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This is an extract from a training manual created for one of our clients.

Getting Ready to Learn

Whatever you are about to do, it helps to be prepared, and learning something new is no different. Following these 3 steps will increase your chances of success:

- What Motivates Me?
- What is Getting in My Way?
- Rising to the Challenge

What Motivates Me?

If you are able to answer **Yes!** to some of these questions and statements about potential benefits, then you are well on your way to having the drive and determination to learn something new.

What motivation do you have for learning? That will depend on a variety of things, like your past experiences and future goals, as well as your personally held beliefs about learning.

The most effective and motivational learning is achieved when you personally can see, and want, the benefits that the learning will provide you. So, start by identifying the benefits you will gain from it.

Believing in Yourself

- Will I feel more self-confident once I have completed this?
- Will completing this learning give me the boost to go ahead with further development?
- Will completion of this learning give me a sense of satisfaction and achievement?

Helping Your Team

- Will I gain skills and knowledge I can use at work and pass on to my colleagues?
- Will this learning help me to develop stronger, more effective working relationships?

Helping Yourself

- Will this help me to develop new competencies that will be useful to me in my career?
- Will this help me to be better at my current job?

Helping My Employer?

- Will this help me to develop skills that will benefit the company?

That's great! Now you have come up with reasons why learning will be valuable to you.

But do you still have any nagging doubts? Don't worry. It is perfectly normal to have reservations about learning, or be unsure about how to go about it. If you have got anything standing in your way the best thing to do is deal with it, so that you can get into the best mind-set for learning effectively. This section will help you to identify, understand and find ways to reduce obstacles to your learning journey.

Excuses, Excuses! - What is Getting in My Way?

"The greater the obstacle, the more glory in overcoming it." ~ Moliere

Learning takes time, energy, dedication and some skills which, if you don't already have them, can be acquired. If you think you haven't done much learning for a long time, perhaps since school, you may feel anxious about it.

Many of us have one or more obstacles in our way on the road to learning. These may be self-imposed, for example a limiting belief about our ability or desire to learn. Or, there may be real or perceived external barriers, such as lack of time. Whatever the barriers are, you can find ways to overcome or reduce them. The first stage to overcoming any obstacle is to recognise and understand it, then plan what you are going to do about it.

So, if you think any of these are getting in your way, why not try some of our suggestions for moving around them, climbing over them or even blasting them out of your way?

⊗ **People Like Me**

You may believe that learning is not for people like you – people with your background, with your education level, who went to a school like you did, with your job history, etc. Or maybe you are worried that your friends will laugh at you if you take learning seriously.

Leap that barrier! Learning is for everyone. We are learning all of the time – many of us just don't notice it, including your friends!! You and your partner had to learn to put up that flat pack wardrobe last weekend. When you watched that cookery programme last week and then tried out one of the recipes, you were learning. When you started teaching your teenager how to drive last month, you were both learning.

Learning is for People Like You, People Like Me, People Like Us and People Like Them!

⊗ **I Don't Have the Toolkit**

Think you don't have the skills you need to help you to learn? Well, that's where this booklet comes in. You will get some tips and techniques to help you. If that isn't enough, you can find more support in the Getting Help section.

You may fear you don't understand enough about technology to take advantage of on-line learning. Well, the only way you are going to get used to using computer technology is to give it a try with the help and support available to you within the company – see Getting Help. Once you get used to it, in fact it can end up being a lot of fun and open you up to many new and exciting opportunities. You are well on your way if you already 'Google it' whenever you are comparing prices, planning a holiday,

buying insurance or helping your kids with their homework.

So if you don't have the toolkit, go and get it! Isn't that what learning is all about?

⊖ **Tomorrow Never Comes**

Time can be very uncooperative and has a habit of never quite being right. If it's not time that is the problem you may also believe that the place is not right, or the situation is not right. The time is never perfect, the place is never perfect, the situation is never perfect. Tomorrow never comes, so make a start today. By all means try to plan to get the optimum benefit from what you are doing, but don't let that plan get in your way. If you think it is becoming a barrier to your progress, you have just met your enemy to progress, procrastination.

"Procrastination is opportunity's natural assassin." ~Victor Kiam

⊖ **That Sinking Feeling**

It is quite normal to experience that sinking feeling of nerves when you are faced with unfamiliar situations, such as learning something new. Common fears include a worry that you are not 'bright' enough, will not be able to keep up and end up looking stupid; or that you fear failure; memories of previous negative learning experiences; or just not knowing what to expect.

The great news is that these feelings are not permanent and can be dealt with. As a starting point it helps to remind yourself just how capable and confident you really can be when learning something new.

- Think about the last time you learned something and it went really well. This does not have to be at school or work. Instead it could be when you learned to drive, ride a bike, play a sport, an instrument, use the Internet, put up some flat pack – anything where it was a positive learning experience, you enjoyed it and got a lot out of it.
- Next, think about all the times when you have been so competent at something you have actually been in the position of teaching others. How about at work when helping to induct a new team member, at home when showing your partner how to use the washing machine or helping your child with their homework, in your community when coaching the junior football team, or a whole host of other winning experiences.

Get the picture? So whenever you start to get that sinking feeling, just use these simple techniques to boost your confidence. Remind yourself that if you have done it before, you can do it again.

**"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow,
you gotta put up with the rain."
~ Dolly Parton**

⊖ **I'm The Expert**

Maybe you think you have learned all you need to know because you have a qualification; that you don't need to learn any more once you have left school/college/university; or you have reached a high enough level in your profession/work role and have no ambition to aim any higher. Whatever the reason, do you now believe that you're such a seasoned expert in everything you need to do that you don't need to learn anymore?

When you think about it, surely that is just not true!

“It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.” ~ Harry S Truman

None of us knows everything there is to know about our job, company, industry or profession. The world keeps changing, and you need to change with it. No matter how much of an expert you are today, you need to be prepared to flex with the changing commercial and work tides. If you love learning and know how to do it well, you are better prepared, not only to respond to changes that are just around the corner, but also to be ready to rise to future challenges that cannot be fully predicted now.

Not convinced? Think about how you did your job 10 or even 5 years ago and compare it to how you do it today. Even if the job title has remained the same, something about the way you work will have changed, such as the technology that you are using, the way you interact with colleagues, regulations that govern what you do, or the impact of the economy and the market.

So no matter how much of an expert you are, you still need to stay open to learning to keep up with the pace of change.

Pass It On

If you really truly are an expert, then perhaps your next learning opportunity is to **teach, coach and mentor others**. This is a learning opportunity in itself. You will be amazed to discover how much more you can learn about yourself and other people if you focus your attention on helping others to learn. It can be a truly enriching experience.

Rising to the Challenge

Perhaps you think the obstacles in your way are impossible to overcome. Well, don’t worry, where there is a will there is a way. The first key to overcoming obstacles is to change your mind-set or your focus.

Consider this analogy from downhill skiing:

Change your Focus

If you are skiing off-piste, there may be a lot of trees in your way. Whilst it is natural to have a fear of hitting the trees at high speed, if you focus solely on the trees this is very likely to slow you down. You are also far more likely to hit them because that is the direction you are looking in. But, focus on the gaps between the trees, and that is where you will be heading, allowing

So, whilst it is important to be aware of the obstacles and to understand their potential impact, you need to develop a strategy to deal with them. Sometimes you can remove them altogether. In the case of the skiing example, that could mean removing the trees. But that is expensive, is not ecological and removes one of the great features of off-piste skiing, the excitement and challenge. So, instead of removing barriers altogether you may need to minimise them, move them slightly or just change the way you see things so that they are still in your peripheral vision, but you are focusing instead on seeing past those obstacles.

"Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."

Getting Set

How to Become a Better Learner

Now you are well on your way to becoming a learning super-hero, and understanding **how** you learn will really help.

Activity

A good starting point is to think about how you have learned things in the past. This could be at school, college, in your home life (e.g. a sport or hobby), or at work.

Think about:

- One learning experience that was good for you (enjoyable and effective)
- One learning experience that was less effective and enjoyable.

Now reflect on those experiences and consider why the first one was so much more effective than the second one. What were you doing, where was it, how did you feel about it, what were your beliefs about the experience at the time, what are the beliefs you hold about learning as a result of that experience?

Reflect

Whatever your response to this exercise, it is likely that you will have identified some feelings and beliefs about learning. Emotions and feelings are part of our learning. We all have a learning history that has both positive and negative experiences.

Positive

If you can identify what mind-set and feelings help to get you in a positive mood for learning, that is great, and you can aim to replicate those conditions to help you in future activity.

Negative

Chances are that you also identified some more negative conditions, feelings, beliefs and experiences. Some of those feelings may not serve you very well in the future and you can use some of the guidance in this booklet to help you to become more positive about learning. However, feeling uncomfortable and experiencing unease may be just what you are looking for to make sure that you are really getting the most benefit from your learning experience. Whilst this may sound a bit mad, just hold that feeling of disbelief for a little longer, as the next section explains why you should aim to **get out of your comfort zone**.