peace of mind. He is the founder of Kwik Learning and a widely recognized world expert in speed-reading, memory improvement, brain performance, and accelerated learning. Kwik is regularly featured in media, including Forbes, HuffPost, Fast Company, Inc., and CNBC, as well as online videos totaling in excess of 100 million views. He is the host of the acclaimed “Kwik Brain” podcast, which is consistently top-ranked among self-improvement shows on iTunes. KwikLearning.com’s online courses are used by students in over 180 countries. Kwik and his team have a passion for education and funding schools for children in places from Guatemala to Kenya, providing healthcare, clean water, and learning for kids in need.

After your childhood accident, what inspired you to work as hard as you did?

My parents immigrated here—my dad came when he was 13, and we lived in the back of a laundromat where my mom worked. They had lots of different jobs because they worked really hard.

My grandmother helped raise me, so she was my primary caregiver. I had my accident when I was five. It was tough, though, because it was around then that she started showing signs of early dementia.

I think it’s very important to find your purpose and know who is counting on you. A lot of my drive, as the oldest of three children, was to make my family proud because of the amount of sacrifice that they made for us. I worked hard for the people I loved and to be a good role model for my younger brother and sister.

Your mention in an interview that learning and public speaking were your biggest challenges growing up. How did you overcome these challenges, and when did you realize you were onto something that could help others?

I didn’t learn how to develop my “superpowers” until I was 18. My kryptonite was learning and public speaking, because I was labeled “the boy with a broken brain” when I was in elementary school by a teacher who was very frustrated that I didn’t understand the lessons. She pointed at me in front of the whole class and that label became my inner self-talk.

My superpower growing up was being invisible. I didn’t want the spotlight. I didn’t want to be called on in class. I didn’t want to be heard. I remember I was failing high school English. The school called my parents in and gave me one chance to save myself by doing an extra credit book report on Albert Einstein and Da Vinci, comparing the two. I spent weeks and weeks in a library working on the project. I had my report professionally bound. I was so proud of this thing, I felt like this was going to turn everything around. The day it was due, the teacher said she had a surprise for the class. She wanted me to read my report aloud in front of them. I immediately froze. My heart was beating out of my chest and I couldn’t breathe.

When I got my voice back, I looked at her and I lied, saying that I hadn’t done the report. You could see the disappointment in her eyes. After the class cleared out and I was the only one there, I remember taking the book report out of my backpack and throwing it in the trash.

I think I got over these obstacles through the power of motivation. I think reasons reap results in our lives. I don’t think you have to enjoy the thing that you need to be motivated to do, such as working out. I think you have to have a reason, a big enough reason to work out. So, I wanted to get over my challenges. The heroes in my life, my family, were my motivation.

That gave me enough reason, but the second thing I needed was energy. If you don’t sleep the night before, you’re not very motivated to do things. I found small steps that I could take; I found my superpowers by turning my struggles into strengths and adversity into advantage.

How do you think our current educational system could better help children with learning disabilities?

My mother became a schoolteacher because she didn’t know how to help me with my learning challenges. You...
know, we live in an age of self-driving electric cars and spaceships that are going to Mars, but our vehicle of choice when it comes to education is still the horse and buggy. The issue is that the school system is poorly designed.

Our school system hasn’t changed as much as the world has changed, and our schools don’t prepare us for the world that exists today. That being said, I think one of the things that needs to be taught in our education system is meta learning. Meta learning is learning how to learn. There’s so much information out there. They say that somebody graduating school now is going to have anywhere from eight to 14 different careers—not jobs, but just completely different careers because we don’t know where the work world’s going to be when industries disappear overnight.

Our ability to learn faster and adapt is our most important skill. I think this is something we should have been taught because it’s the ultimate superpower. If you can learn how to learn, you can apply that toward marketing, management, martial arts, music, speaking Mandarin—everything gets easier after that. School teaches us what to learn, what to think, and what to remember. But I would rather school teach us how to learn, how to think, and how to remember. And I think those are skills that anybody can learn.

How is learning and the way we perceive information changing?

Right now, we’re drowning in information, but we’re also starving for practical wisdom and ways to use that information. In today’s world, ignorance is a choice, given that we’re so connected all of the time. Years ago, when we used to be on AOL and used the IM (instant message) thing, we would say “BRB” (“be right back”). We never say that anymore because we’re always online, 24/7.

Learning is changing because of digital technologies. We’re living in a time of digital deluge, where there is too much information and too little time. We’re also dealing with digital distraction, which is a big challenge because information is everywhere—you get app notifications, social media alerts, emails—all of which distract us from the task at hand.

We are all so dependent on our smart devices giving us all of this information that our brains aren’t getting the exercise they need to be able to stay fit, so we’re subject to digital dementia, which is an actual medical term. It refers to our high reliance on technology and not getting the brain activity we need. For example, we used to have to memorize people’s phone numbers back before cell phones existed. Now, we can call and text someone every single day at the touch of an icon or button. But what if our phone battery died, would we even know that person’s number?

Not that I want to memorize 300 phone numbers—nobody wants to do that—but we’ve lost the ability to remember them, a conversation we’ve just had, or something important we need to do. Those kinds of memory lapses, where our smart devices are making us stupid—they’re a symptom of this digital dementia. There’s just too much to learn, too little time.

The ultimate technology is our brain, right? We’re born with the ultimate technology; it is the most incredible superpower on the planet. The challenge is it doesn’t come with an owner’s manual and nobody shows us how to use it. That’s really become my mission, to show people how to use their No. 1 wealth-building asset, their mind. People upgrade their phone more often than they upgrade their brain. That’s really what I’m going to focus on during my keynote: how to upgrade your brain and learn anything faster to achieve more in less time.

Can you share any hacks for better learning?

First of all, it’s not how smart you are, it’s how you smart. When people find their preferred way of learning, all of a sudden things become a lot easier because we all have different modes of learning and learning is a process.

For example, I think reading is to our mind what exercise is to our body, and it’s something you should be doing every day. For many people reading is a chore and it makes them tired, so they read a page in a book and they forget what they just read and then they go back and reread it and they still don’t know what they just read.

One of the hacks to overcome this is to use a visual pacer. A visual pacer could be a pen, a pencil, highlighter, mouse on a computer, or your finger, to just underline the words as you’re reading, and it will boost your reading speed and focus 25 to 50 percent. That’s a remarkable boost for just using what you have, literally at your fingertips. Don’t take my word for it, pick up a book and read for 60 seconds, count the number of lines you read normally in 60 seconds. Then, pick up where you left off using your finger as a visual pacer for 60 seconds. Put a little mark in the margin, count the number of lines you did the second time, and you’ll see about a 25 to 50 perfect increase.

That is a simple hack to help people improve their reading speed and their focus, and if their focus is better, their comprehension will be better.

Before there was Kwik Learning, what kind of career did you envision for yourself?

I’ve never done anything different than what I’m doing. When I was a kid, my uncle gave me my first comic book. I wanted to be a comic book artist because imagination and storytelling is so important, especially nowadays when so many jobs are being outsourced and automated and going to artificial intelligence. I feel the areas that won’t be overtaken are the creative areas where we can do strategy, creativity, solve problems, organize things in different ways, and use our imagination for new possibilities.

Many law librarians teach legal research to law students and attorneys—people who are often in high-stress settings. Any tips or strategies for facilitating better learning within these groups?

I think that the best teachers are the best students and vice versa. When we teach something, we get to learn it twice, and that’s remarkable. Stress is
information multiplied by emotion becomes unforgettable. There is probably a song you could hear today that would take you back to a special moment. When you tie information to some emotion, it becomes unforgettable because we’re not logical, we’re biological—a kind of complex chemical-emotional soup. So, when it comes to remembering things, that’s the key to long-term memory: information times emotion becomes a long-term memory.

Finally, the “T” in FAST stands for teach. I put the responsibility on my students to teach what they learned to someone else. If your students have to pay it forward and they have to teach something to a learning buddy or to their firm or in their class, they will learn it differently. They will take better notes, ask better questions, and own the information, as opposed to just feeling like it’s outside of them.

Whenever I want to learn something better, I learn with the intention of teaching somebody else.

Any advice for law librarians navigating the “digital deluge”?

One thing law librarians can do is to practice self-care. I believe that practicing self-love and self-care are not the same as being selfish. And that in order to be able to tackle this digital deluge of distractions, and even digital dementia, you must make time each day to take care of yourself and schedule that in.

Because if you’re not taking care of yourself—getting enough sleep and eating good foods and being around people that nourish you and encourage you—then you can’t possibly, in today’s hyper-competitive world, be able to catch up and keep up, much less get ahead. Take care of yourself and schedule it because if you don’t schedule it, it’s not going to happen.

You often ask people about their own superpowers. What’s yours?

A lot of people think my superpower is learning. I think that’s my passion. That is, when I think about superpowers, I think about passion and purpose. And for me is that I enjoy seeing what lights a person up.

Learning and reading, all of that lights me up. How I’m using my passion to light other people up is my purpose. So, my passion is learning, and my purpose is teaching people how to learn. I would say that my superpower is teaching people how to discover and develop their ultimate superpower, which is learning.

What impact are you hoping to make on the world?

For me, again, it’s not one billion dollars, it’s one billion brains. I believe that if we change our brains, we can change our lives. If we change our brains, we can change the world. We have a podcast that has tens of millions of downloads; it’s the number one education training podcast on iTunes. If a kid is listening to my podcast in a third-world country and they are able to learn how to be creative or focused or use their mind in a different way and they become the next Malala or the next Elon Musk, or they come up with the cure for cancer—that really excites me.

My goal is to ensure that no brain is left behind. That’s the impact I want. And I want to make sure that anyone I come into contact with is better off because of it.