

# Getting across the competency chasm

It's all very well knowing something. The trick is putting that knowledge into practice. There are many things that we all know but don't necessarily do; that exercising more and eating less will make you healthier and happier; that putting aside money in the good times is the best way to make it through the bad times *etc ad nauseam*.

There are miles of shelves in bookstores housing "success manuals" which aim to explain to the rest of us how to make something of our lives. At the risk of oversimplification, I will point you towards the origins of two words:

"Entrepreneur" is a word much in vogue as political parties of all colours who emphasise its critical importance at the heart of our society. The word comes from the French and literally means, "one who undertakes"; or even more simply "one who does".

"Succeed" comes from the Latin "succedere" and means to "follow or come after" or put more simply, the element of success is to follow through. So if the heart of improvement is action, how can you get over the chasm between inaction and action? At Reed Learning we wear our heart on our sleeves in learning terms. We have a simple, jargon free approach to learning with four headings: **Do, Review, Learn, Apply**

## MINDSET – WHAT IS REALLY HOLDING YOU BACK?

As with many things, the first step is the hardest but everything else flows from it. So think about what it is that stops you from doing something. With most people it is the fear for failure. Despite many organisations' protestations to the contrary, we have a tendency to punish and blame failures rather than reward them, so this fear is common. But if you don't do something, you won't learn anything.

Thomas Edison is widely attributed with the quote, "I have not failed. I've just found 1,000 ways that won't work." This subtle switch of mindset – seeing a setback not as disastrous but as another step achieved on the road to eventual success – is crucial to continue "doing".

## MOTIVATION – IF YOU DON'T WANT IT YOU WON'T DO IT

Let us assume that you have thrown off the shackles of fear that stop you from starting a new challenge. But this is only the equivalent of taking the handbrake off in a car. You still need to switch the engine on and press the accelerator and the engine of learning is motivation.

You can look at motivation in a number of ways. **Instrumental motivation** (doing something in order to achieve a goal – studying for an MBA to get a better higher paid job) is what people often think of first. The key issues here are 1) will the task you are setting yourself actually lead to the goal you want and 2) do you really want to achieve the goal (are you prepared to pay the price?). I have to admit to myself that I clearly don't actually want to have a body mass index of less than 25. If I did, I would be much more easily prepared to give up cheese and fatty foods, would happily drink less alcohol and would enthusiastically play sport more than once or twice a week.



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Often people find that **integrative motivation** (doing something to fit in with others – going running because you promised your friend you'd go with them) is a more powerful force. This is clearly the case with me, I happily play football, tennis or cricket when I have arranged with others to do so, but getting me into a gym is like extracting teeth.

**Extrinsic motivation** (a force coming from outside you – say your boss offering you a pay rise if you get a qualification) further increases the likelihood of success. It doesn't have to be as transparent as a financial bribe (although that certainly helps) – you could ask a boss or colleague to check on your progress towards a goal and this will further push you to achieve it.

Finally, **intrinsic motivation** (a force coming from within you – say a small treat or holiday promised to yourself) completes the picture. It goes without saying that if you can line up motivators in all four categories, you are much more likely to complete your goal.

## PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

You've spent all this time and effort thinking about taking off the handbrake and propelling yourself on your way with your new challenge. Now I'm going to tell you to stop!!!

### Safe practice

I'm not talking about imposing health & safety regulations to spoil everyone's fun. I mean creating a safe environment to test your skills, try, fail, and try again. This is easy enough in a classroom learning environment, but outside of the training room there are plenty of opportunities too.

You can download a clip from YouTube without shouting to everyone, "My name is Simon, I'm a managing director of 13 years experience and I don't know how pivot tables really work. I'm just looking it up now".

### Teach someone else

In breaking a task down and sharing your knowledge to someone else, you will be amazed at the additional things you will learn. You'll begin to realise you knew more than you thought, which will improve your confidence. And your student(s) are likely to bring a whole different perspective to the table, which might reinforce / challenge / transform your thinking.

## WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN?

When compared to the risk of failure, inertia is much easier. But without people taking risks no advance can be made. To get over the chasm between inaction and action apply the Dr Pepper principle: "Try it... what's the worst that could happen?"