

Sticky

Learning

Guide

A RESOURCE TO LEVERAGE  
YOUR LEARNING

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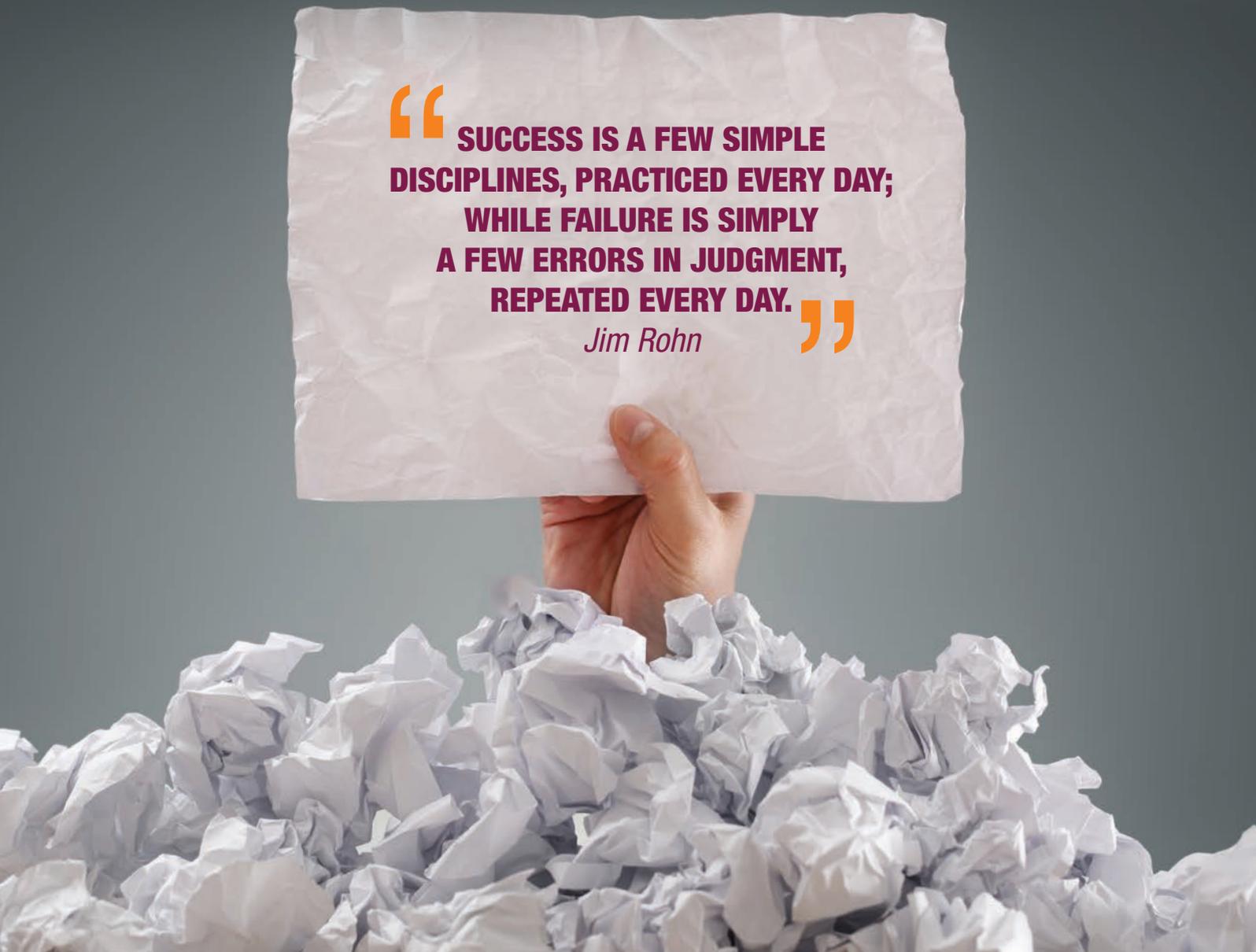
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# Introduction

You know the story. You attend a training course, you learn something new, and you vow to do things differently ... But you don't. Work piles up while you're away, and you find yourself behind and playing catch up before you've even begun. Another wasted training program. 😞

If this story doesn't ring true for you, congratulations you have cracked your own learning code! Go help others do the same. If it's an all too familiar story then read on.

This guide had been designed for participants of training programs who want to get the most out of the learning opportunity. It is for committed professionals who see training as more than just a 'tick the box' exercise and rather as an opportunity to really develop and refine new skills and behaviours to succeed at work. In this guide we'll look at why new skills and behaviours don't magically develop after attending a training program, and what you can do to change that. We'll explore the latest in learning theory and brain science to help you hack your own learning strategy and provide a list of tips and tricks to help make your learning stick. (Jump straight to the Cheat Sheet at the end if you want to action these tips and tricks immediately.)



**“ SUCCESS IS A FEW SIMPLE  
DISCIPLINES, PRACTICED EVERY DAY;  
WHILE FAILURE IS SIMPLY  
A FEW ERRORS IN JUDGMENT,  
REPEATED EVERY DAY. ”**

*Jim Rohn*

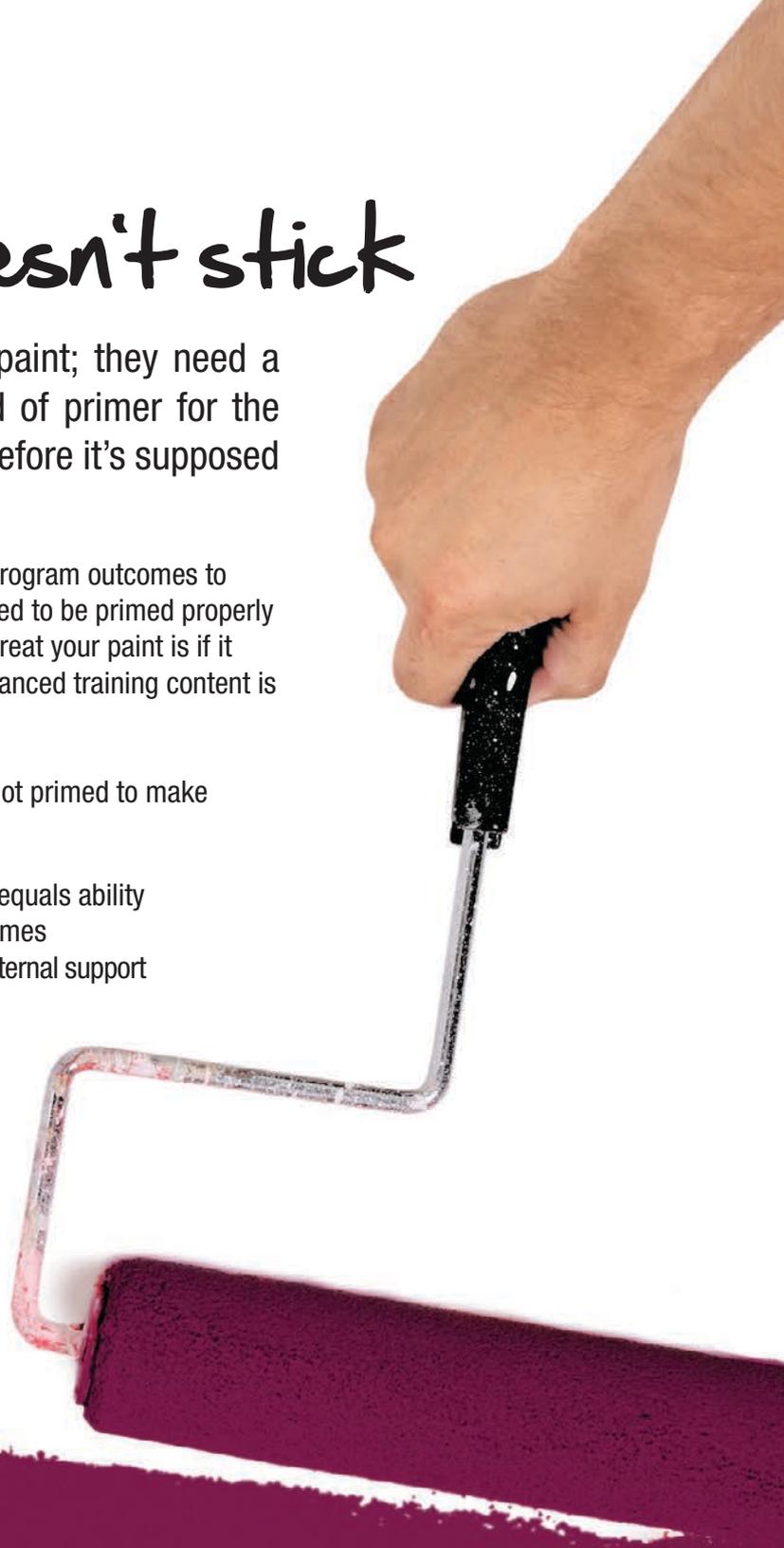
# Why learning doesn't stick

Training programs are like high quality paint; they need a good primer to stick. Without some kind of primer for the walls, the high quality paint will peel off before it's supposed to, wasting the investment and effort.

High quality training also needs a good primer for the program outcomes to stick. The environment, the players, the pathway, all need to be primed properly in order to make learning stick. It doesn't matter how great your paint is if it doesn't stick to the wall, and it doesn't matter how advanced training content is if it doesn't get traction back in the workplace.

There are many ways the learning canvass at work is not primed to make learning stick. Let's explore three of them.

1. **Legacy learning systems** - Assuming awareness equals ability
2. **Reasons over results** - Low commitment to outcomes
3. **Unsupportive application environment** - Lack of external support



## 1.

**LEGACY LEARNING SYSTEMS**

Traditional classroom experiences have taught us that attending a training program is all the effort required to learn something new. We have become conditioned to think that 'knowing' equals 'doing'. However, research<sup>1</sup> suggests that attending a training event accounts for only 10% of the effort required to make the learning stick; 20% of the effort comes from talking about it with others and the remaining 70% comes from what you actually do. If it were as easy to 'do' as to 'know' we would have more sports people on the field and less spectators in the crowd!

**TIP: AWARENESS DOESN'T EQUAL APPLICATION.**

“ **THE ONLY THING THAT INTERFERES WITH MY LEARNING IS MY EDUCATION.** ”  
*Albert Einstein*

**Effort required to learn:**

Learn stuff .....	10%	✓
Discuss stuff .....	20%	✓
Do stuff.....	70%	✓

## 2.

**REASONS OVER RESULTS**

With the pace of change today, it can be very easy to find reasons why things couldn't get done or results didn't happen. No time, no budget, no priority! But when it comes to the things that are most important to us, we have an amazing capacity make stuff happen. If you want to learn how to use a new app on your smart phone, you will find the cracks of time in your day to work it out. Learning at work is no different. If you want to practise a new skill that will further develop your career AND it's important to you, you will find ways to make this happen.

**TIP: IF IT'S IMPORTANT ENOUGH, YOU'LL FIND A WAY.**

“ **EDUCATION IS NOT TO FILL A PAIL, BUT TO LIGHT A FIRE.** ”  
*William Yates*

## 3.

**UNSUPPORTIVE APPLICATION ENVIRONMENT**

Studies<sup>2</sup> have shown that one of the main causes for training failure in organisations is an unsupportive application environment - lack of line manager support, peer support or organisational culture. Even your best intentions to practise may not be enough to overcome these external influences. However, application support can be found in other places. Sometimes a mentor or support person can be found in another department or outside your organisation altogether.

**TIP: LACK OF SUPPORT CAN MAKE IT TOUGH, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE.**

“ **THE ILLITERATE OF THE 21ST CENTURY WILL NOT BE THOSE WHO CANNOT READ AND WRITE, BUT THOSE WHO CANNOT LEARN, UNLEARN, AND RELEARN.** ”  
*Alvin Toffler*

“ **AN ORGANISATION DEVELOPS PEOPLE; IT EITHER FORMS THEM OR DEFORMS THEM.** ”  
*Peter Drucker*

**What's Your Application Obstacle?**  Tick

- TIME** - "I'm too busy."
- PRIORITY** - "It's not my top priority right now."
- MANAGEMENT SUPPORT** - "My manager doesn't care so why should I?"
- PEER SUPPORT** - "No one else is doing it."
- FOCUS** - "I got side tracked."
- PRACTICE** - "I didn't practise enough."
- COMMITMENT** - "It's just not something I care about."



## What's your training outcome - knowing or doing?

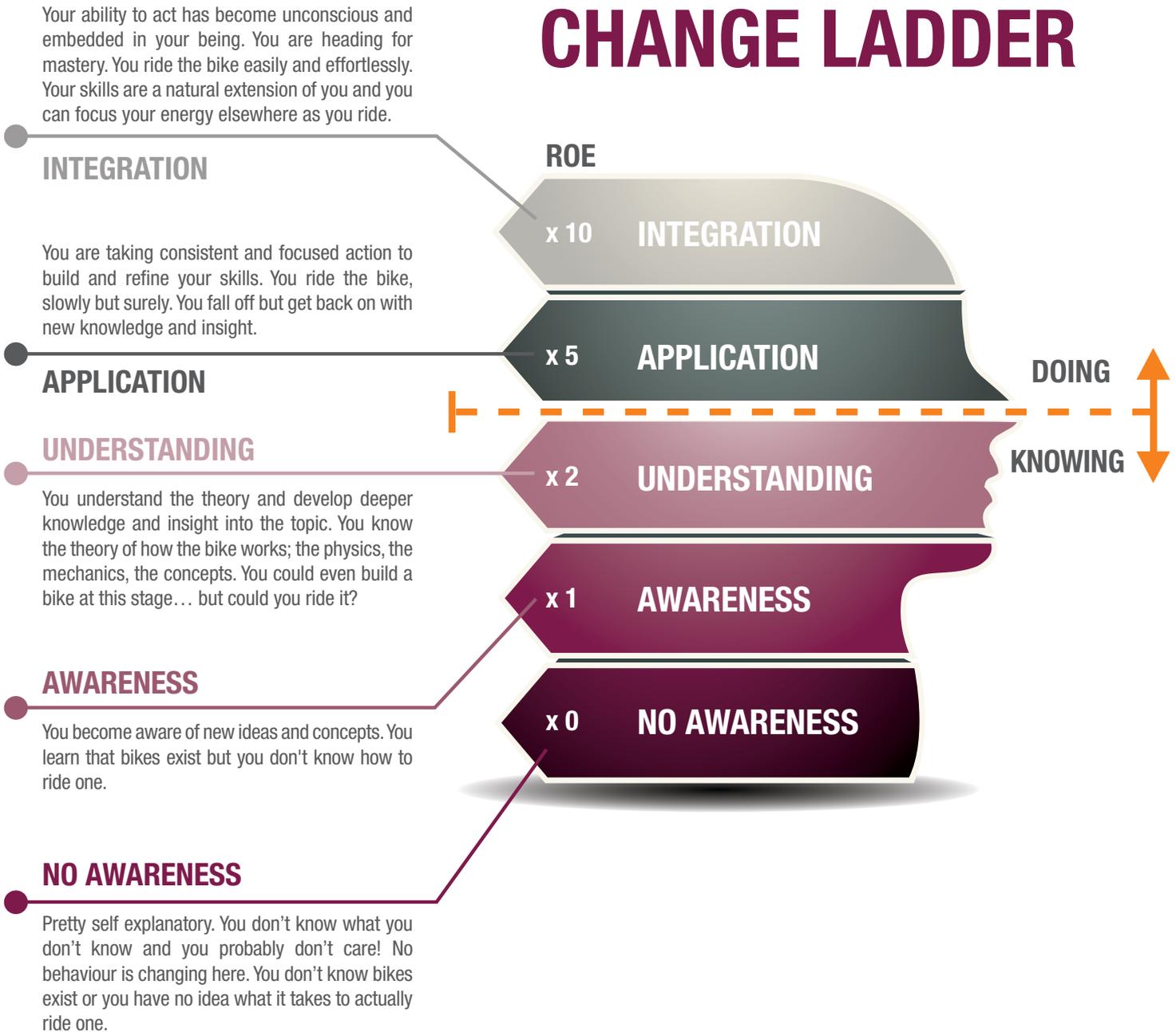
“It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.” Proverb

Given the many reasons why formal learning doesn't translate into new behaviours back at work, it's worth asking the question: 'why do we attend training at all?' Apart from being 'required to' at times, let's assume that most of us attend training programs because we actually want to learn new skills. However, as discussed above, having an intention to develop new skills is not the same as actually developing them. As a result it is important to understand if there is a gap between what you expect from a training program and what you are actually doing to make that expectation happen.

For example, have you ever attended a training program (for example time management) and expected to walk away instantly productive, assuming that because you know better, you'll do better? You'd be in great company if you did. Most people fall into this trap without really acknowledging the real work required to make the lessons stick. It's like reading a book on how to ride a bike and expecting to be able to ride it immediately. This approach works fine if it's really just about knowing more information, however we're talking about doing things differently to improve performance at work. And that requires you to actually get on the bike.

So once you get clear on your training outcomes, you need to make sure they're aligned with the effort required to make them happen. To do this, let's take a look at the Behaviour Change Ladder as a great way to understand the stages involved in learning. You'll see a clear distinction between building awareness (the book) and taking action (the bike).

# BEHAVIOUR CHANGE LADDER



You'll notice that it's not until we hit the application stage that we start to see behaviour actually change. It's not until we start to do things differently that we close the knowing-doing gap. And doing is where we start building the muscle memory that creates the new brain structures to make learning sticky. Your job is to get above the knowing line as quickly as possible if you want to make learning stick.

## A Quick Check In...

What's your learning outcome? Knowing or doing?

Where do you focus your effort to achieve this?  
Above or below the line? (Understanding or application?)

What needs to change to improve  
your learning outcomes?



## How to make learning stick

Think about the last time you successfully learnt something new. It might have been learning to play an instrument, speaking a language, or mastering a sport. Whatever the skill, the learning occurred as a result of three things; **awareness**, **practice** and **reflection**. This is because at its core, developing sticky learning is about the interplay between what you know, what you do and how you review. Let's delve a little deeper...

# Awareness

## GET CLEAR

Self-directed learning produces significantly better results than learning that has been mandated<sup>3</sup>. There has to be a compelling reason for you to want to put in the effort or you simply won't stick at it. Getting clear on why this learning is important will help provide the fuel to keep going and ensure your effort is relevant.

Once the goal is clear, it's important to know your starting point. What is your current skill level, where do you want it to be and how big is the gap? Research<sup>4</sup> suggests that when it comes to workplace behaviours, we often can't see ourselves as clearly as others can, so getting feedback on the gap is a great way to build up your awareness.

“ **THE ROAD TO SELF-INSIGHT RUNS THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE.** ”

*David Dunning*

## GET COMMITTED

Be clear about what might be holding you back from achieving your learning goal. Do you say things like 'I'm not a quick learner', 'I'm not a people person' or 'creativity is not my strong point?' Believing we do not have natural talent gives us a 'fixed mindset'<sup>5</sup>. We give up more easily, persist less through hurdles and can take failure personally.

Commit to a 'growth mindset'<sup>6</sup> and choose to believe that new skills and behaviours can be developed through concerted effort over time. Commit to the process, be willing to fail forward and embrace the learning challenge.

“ **THE KEY TO BUILDING LASTING HABITS IS FOCUSING ON CREATING A NEW IDENTITY FIRST. YOUR CURRENT BEHAVIOURS ARE SIMPLY A REFLECTION OF YOUR CURRENT IDENTITY.** ”

*James Clear*



# Practice

## KEEP IT SMALL

Little steps lead to large results. Keeping the steps small and actionable keeps the motivation high and the momentum on track. If the goal is too big it can become overwhelming and procrastination is likely to set in. Thanks to the Goal-gradient effect<sup>7</sup>, we have a bias for completion; the closer we get to our goals the more we are motivated to act. Therefore the smaller your goals, the greater your motivation.

“ **THE SECRET OF GETTING AHEAD IS GETTING STARTED.** ”  
*Mark Twain*

## FOCUS REPEATEDLY

New behaviours require new connections in the brain. These new ways of thinking and behaving are developed just like any other muscle - through focused repetition over time. It's like going to the gym. You don't get strong after lifting weights once. Your body needs time to adapt and build new muscle fibre and it does this from dedicated practice over time.

## BUILD A HABIT

Small repeated actions eventually build a habit. Embedding a new habit into an existing one, allows you to take advantage of the strong brain wiring that already exists around the first habit and reduces the mental effort required to start something new. Stacking habits<sup>8</sup> in this way helps you remember, repeat and reinforce each new behaviour with ease.

## STACK THE CHANNELS

The more neural circuits that fire up during the learning experience, the more effective the learning will become<sup>9</sup>. Therefore stack the processing channels (hearing, seeing, doing, reading etc.) to be more effective. Not all training programs are tailored to our individual learning preferences so knowing your primary learning channel can also enhance your learning effectiveness.

“ **I HEAR AND I FORGET.  
 I SEE AND I REMEMBER.  
 I DO AND I UNDERSTAND.** ”  
*Confucius*

### EFFECT OF PROCESSING CHANNELS ON RECALL<sup>10</sup>

	Told	Told & Shown	Told, Shown & Experienced
Recall after 3 weeks	70%	72%	85%
Recall after 3 months	<b>10%</b>	32%	65%



**“ WHEN EMPLOYEES CAN SEE HOW THEIR EFFORT IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE AND CONTRIBUTING TO PROGRESS, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO INVEST EFFORT INTO THE WORK. ”**

*Jason Fox*

## MAKE PROGRESS VISIBLE

When practising new behaviours it's important to keep focused, stay motivated and stay on track. A clever way to increase the inherent motivation of any activity is to track your progress visibly. Research<sup>11</sup> suggests that a clear sense of progress is more effective than clear goals, incentives or rewards when it comes to people's enthusiasm for doing work. You can tap into this principle by breaking down the ultimate goal into a series of smaller tasks.

**“ WHILE WE TEACH, WE LEARN. ”**

*Seneca*

## TEACH TO LEARN

They say to teach is to learn twice. Understanding something for yourself is very different to helping another person understand it. The key here is to teach what you are learning to as many people as possible to increase your ability to 'get it' at a deeper level. You can also apply this concept when you are attending the training event itself. If you listen as if to teach you will take in much more than if you were just listening to learn for yourself.

## USE YOUR NETWORKS

The people around us (mostly line managers, peers) play a crucial role in supporting or sabotaging our efforts to develop new behaviours at work. The role of the manager is vital in creating sticky learning back in the workplace<sup>12</sup>. Having a targeted discussion about the goals of the training before and after the training event, is the key to leveraging your line manager's support. Peers can also help you stay focused, provide feedback and help you stay accountable to your own goals.

**“ GOALS ARE GOOD FOR PLANNING YOUR PROGRESS AND SYSTEMS ARE GOOD FOR ACTUALLY MAKING PROGRESS. ”**

*James Clear*

### The Probability of Completing a Commitment to Action:

- 10% if you hear an idea
- 25% if you consciously decide to adopt it
- 40% if you decide when you will do it
- 50% if you plan how you will do it
- 65% if you commit to someone else that you'll do it
- 95% if you have a specific accountability appointment with the person/team to whom you committed

*Source: American Society of Training and Development*

# Reflection

## TAKE THE TIME

Implementation without reflection is like setting up a science experiment without checking the results. The doing is critical and yet without the reflection, critical insights get missed and the science behind the success can be harder to replicate. Reflection also aids retention and improves results. Taking time away from training and reallocating that time to reflection actually improves individual performance<sup>13</sup>. Just 15 minutes at the end of the day can powerfully enhance the learning process.



**“ FOLLOW EFFECTIVE ACTION WITH QUIET REFLECTION. FROM THE QUIET REFLECTION WILL COME EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE ACTION. ”**  
*Peter F. Drucker*



Whilst the time allocated to awareness, practice and reflection is different, it is not a reflection of the level of importance of each aspect. They are equally critical because the true power is in the way they combine together to create sticky learning.

When we combine awareness and practise together, we start making real **progress** in our learning. We become clear on what we want and we start taking action toward achieving it.

When we combine practice and reflection together we gain **precision** in our performance. With the ability to review and refine our actions, we get access to greater distinctions in our work.

Finally when we combine reflection and awareness, we gain a greater **perception** into our new behaviours. It allows us to deepen our insights and reflections and clarify our possibilities. This is how sticky learning is created.

# Sticky Learning Cheat Sheet

Now you know what makes learning stick you can use the cheat sheet below as a guide to creating your own sticky learning strategy. Pick a few tips from each section and begin your practice today!



*Anneli Blundell*

people whisperer

## Awareness

- Know your starting point. Know your development gap. Know your goal
- Get feedback from trusted colleagues
- Take a self assessment test to create a starting benchmark
- Set an outcome intention by describing what you will experience, do, think or be once the change is made. ("Before providing answers to my teams' questions, I ask at least 3 questions to help them come up with their own answers first.")
- Set an 'If/then' outcome goal ("If I feel overwhelmed with my workload, then I will focus on completing one small task to get a quick win.")

## Practice

- Record your schedule of practice
- Teach the new skill to at least 3 other people
- Discuss your development plan with your manager and get their support
- Get a buddy to discuss progress with and stay accountable
- Ask someone to test you or role-play with you
- Embed the practice as part of your everyday work schedule
- Create triggers to remind you to practise and focus
- Link an existing habit to a new habit to build consistency
- Record one small action on a sticky note and stick it on your computer for a week as a reminder to stay focused
- Break down the actions and focus so it takes less than 5 minutes a day to do
- Aim to begin your practice every day (even if you don't complete the whole task at first). Momentum will soon pick up
- Create visual triggers for tracking your progress - wall charts, dashboards, targets, tick boxes, sticky notes, etc
- Include milestones in your progress plan so you can tick off the small steps

## Reflection

- Review your progress regularly to adjust as necessary
- Block out diary time at the end of each practice opportunity (day, meeting, week, presentation etc) and take 5 minutes to reflect on what happened
- Refine your practice schedule if the changes aren't taking hold
- Reflect on what's working and why as well as what's not working and why
- Appreciate and celebrate your success

“ IF YOU REALLY WANT SOMETHING, YOU WILL FIND A WAY.  
IF YOU DON'T, YOU'LL FIND AN EXCUSE. ”

Jim Rohn

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As a professional People Whisperer, Anneli has been working with leaders and teams to improve their communication and interpersonal intelligence for almost a decade. She brings to her clients a recognised expertise in the field of below **conscious communication and motivation**.

Fuelled by her passion to create behaviour change programs that stick, Anneli partners with her clients to co-create practical and relevant people and performance solutions that provide real results. Check out [www.anneliblundell.com](http://www.anneliblundell.com) to see her latest behaviour change programs that are making a difference to her clients right now.

Anneli is an accomplished author, speaker and trainer who has published two books on decoding human behaviour (to assist coaches and facilitators). Her third and most recent book *Developing Direct Reports: Taking the guesswork out of leading leaders* is a practical leaders guide for developing leadership performance at work.

**To enquire about working with Anneli, contact her office today.**

## Stay in touch...

Anneli is an avid blogger, writer and presenter. To keep in touch with her latest postings and white papers connect with her through your favourite channel:

-  Newsletter 'Reading between the lines', tips about decoding people and performance dynamics at work. ([www.anneliblundell.com](http://www.anneliblundell.com))
-  White papers downloadable from [www.anneliblundell.com](http://www.anneliblundell.com)
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