

Self-Development Toolkit



***10 Strategies & 10 Tools to
Help You Improve Your
Performance***



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Also by Dennis E. Coates, Ph.D.:

*Train-to-Ingrain Guidebook: How to Implement a Reinforcement-based Approach
to Learning and Development That Achieves Permanent, Measurable
Improvements in Workplace Performance and Positive Impacts on Business
Results*



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What You Can Do to Advance Your Career

How capable are you? How effective do you want to be?

The traditional mindset is that training will improve your skills. This is an excellent way to learn about new skills, but training is never enough to master a skill or to ingrain it as a natural, routine aspect of your behavior. By far, most of the learning happens after formal instruction is over.

If you've ever attended formal training, you know this is true. You may have agreed with what you were learning, and you may have felt the trainers were excellent. But you didn't suddenly begin doing things differently back in the workplace. If you're like most people, the new skills felt awkward at first, and they didn't always work well for you. If so, you probably returned to doing things the old way.

There's a simple explanation for this. Behavior patterns are, by definition, actions that you do without having to think about how to do them. You're comfortable doing things this way, whether or not they're always effective. This is because your brain has established a special network of brain cells to do that job. The behavior pattern is comfortable and automatic.



An ingrained skill is like walking, running or riding a bicycle. Once the brain cells are physically connected, the only thing that breaks up these connections are old age, injury or death. This is why old habits are so hard to break.

It's possible to replace the old patterns with new ones, but it's a lot like building a brand new interstate highway next to an old country road. It takes a lot of construction. And it takes months of practical application on the job before a new skill becomes comfortable. But if you do the work, the newly ingrained patterns will become your new routine. And they'll be virtually permanent.

If you're one of the millions of fans who follow the career of golfer Tiger Woods, you may remember that 2004 wasn't one of his best years. Even though he had already achieved greatness at an early age, at the beginning of the season Tiger made a number of changes in his swing. The changes were designed to make the world's best golf swing even better. But then Tiger struggled all year, winning only one tournament and finishing fourth in total winnings.

However, at the end of that year his game came together for him, and he won two post-season tournaments back-to-back. In 2005 he won his fourth Masters. He placed second in the U.S. Open and won the British Open, leading the field from start to finish. He finished the year with six victories, ranked first in the world with about \$10 million in winnings. In 2006 he repeated this pace of winning, dominating the PGA tour.

The point is that *excellent instruction is only the beginning*. Tiger Woods hits golf balls all day long nearly every day. And yet, he had to invest an entire year of persistent effort before he ingrained the new patterns that improved his game. Another point is that Tiger couldn't have made this effort without a strong internal motivation to change. His desire to have the best possible swing, to compete, to win the major championships, and to be the best golfer in the world are what kept him at the practice tee. And he had coaching. It's common knowledge that he has invested as much as a million dollars a year for a swing coach who will keep him on track.

Clearly, you need to work on improving your skills well beyond the classroom. Like Tiger Woods and everyone who wants to succeed at a higher level, what you need is for your professional development to become a routine aspect of your work.

This booklet contains tools and strategies you can use for your self-development. Yes, you're in charge of your own professional development...not your boss, and not the training department. In fact, you've always been in complete control of what you learned or didn't learn.

Throughout life, you probably learned a lot from others: parents, teachers, trainers, coaches, advisors and friends. But none of these people could make you learn. When you did learn from them, it was always because you wanted to. And when you weren't interested in what they had to say or what they were showing you, not much learning happened.

Learning is something you do for yourself. And you've been teaching yourself things all your life. Sure, you may have had help. But basically you taught yourself to walk, to talk and every important skill you have. As you learned to play the piano or to swim, for example, you practiced the skills until they became natural. You made the effort because you wanted to. That's why you didn't quit.

In the world of work, you're still in charge of whether you learn or not. Although your organization may offer you opportunities and resources, you control the end result: whether you get better at what you do—or not. *When it comes to developing yourself and advancing in your career, you have to take the initiative and do most of the work yourself.*



If you're an ambitious, success-oriented individual, you're already motivated to advance in your career. You know that improving your abilities will enable you to:

- Prepare yourself to be more competitive in the job market.

- Achieve financial goals for yourself and your family.
- Be recognized as a professional – someone who takes pride in the quality of your work and seeks to improve and perform at the highest level possible.
- Contribute more to your team's mission and its success.

Successful people don't wait for good things to happen. They make them happen. They actively work on being the kind of person who gets noticed, rewarded, promoted or hired at the next level. Accepting that you have to take the lead in improving your capabilities is the first step.

How to use the Self-Development Toolkit

This booklet was written to support you during the ongoing process of self-development. While your organization may involve you in excellent programs, *most of the learning will take place after these programs*. So it's up to you whether your performance actually improves. The Self-Development Toolkit explains 10 strategies and gives you 10 tools (plus 3 supplemental tools) that will help you become an even more effective, professional person at work. Each strategy encourages you to use one of the tools. You have permission to make copies of the forms for your own personal use.

To grow stronger in your job, you need to know what to improve. Feedback is the essential first step, whether it comes from 20/20 Insight multi-source feedback, your boss or a co-worker.

Strategies 1, 2 and 3 will help you accept and make use of this feedback. Strategy 4 will help you create a plan for building on strengths and improving areas of need.

Strategies 5, 6 and 7 will help you make the most of training, get coaching and put your development plan into action.

Strategy 8 and 9 will help you ingrain the new skills at work during the months ahead. Strategy 10 explains how to use self-encouragement to stick with your plan during this critical period of reinforcement.

In short, the strategies and tools are a collection of the best insights and practices about learning that have been introduced during the past 40 years. If you use them, you'll experience the benefits. Remember – you're in charge!

From time to time I mention 20/20 Insight GOLD, which is a customizable performance feedback system. You may have been given the Self-Development Toolkit as a part of this program. While formal, multi-source feedback can be a revealing first step towards self-development, there are other ways to get feedback. The 10 strategies and 10 tools will work well for you even if you haven't yet benefited from 20/20 Insight.



I wish you success!

Strategy #1 – Ask for Feedback

"The eye sees not itself, except by reflection." - Shakespeare

You can't get ahead without feedback. Why? Because you need to know where you're strong and where you're not, and you have "blind spots" when it comes to your own behavior. You don't see yourself the way others see you. This means that the people who come in contact with you already know what's not working—even if you don't.

If you're a success-minded person, you want to be in on this secret. You want to be at your best and do your best work. You know you have to improve to remain competitive, and you're looking for ways to do that. And it's not in your best interest to cause problems for the people who work around you.

Feedback can be positive and appreciative, or it can be critical and constructive. Both types can give you insights that will help you improve. To truly help you succeed, more than anything you need honest information about your behavior and its impact on others. Later, as you invest time and effort to improve yourself, the perceptions of others will help you learn whether you're making progress.

What's the best way to ask for feedback? If you've already received feedback using 20/20 Insight GOLD, you know it's thorough and anonymous. Even if you haven't received structured feedback, you can ask people for face-to-face verbal feedback. Whether you prefer email or a meeting, you can interview managers, peers, direct reports or customers—anyone who's familiar with your work.



While you may find it uncomfortable to listen to feedback, appreciate that it's also hard for people to give it to you. They may not be sure how to express it, and they may not be sure how you'll receive it. It would be easier for them to say nothing, to just let you figure it out for yourself. That's why feedback is a gift—if someone cares enough about you to take the time to give it to you.

To make sure these exchanges are positive for you and for them, keep these guidelines in mind when you ask for feedback:

- Prepare yourself to let go of feelings of surprise, resentment or defensiveness.
- Ask for feedback about specific aspects of your behavior.
- Be sincere. You have to really want it, because people will know if you don't.
- Tell them why you want the information—what you plan to do with it.
- Whenever you receive feedback, express genuine appreciation, so that people will continue to be helpful when you ask for more feedback later.

Tool #1 – From Feedback to Focus

Whether you've received a formal 20/20 Insight performance feedback report or face-to-face input from others, it's important to put this information in perspective. To defuse defensiveness, give yourself credit for your strengths and look for areas you can improve. Use this form, adapted from the "Johari Window" model, to help you:

- Think about what people are telling you
- Sort through comments and ratings
- Determine strong and weak areas
- Prepare to ask follow-up questions about the feedback
- Record supplemental feedback as you receive it
- Set goals and create an action plan for your development

	KNOWN	UNKNOWN
STRENGTHS	<i>Areas you already know are strong</i>	<i>New information about strong areas</i>
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
WEAKNESSES	<i>Areas you already know need improvement</i>	<i>New information about areas that need improvement</i>
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
DEVELOPMENT GOALS	1. _____	
	2. _____	
	3. _____	

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Strategy #2 – Accept Feedback Graciously

Feedback is worth its weight in gold, but it almost always creates an unpleasant feeling in your gut. That's why people say, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." It takes inner strength to let go of your defensiveness so you can digest what you're hearing.

Often feedback is positive – a pleasant surprise. It's good to know that others believe you're on track, so you can continue to push hard in these directions.

More often, feedback is critical. The most difficult feedback to accept is unexpected negative feedback about an area that you thought was adequate or strong. Yet, this kind of constructive feedback is the most valuable, because it's about your "blind spots," which you can now examine and improve.

Remember, neither you nor anyone else is perfect. We're all on a life-long journey toward self-improvement. You have special areas of competence, and you have areas you can improve. So make an effort not to react negatively to critical comments. You'll probably feel anger, hurt, denial or defensiveness, but let these feelings pass.

It's important to remember that it isn't pleasant to give feedback. People aren't sure how you'll take it. They may not want to be the "bearer of bad news." Many will be reluctant to confront you with shortcomings, because they don't want to offend you, or they may not know of a polite way to go about it. So often people bring up performance issues when they're unhappy, and so their feedback sounds critical. Giving feedback takes caring, skill and courage – not to mention time and effort. This is why most people don't bother.



You're the one who benefits the most from feedback. If you accept it graciously, people will be more likely to continue giving you this kind of valuable input in the future. You can't expect them to tell you about your issues if they think you won't appreciate or use the information.

So even if you hear criticism instead of detailed, specific descriptions of your behavior, if you're smart you'll rise above your negative reactions and accept the feedback graciously.

Tool #2 – Follow-up Feedback

After you get feedback, the work of self-discovery isn't done. Frequently the feedback isn't clear enough or specific enough to take appropriate action. When you meet with people to ask follow-up questions, use this form to guide you and take notes. Use one copy of this form for each feedback topic.

Feedback topic: _____

Ask for more detailed information:

- "When I'm doing this, exactly what does my behavior look like?"
 - "What impact have my actions had?"
 - "Can you describe what you'd like me to do differently?"
-
-
-

Respond constructively:

- Suppress the urge to react defensively – hard to do, but important!
- Focus on what the feedback means, not specific scores
- Don't probe to discover who said what

Listen actively to what people say:

- Focus on the speaker
- Listen for the meaning
- Check what you heard – verbal messages
- Check what you saw – nonverbal messages
- Encourage the speaker to continue until finished

Assure them you take their feedback seriously:

- Communicate what was valuable to you – what you learned
- Describe self-improvement goals and actions you're already committed to
- Tell them about your next steps – what you plan to do about it

Express appreciation:

- "I appreciate your bringing this to my attention."
- "It's good to know that you appreciate what I did."
- "Thank you for your honesty."

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Strategy #3 – Analyze Your Strengths and Opportunities for Development

If you've been lucky enough to get feedback about your performance, you're probably aware of your strengths and problem areas. But what should you do next? What's the best way to address performance issues and make the most of your strengths? To do that, you'll need to know why you perform well or below par in any given area.

These major factors may be influencing your current level of performance:

1. **Self-awareness.** Do you have information about:

- What's happening around you?
- What's expected of you and how others view your work?
- How to accept the feedback given you?
- The consequences of your actions?
- Your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why you behave the way you do?

2. **Ability.** Do you **KNOW HOW**? Do you:

- Understand the basic principles?
- Have the right skills?
- Use proper procedures and have job aids?
- Apply best practices?
- Have enough experience?
- Have the physical capability to do the job?

3. **Motivation.** Do you **WANT TO**? Do you:

- Consider the activity important?
- Sense the need to do it?
- Have a positive attitude towards doing it?
- Feel comfortable, natural and enjoy doing it?
- Feel that doing it will help you achieve your goals?
- Believe you'll be appreciated and rewarded for doing well?

4. **Support.** Do you **HAVE WHAT YOU NEED**? Have you been given:

- Responsibility, authority and parameters?
- Clear expectations, standards and guidelines?
- Current information?
- Adequate personnel?
- Enough time?
- Tools, equipment, supplies, etc.?

Tool #3 – Performance Analysis

Describe a specific performance trend:

To analyze your *strengths*, use Supplemental Tool #1 (p. 28).

Use the analysis below to focus on actions for your Self-Development Plan (Tool #4). Check the reasons that apply. Write other reasons in the space after “Other.” An online version of the Performance Analysis self-assessment is also available at <http://www.2020insight.net/pa>.

SELF-AWARENESS

- I haven't had feedback about this before.
- I didn't know that doing this was expected of me.
- I didn't know that anyone had a problem with my way of doing this.
- I don't know why my way of doing this is causing problems.

ABILITY

- I don't understand the basic principle or concept for doing this well.
- I haven't observed others doing this well.
- I haven't learned how to do this.
- I know how, but I don't always do it well.

MOTIVATION

- I don't particularly like doing this.
- I haven't made a commitment to do this well.
- I haven't felt the motivation to do this well.
- It's not my routine, habit or style to focus on doing this.

SUPPORT

- Doing this well isn't one of my major responsibilities.
- I'm not receiving the backing I need to do this well.
- I don't have the resources I need to do this well.
- Where I work, there are obstacles to doing it well.

OTHER

- _____
- _____

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Strategy #4 – Set Goals and Have a Plan

The first three strategies and tools help you get and analyze feedback about the effectiveness of your work habits. The question is, what to do about it? You don't have time to waste, so you need to focus on the important issues first and address the real causes. Here's how to use feedback to create a plan that will make a difference:

1. Identify priority areas for improvement. If you have formal, consolidated feedback from the people who work around you, in what areas did you receive your lowest scores? Have people been giving you hints or informal verbal feedback? What does your boss have to say? In the end, you need to be honest with yourself. What do you need to work on most to elevate your performance?

2. Set a goal. If you're ambitious, you may want to improve several areas. But it's hard enough to change one behavior pattern. The smart money is to focus on improving the one aspect of your performance that will make the biggest difference. At most, select no more than two priority areas for improvement.

Remember the guidelines for SMART goals:

- **Specific** – Describe a specific behavior pattern you want to improve.
- **Measurable** – Describe the goal in quantifiable terms, so you have evidence that you were successful.
- **Ambitious** – Set a goal that will get your performance where you want it to be.
- **Realistic** – Set a goal you believe you can achieve.
- **Time-based** – Set a realistic time frame for achieving the goal. Remember that it may take several months to replace an old behavior pattern with a new one.

Example: *By July 1 next year, raise my average feedback score for "Delegating" from 6.1 to 7.5.*

3. Review why you need to improve this area. The purpose of Tool #3 (Performance Analysis) is to help you analyze why you may have a performance problem. Decide which issues to address: self-awareness, ability, motivation or support.

4. Consider developmental recommendations. When you know why you haven't been doing what others expect of you, you can think about how to address the shortfall. See Supplemental Tool #2 (p. 29) for some general ideas. Use them to think of specific actions and resources that are possible for you.

5. Create a plan to achieve the goal. Use the "Self-Development Plan" form on the next page to record what you'll do to improve your performance. Use a separate form and make a separate plan for each developmental goal. Discuss your plan with your direct manager. Also, consider discussing it with the people who gave you feedback. They may suggest actions you haven't thought of. Be sure to enter the actions for your plan on your calendar.

Tool #4 – Self-Development Plan

Describe the problem behavior:

Improvement goal (SMART):

ACTION #1 (what, when, where, with whom):

Resources:

ACTION #2 (what, when, where, with whom):

Resources:

ACTION #3 (what, when, where, with whom):

Resources:

ACTION #4 (what, when, where, with whom):

Resources:

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Strategy #5 – Make the Most of Training

Training is a big investment. When your organization commits to training, it pays for the development of the training, the trainer's services, the training facility, training materials, and your salary – for the time you were paid to be in the classroom. Close to \$100 billion is spent on training every year in the U.S. alone.

This money is invested primarily for one reason: to improve performance in the workplace. Desiring to improve sales, productivity, profitability or any key business result, executives may decide that you're a key contributor, and that it will make a difference if you work smarter and contribute more. And they've concluded that a training program is part of the solution.

Of course, training is an opportunity for you, too. True, if you're a self-starter you can learn on your own from books, role models, peer coaching and on-the-job practice. But training can be an excellent introduction to new skills. You're likely to gain a lot of relevant knowledge about skills in a short period of time. And the training may feature the best behavior models and time to practice in a safe environment. Later, when you master new skills, you'll be more valuable in the workplace. Training can help you advance in your career.

Here's the most important thing you need to know about learning. It's not an event. It's an ongoing process. It may start with a training program that lasts three days, a week, or longer. But training isn't some amazing activity in which important know-how is somehow magically infused into your behavior.

The real learning happens after you leave the classroom.



So the all-important question is: *will your learning stick?* Will you permanently ingrain the new skills in the workplace? Or will you go back to your old, comfortable ways of doing things?

The answer depends on whether you persist in practicing and reinforcing the new skills on the job. Some skills take several months to become comfortable work habits. Remember, it's up to you. You're in charge of your own learning. It's something you do for yourself. You'll have plenty of work to do to "make the learning stick."

Tool #5 on the next page is a list of tips for making the most of training. It includes actions you can take before, during and after training that will make a big difference in your effort to achieve permanent improvements in your performance.

Tool #5 – How to Make Learning Stick

Before training...

- Get information about the course. What's the purpose of the course – the behavioral objectives?
- Complete pre-course readings and exercises.
- Meet with your direct manager to:
 - Discuss pre-course assessment results and post-course assessment goals.
 - Agree on the top-priority areas for improvement.
 - Define how these areas of your performance impact on business results.
 - Make arrangements to cover your responsibilities, projects, tasks, etc.

During training...

- Work on improving one or two top-priority skill areas.
- Stay focused – don't call to find out how things are going back at work.
- Participate in skill practice at every opportunity.
- Take notes about how to apply new ideas and skills in the workplace.
- Identify co-participants who'll share experiences with you after the course.

After training...

- Keep in mind that it's your responsibility to follow through and ingrain the skill.
- Meet with your manager to review the course and create a plan for reinforcement.
- Seek opportunities to use the new skills on the job.
- Accept that your early efforts may be difficult, awkward and frustrating – it takes time for new skills to become ingrained and comfortable.
- If you find yourself reverting to old, comfortable patterns, reset your plan to apply the new skills.
- From time to time, review course materials, videos or online behavior models.
- Observe positive role models.
- Ask for, accept and learn from feedback about your successes and shortfalls.
- Whether success or frustration, analyze and learn from the experience.
- Appreciate and make the most of your boss's efforts to coach you.
- Stay in contact with trainers, course participants and mentors, who can share experiences, insights and feedback.
- Meet with your manager to review the results of post-course feedback surveys.
- Encourage yourself and graciously accept any encouragement from others.
- Don't give up. Even if it takes months, persist until the new skills feel natural.

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Strategy #6 – Ask for Coaching

Sure, you're in charge of your own learning, and you're willing to work on developing yourself. But you can save a lot of time by tapping into the wisdom and experience of others. And when the going gets rough, it's nice to have support.

Most highly successful people had help along the way, individuals within the organization who voluntarily played a coaching role. Who will do this for you? You'll find coaches among the people who care whether you succeed, people such as your direct manager, your team members, training program co-participants, colleagues, mentors and trainers.

The first step is to ask one of these people to play a coaching role: "I'm working on some areas in my job, and it would mean a lot to me if you'd help me talk through some of the issues and give me some informal coaching from time to time."



Probably the most effective coach you'll have is your direct manager. For one thing, coaching you about your job performance on a day-to-day basis is a traditional leadership role. No one has more responsibility, authority, experience and opportunity to coach you than your boss.

For others, a coaching relationship will be voluntary, so it must benefit both parties – you from the coaching, and the other person from helping you succeed and from working with you more effectively. If your coach finds you hard to work with, he or she will lose the motivation to continue. You don't want your coach to feel that time spent helping you usually comes to nothing. So give it your best effort. When you schedule activities, follow through. Some suggestions:

- Tell your coach what kind of help you need and what to expect from you.
- Request help that is important and meaningful to you.
- Meet with your coach regularly, but remember he or she has a full-time job.
- Establish a norm of confidentiality. Then be honest and straightforward.
- If you've had 20/20 Insight feedback, share a summary report, along with your current Self-Development Plan.
- Express genuine appreciation for any help your coach gives you.

When you find someone who agrees to offer you coaching, give this person a copy of Tool #6 on the next page, "Tips for Coaching in the Workplace." It will help this individual be more effective when interacting with you.

Tool #6 – Tips for Coaching in the Workplace

What workplace coaches can do...

- Discuss individual development planning and offer suggestions.
- Pass on related information about articles, books and other resources.
- Be a role model for effective performance.
- Share experiences, lessons learned and success tips.
- Remind and hold the person accountable for goals and commitments to action.
- Look for “learning moments” – experiences that can produce lessons learned.
- Give constructive feedback about observed performance.
- Discuss workplace experiences to help the individual learn from them.
- Listen actively as the person talks about workplace issues.
- Offer encouragement when someone faces frustration or setbacks.

When discussing lessons learned...

People learn best from work itself. To guide self-discovery, ask questions such as these to help a person think about an experience and learn from it.

- What happened? Who did what? What was the sequence of events?
- Why did you handle it that way? What were you trying to accomplish? What helped or hindered? What led to the ultimate outcome?
- What were the consequences? The impact on others? The costs and benefits? Was anything resolved? Did the incident cause any problems?
- What did you learn from this? What would you do differently if you encountered a similar situation in the future?
- What are your next steps? What support do you need to be more successful?
- Conclude with encouragement.

When giving feedback...

People need to know what they did right as well as what they need to improve.

- Describe specific observed behavior – what was effective and what wasn't.
- Explain the impact of the behavior.
- State what you want the person to do differently.
- Express confidence and offer encouragement.

When listening...

When someone talks about problems encountered while working on self-development:

- Give your full attention.
- Pay attention to both nonverbal and verbal messages.
- Check the message – paraphrase the main point in your own words.
- If the person's account is incomplete, ask for more information.
- Ask the person to think of ways to deal with the issues – then continue listening.

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Strategy #7 – Establish a Learning Support Group

“No man is an island....” – John Donne

What this famous quote implies is that people are interconnected. Four hundred years after Donne wrote this, we have a similar message in a Beatles song: “I get by with a little help from my friends.”

Throughout the Toolkit I emphasize the practical reality that it takes a lot of work and persistence to replace an old work habit with a new one. It makes a huge difference if you don't have to do this alone. In Strategy #6 I explain where to find people who can listen to your successes and challenges, share their know-how, give you feedback, help you learn from experience, hold you accountable and encourage you.

In Strategy #7 I recommend that you think of these people as a diverse “learning support group.” Your group will be different from anyone else's. You'll contact some of them individually. You can ask questions and discuss opportunities with your boss or mentors by phone, email or in person.



From time to time you can arrange meetings with several people. A classic encounter is the “brown bag lunch,” where people such as program co-participants discuss the results of attempts to apply skills in the workplace. If you invite a trainer, you can review and discuss behavior models. In addition, you don't have to meet in person to have these discussions. You can meet using telephone conference calls. It's possible to set up an online forum, have similar dialogues and get useful input sitting at your computer.

To make this real, use “Tool #7” on the next page to identify the people who agree to help. Select people you believe care about your success and who have something to offer. Discuss what both of you might expect and what each of you requires to make the encounters productive.

Tool #7 – Your Learning Support Group

	Phone	Email
Your direct manager		
_____	_____	_____
Trainers		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Co-participants		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Colleagues		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Mentors		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Direct reports		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

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Strategy #8 – Apply New Skills on the Job

Perhaps the most helpful aspect of training is the opportunity for practice in a safe environment. Mistakes have no consequences in the classroom, and you can get immediate coaching. This repetition of key skills stimulates the brain cells to begin connecting with each other.

But there's no teacher like the real world, and no practice is quite like applying what you've learned in actual work situations. The classroom can never be quite as real as work itself, and it's impossible to get enough classroom practice to connect the neural pathways and make a skill your own. The question is, will you get immediate opportunities to apply your new skills, and will they come often enough?

I recommend that you meet with your direct manager soon after training. The two of you can plan follow-up actions to reinforce what you learned. To ingrain the new skills, you'll need steady reinforcement over a considerable period of time. Your boss will need to be patient as you make the mistakes anyone would make in the early stages.



More than anything, you'll need to apply the new skills. Getting real-world experience should be the centerpiece of your self-development plan. Ask your manager to give you responsibilities, projects or tasks that will require you to use what you learned.

Beyond that, it's up to you. If the jobs you've been given don't require you to use the new skills, find ways to use them anyway! The reality is that skills take time to ingrain. If you don't apply them, you won't establish the patterns; the new skills will continue to feel awkward and uncomfortable; your success will be mixed, at best; you'll encounter frustration and failure; and you'll be tempted to fall back on your old, comfortable way of doing things. And if that happens, your training will be mostly wasted.

Use Tool #8 to record planned and unexpected opportunities to apply what you learned. Rate your success as you go. Doing this will help keep you on track, and over time you'll notice whether your success rate is increasing.

Strategy #9 – Learn from Experience in the Workplace

Adults learn best from experience. Performing a new skill on the job over and over is the best way to refine and master a skill over time, so that it feels comfortable and natural.

But you don't always learn from what happens in the workplace. In the course of a busy day, you don't have much time to reflect on why things happen or whether another approach may have been more effective. *Thinking about what happens is the key to learning from experience.*



The first step is to recognize that you've just had a "learning moment," which is an opportunity to think about what you did, why you did it that way, and how you could do it better in the future. Maybe you were successful, or maybe you encountered problems. You can learn from both kinds of experiences.

These questions will help you lock in the lessons of experience:

- **What happened?** Who did what? What was the sequence of events?
- **Why did it happen that way?** Cause and effect? Your motives? What helped or hindered?
- **What were the consequences?** Impact on people? Benefits? Costs? Problems? Resolutions?
- **What did you learn from this?** What would you do in a similar situation in the future?
- **What are your next steps?** What will you do to improve? What support do you need to be more successful?

The most effective learning happens when you put your thoughts in writing. This forces you to think through all the steps, so your analysis and learning are richer. Plus, if you keep the forms in a notebook you can review learning moments again later, which will reinforce the lessons. If writing doesn't work for you, simply answer each of the questions in your mind.

Use the form on the next page to guide your thinking about something that happened in the workplace.

Tool #9 – The Learning Moment

To turn a workplace experience into learning, you need to think about what happened. Use this form to help you think about it and make a record of what you learned.

What happened? Who did what? What was the sequence of events?

Why did it happen that way? Cause and effect? Your motives? What helped or hindered?

What were the consequences? Impact on people? Benefits? Costs? Problems? Resolutions?

What did you learn from this? What would you do in a similar situation in the future?

What are your next steps? What will you do to improve? What support do you need to be more successful?

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Strategy #10 – Persist in Spite of Setbacks

You may be strongly motivated to improve how you do your job. Without a doubt, you can do it. But you also know that changing a work habit is never easy.

- Doing a new skill won't feel natural to you until it's ingrained, which takes time.
- At first, applying at work what you learned in the classroom will feel awkward.
- For a period, you may experience more frustration than success.
- Your coworkers may not appreciate what you're trying to do. They may wonder why you're acting differently.
- Your boss and others may not always be there to coach you when you need it.
- Certain policies or practices in your organization may make it hard for you to perform the way you were taught.
- You may be tempted to go back to doing it the old way.

As you try to work through the challenges, difficulties, roadblocks, opposition, problems, limitations, costs, risks and setbacks along the way, you may get discouraged. You may at times feel that it's too hard – a losing proposition. You could get to the point that you want to give up doing things differently, no matter how promising the new approaches seemed in training.

When discouraged, you temporarily lose the will to persist. Knocked down too many times, you focus on how hard the journey is and how bad it feels to fail. This can temporarily drain your desire to keep trying. At such times, it helps to have encouragement.

Encouragement isn't about "whistling in the dark" or giving false hope. It's a reminder that the negatives in your situation are not the whole story. Your knowledge, talent and character are real, too.

Consider who you are, what you've achieved in the past, the progress you've made already, your strengths, the benefits of persisting, the inherent advantages in your situation, the creative solutions that are possible, and the tools, resources, and support available to you. In spite of what has happened so far, you have the inner strength to take practical next steps to move forward.

In short, you can encourage yourself. Use Tool #10 to remind you of what you can say to yourself when no one is around to encourage you – which is very often the case.

Remember, in most cases the winners are simply the people left standing – the individuals who are still trying to succeed and who haven't given up.



Tool #10 – Self-Encouragement Tips

To persist in spite of adversity, you need to regain your perspective on what's good and positive about your situation. These are some examples of self-encouragement:

Acknowledge reality.

"Instead of being more effective, this time I was less effective."

"I didn't get the support I needed. It made me feel unappreciated."

Admit that it's OK to make mistakes.

"When I attempt hard things, I'll sometimes make mistakes."

"Mistakes are valuable. Without them there's no learning, no progress."

Give yourself a time-out.

"I feel wiped out. I shouldn't try to deal with this right now."

"This whole situation will look differently to me after the weekend."

Broaden your perspective – take a look at the plus side, too.

"Yes, I've had some problems. But look at what I've accomplished so far."

"First I'll list what's working against me. Then I'll list what I've got going for me."

Refocus on what has gone well so far.

"The truth is, I've been doing pretty well up to now."

"In spite of what just happened, I've actually gotten better at doing this."

Remember your strengths – knowledge, skills, experience, creativity, character...

"Nobody has more energy or works harder than I do."

"They need someone with good communication skills. That's my strong suit."

Feel your self-confidence.

"I've handled worse situations than this. A lot worse."

"Yes, it's bad. But the truth is, I can deal with it. I know that."

Reaffirm the importance of your goal.

"When I improve in this area, it'll make a big difference."

"This skill is important. It will help me in lots of areas."

Remember past successes.

"This reminds me of what I did when I had a similar problem . . ."

"Situations like this can be turned around. I remember when..."

Refocus on action and possibilities.

"OK. I can sort out what's possible and what's not."

"It's important to get the ball rolling again. What's my next step?"

Supplemental Tool #1 – Strength Analysis

In the space below, enter a phrase beginning with an action verb that describes one of your *strengths* – a skill or a work habit that usually gets good results:

1. How can you use this strength to improve how you do your job?

2. How will you use this strength to contribute more to your team?

3. What can you do to make this strength even stronger?

4. How can you avoid using this strength inappropriately?

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Supplemental Tool #2 – Self-Development Recommendations

When setting goals and creating a Self-Development Plan (Tool #4), you'll need to list actions that will help you correct a *specific* performance problem. Below are some *general* recommendations, which you can use to think of specific resources and activities available where you work. The recommendations are organized according to the issues in the Performance Analysis self-assessment (Tool #3, and the automated online version at <http://www.2020insight.net/pa>).

SELF-AWARENESS

I haven't had feedback about this before.

- Ask for 360-degree (multi-source) feedback.
- Talk to your coworkers to get their impressions of how you perform in this area.
- Listen to others analyze a videotape of your performance.

I didn't know that doing this was expected of me.

- Ask your manager to explain in detail what is expected of you in this area.
- Interview your coworkers to get their impressions of what they expect of you.
- Reread your job description and other job manuals.

I didn't know that anyone had a problem with my way of doing this.

- Make an effort to avoid blaming others.
- Ask your manager or coworkers to describe the consequences of your actions.
- Ask your manager or coworkers what they'd like more of or less of in this area.

I don't know why my way of doing this is causing problems.

- Ask the people who work around you why your way of doing this causes problems.
- Study carefully the results of your Performance Analysis (Tool #3, p. 13).
- Think about how your job habits or style influence the way you do this activity.

ABILITY

I don't understand the basic principle or concept for doing this well.

- Read a book or article about it.
- Listen to an audiotape on the subject.
- Discuss the behavior with a coach or mentor.

I haven't observed others doing this well.

- View a video on the subject.
- Watch a trainer or expert demonstrate the activity.
- Observe someone who does it well on the job.

I haven't learned how to do this.

- Have a trainer or skilled coworker show you how.
- Attend a training program related to this skill area.
- Apply the skill on the job and work on improving it.

I know how, but I don't always do it well.

- Concentrate on doing the activity better on the job.
- Analyze your performance after using the skill.
- Ask a coach or mentor to observe you and suggest ways to improve.

MOTIVATION

I don't particularly like doing this.

- Focus on the aspects of the activity that interest you the most.
- Think of ways to "do it your way."
- Ask for and accept encouragement from others.

I haven't made a commitment to doing this well.

- Ask a knowledgeable person to be your performance coach.
- Make a verbal or written commitment to your manager or coworkers.
- Tell others about your improvement goals.

I haven't felt the motivation to do this well.

- Set a specific goal to improve your performance.
- Establish a personal reward for accomplishing your performance goal.
- List the positive consequences and benefits you'll experience when you do it well.

It's not my routine, habit or style to focus on doing this.

- Make a more concentrated effort to do it well.
- Analyze your performance after using the skill.
- Use a procedure or job performance aid to help you do it well.

SUPPORT

Doing this well isn't one of my major responsibilities.

- Acknowledge that doing this is a part of your job.
- Request an assignment that requires doing more of it.
- Volunteer for a project that involves doing more of it.

I'm not receiving the backing I need to do this well.

- Identify specifically what you need from the people who support you.
- Explain what you need to the people who support you.
- Give more positive and constructive feedback to the people who support you.

I don't have the resources I need to do this well.

- List the tools, equipment, supplies and other resources you need to do it well.
- Obtain the resources that will help you perform better.
- Ask for a catalog of available training or development materials.

Where I work, there are obstacles to doing it well.

- Make a list of what is keeping you from doing it well.
- Ask a manager to help you identify and remove barriers to top performance.
- Brainstorm ways to change your workplace to make performance easier.

Supplemental Tool #3 – 10 Strategies for Improving Your Performance

Strategy #1

Ask for feedback.

Strategy #2

Accept feedback graciously.

Strategy #3

Analyze your strengths and opportunities for development.

Strategy #4

Set goals and have a plan.

Strategy #5

Make the most of training.

Strategy #6

Ask for coaching.

Strategy #7

Establish a learning support group.

Strategy #8

Apply new skills on the job.

Strategy #9

Learn from experience in the workplace.

Strategy #10

Persist in spite of setbacks.