

## **INTENTIONAL PRACTICE**

### **Learning is an Accomplishment**

There's no argument that well executed practice within the sports arena is a key competitive advantage. Just ask professional athletes and they'll tell you that going over and over the skills, both before and after each game, make the difference between winning and losing. Top athletes go even further to achieve their performance goals by using visualization techniques to mentally rehearse muscle movements in their heads.

It's a given that you also need to practice when learning physical (kinesthetic) skills such as tennis and golf. Not just any old practice will do. What works is practice of the core, fundamental skills (back to basics stuff) that when reinforced over time leads to high quality, sustained performance.

If you're a contestant on a television show such as 'Dancing With the Stars', your top ballroom dance professional will teach you the physical, mental and social tools necessary for success, and will stop at nothing to transform you from ordinary to extraordinary. After a lot of practice and more practice you're ready to confidently glide across the dance floor. Again, you discover that you can only learn a physical skill with practice.

### **Once is not Enough**

Now think of the last time you attended a workshop, seminar, or completed an online course to learn new job knowledge and skills? How many times did you actually practice? Was once enough? For some learning events there's only time for content presentations and explanations with little or no opportunity to really discuss, work with, try out, use, and apply the learning.

Did you know that it takes twenty-one times of repetition to learn something...seven times to a performance level and the other times to reinforce it so it happens automatically. It's dangerous to think of learning as awareness only (a topic 'coverage' orientation) and not performance. What you think you know vanishes very quickly without practice. It's called learning decay.

### **Testing is not Practice**

So, you'd assume that with technology-based training you'd have more opportunities to practice. The opposite is true. Too many e-learning programs provide very little practice. The focus is more on testing as quickly as possible (within 15 to 30 minutes) to prove you have learned. What's being tested is not whether or not you have learned but how effectively you have retained the information in your short-term memory. It's "teach, test and hope for the best" training. It's similar to cramming for a test only to forget most of what you 'learned' the next day, week, or month.

### **Perfect Practice Makes Perfect**

Do you or your organization need to place more emphasis on practice? From an organizational perspective it's often the case of no time and no money to invest in practice. It's left up to you, the

learner, to take what you’ve learned and apply it back on-the-job. Often there’s no time to do that either because of other priorities and pressures that push practice to the back burner.

So, the next time you attend or go online to complete an organization-sponsored learning initiative, try using the same practice skills you rely on when learning a new sport or hobby. Take time to intentionally learn based on proven practice strategies.

### Practice Strategies

Here are some practice strategies to help you intentionally learn new knowledge and skills:

Knowledge Practice Strategies	Skills Practice Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cluster or group the content to make it more ‘memory’ manageable.</li> <li>• Summarize and write down the key learning points (more than once).</li> <li>• Visually represent what you’ve learned (draw a picture, chart, graph, picture, mind map, etc.).</li> <li>• Think of an acronym to anchor the new information in your memory, e.g., SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound).</li> <li>• Link the new knowledge to your known knowledge.</li> <li>• Talk about what you’ve learned (more than once to a variety of people in various contexts).</li> <li>• Ask yourself reflective questions about what you’ve learned, e.g., What are the key points? When would I use this new knowledge? Why do I need to know this?</li> <li>• Teach what you’ve learned to someone else.</li> <li>• Repeat the test over and over again.</li> <li>• Think up new testing questions, and then answer them.</li> <li>• Recognize (and feel) personal knowledge acquisition and retention.</li> <li>• Challenge yourself to recall knowledge over an extended period of time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up an optimal skill learning environment.</li> <li>• Have ready the necessary skill-supporting tools and resources.</li> <li>• Observe effective skill performance (more than once).</li> <li>• Observe poor skill performance (at least once) to see what not to do.</li> <li>• Break down each skill into clusters of steps (no more than 7 steps at a time, starting with a verb for each step).</li> <li>• Try-out the skill clusters (one step at a time).</li> <li>• Receive feedback and coaching.</li> <li>• Clarify the skill requirements (ask questions).</li> <li>• Adjust your performance to get better.</li> <li>• Repeat the performance (over and over and over again) i.e., practice does not make perfect but perfect practice makes perfect.</li> <li>• Recognize (and feel) personal perfect performance.</li> <li>• Reward yourself for learning the new skill.</li> <li>• Challenge yourself to repeat the skill (performance) over an extended period of time.</li> <li>• Value the skill as part of your skill repertoire.</li> </ul>

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Valerie Dixon, President of Learnware Design Inc., is a leading expert in the field of Training and Development. Valerie has over 40 years of experience in all aspects of training needs analysis and multi-media based learning design - including designing competency-based technical and management training programs, managing training designers and major training design projects and facilitating the successful implementation of training initiatives within both the private and public sectors.

Learnware Design Inc. offers a wide variety of training programs, tools and resources needed to achieve *Accelerated Competence™* – helping corporations, employees, training professionals and individuals learn faster, better and smarter.

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