



Continuous Learning



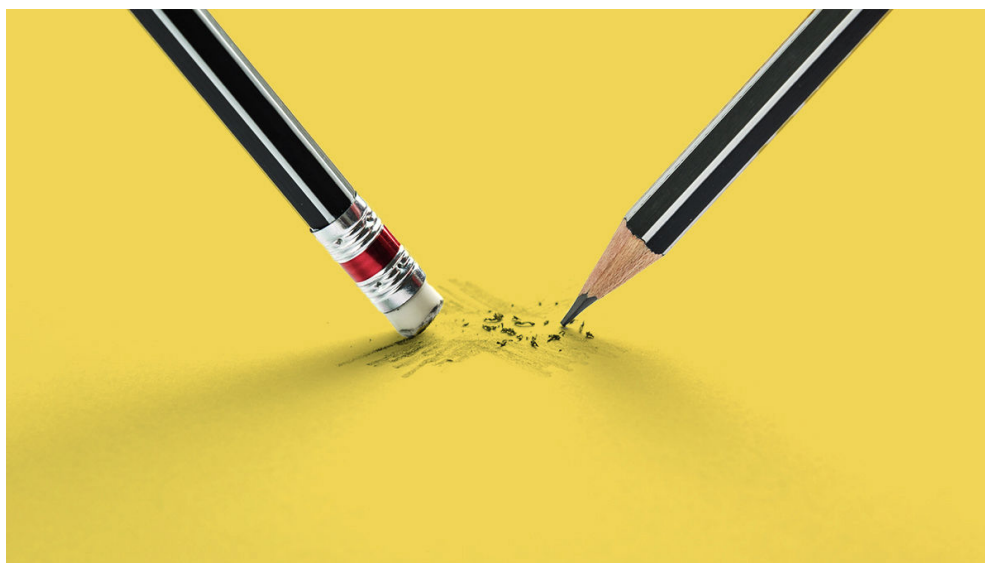
Make Learning a Part of Your Daily Routine

Strategies to help you get better at learning, unlearning, and relearning.
by Helen Tupper and Sarah Ellis

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Our capacity for learning is becoming the currency we trade on in our careers. Where we once went to work to learn to do a job, learning now *is* the job. Adaptive and proactive learners are highly prized assets for organizations, and when we invest in our learning, we create long-term dividends for our career development.

Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, shared that when assessing founders of potential investments, he looks for individuals who have an “infinite learning curve”: someone who is constantly learning, and

quickly. Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, echoed the importance of learning when he said, “The learn-it-all will always do better than the know-it all.”

However, it’s not as simple as acquiring new knowledge. In our increasingly “squiggly” careers, where people change roles more frequently and fluidly and develop in different directions, the ability to unlearn, learn, and relearn is vital for long-term success. Based on our experience designing and delivering career development training for over 50,000 people worldwide, working with organizations including Virgin, Unilever, and Microsoft, we’ve identified several techniques and tools to help you make learning part of your day-to-day development.

Learning

Since we spend so much of our time, energy, and efforts at our day jobs, they provide the most significant opportunities for learning. The challenge is that we don’t invest intentionally in everyday development — we’re so busy with tasks and getting the job done that there’s no space left for anything else. Deprioritizing our development is a risky career strategy because it reduces our resilience and ability to respond to the changes happening around us. Here are three ways to take ownership of your learning at work.

Learn from others

The people you spend time with are a significant source of knowledge. Creating a diverse learning community will offer you new perspectives and reduce the risk that you’ll end up in an echo chamber. Set a goal of having one *curiosity coffee* each month, virtually or in person, with someone you haven’t met before. This could be someone in a different department who could help you view your organization through a new lens or someone in your profession at another company who could broaden your knowledge. You can extend your curiosity even further by ending each conversation with the question: “Is there anyone else

you think it would be useful for me to connect with?” Not only does this create the chance for new connections, but you might also benefit from a direct introduction.

Experiment

Experiments help you test, learn, and adapt along the way. There are endless ways you can experiment at work — for example, using different tools to increase the interactivity of your virtual presentations, exploring the impact of camera-on versus camera-off meetings, switching from video to phone calls, or even trying out new negotiation tactics.

For an experiment to be effective, it needs to be a conscious choice and labeled as an opportunity for learning. Keep a *learn-it-all log* where you track the experiments you’re running and what you’re learning along the way. It’s important to remember that you should expect some experiments to fail, as that’s the nature of exploring the unknown.

Create a collective curriculum

In a squiggly career, everyone’s a learner and everyone’s a teacher. As a team, consider how you can create a collective curriculum where you’re learning from and with each other. We’ve seen organizations effectively use *skills swaps* where individuals share one skill they’re happy to help other people learn. This could look like a creative problem-solver offering to share the processes and tools they find most helpful, or someone who has expertise in coding running beginner lunch-and-learn sessions. Skills swaps are a good example of democratized development where everyone has something to contribute and is learning continually.

Unlearning

Unlearning means letting go of the safe and familiar and replacing it with something new and unknown. Skills and behaviors that helped

you get to where you are can actually hold you back from getting to where you want to be. For example, a leader might need to unlearn their default of always being the person who speaks first in meetings. Or a new manager might need to unlearn always saying “yes” as their workload increases.

During the pandemic, we were all forced to unlearn some aspects of our lives, like how we collaborated on work or what school looked like for our kids. Unlearning feels uncomfortable, but the past couple of years have reminded us how adaptable we can be. Here are three ways to make unlearning an active part of how you work.

Connect with challengers

We unlearn when we look at a problem or opportunity through a new lens. This is more likely to happen if we’re spending time with people who challenge us and think differently than we do. The purpose of connecting with challengers is not to agree or debate but to listen and consider: What can I learn from this person?

Seek out people who have an *opposite experience* from you in some way. For example, if you’re in a large organization, find someone who has only ever worked for themselves. If you have 25 years of experience, find someone just starting out. People who have made different choices and have different areas of expertise than you are a good place to discover a new source of challenge. Asking people, “How would you approach this challenge?” or “What has your experience of this situation been?” is a good way to explore an alternative point of view.

Identify habits and hold backs

We all have habits that helped us get to where we are today. However, habits can create blind spots that stop us from seeing different ways of doing things or new approaches to try out. Our brains use habits to

create mental shortcuts that might make us miss out on opportunities to reflect on and unlearn our automatic responses.

Create a *habit tracker* by writing down all the actions and activities you do by default over the course of a week. Pick three habits to consciously unlearn and try out a new way of working. For example, if you habitually set up meetings, see what happens when you leave it to someone else. If you habitually problem solve, try out asking for other people's perspectives first. Testing your habits helps increase your awareness of your own actions.

Ask propelling questions

Propelling questions reset our status quo and encourage us to explore different ways of doing things. They often start with: How might we? How could I? What would happen if? These questions are designed to prevent our existing knowledge from limiting our ability to imagine new possibilities. They fast-forward us into the future and prompt positive action in the present.

To put propelling questions into practice, it's helpful to pair up with someone else and take turns asking and answering questions. These five peer-to-peer propelling questions can get you started:

1. Imagine it's 2030. What three significant changes have happened in your industry?
2. How might you divide your role between you and a robot?
3. Which of your strengths would be most useful if your organization doubled in size?
4. How could you transfer your talents if your industry disappeared overnight?
5. If you were rebuilding this business tomorrow, what would you do differently?

Relearning

Relearning is recognizing that how we apply our strengths is always changing and that our potential is always a work in progress. We need to regularly reassess our abilities and how they need to be adapted for our current context. For example, collaboration remains as important as ever, but maybe you're relearning how to do it in a hybrid world of work. Or maybe you've made a career change and you're relearning what it looks like to transfer your talents to a new setting. Here are three ways to use relearning to stay nimble in the face of change.

Stretch your strengths

One of the ways to make your strengths stronger is to use them in as many different situations as possible. If you become too comfortable applying them in the same way, your development stalls. *Strengths solving* involves relearning how to use your strengths to offer support and solve problems outside of your day-to-day work. This could be in your networks, organizations you volunteer for, or even side projects you're involved in. For example, one of our workshop participants is a commercial marketing director who applies her creativity not only in her day job, but also in the successful brownie business she started during lockdown.

Get fresh-eyed feedback

Looking at your skills from someone else's perspective will help you identify opportunities to relearn. Asking for feedback can help open your eyes to your development blind spots and take back control of your growth. When your objective is to relearn, we find that presenting people with *even-better questions* works particularly well to provide them with the safety to share candid feedback. For example: How could I make my presentations even better? How could I make our team meetings even better? What's one way I could do an even better job of progressing my performance?

Relearn resilience

Relearning takes resilience, and if you feel pessimistic about the progress you're making, you might be tempted to give up. Refocusing on what's working well can help you continue to move forward.

Try writing down three *very small successes* at the end of each day for two weeks. Your successes can come from your personal or professional life, and though it can be hard to spot them at first, the more you do this, the easier it gets. A very small success could include asking one person for feedback, helping a colleague prepare for a presentation, or even encouraging your toddler to eat a vegetable! At the end of two weeks, you'll have 42 very small successes, creating the motivation and momentum to continue investing in your development, even when it feels hard.

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We can't predict how our careers will develop or what the world of work will look like in the future. Investing in our ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn helps us increase our readiness for the opportunities that change presents and our resilience to the inevitable challenges we'll experience along the way.

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