

Engage with Remote Learning

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Put Learning in Perspective

Long ago, Christopher Morley asserted that three ingredients were central to a good life: “learning, earning, and yearning”. For success, a person had to juggle three needs.

Drawing them on was desire, a destination in mind to which they were motivated to act. Next came productivity, a capacity to effectively build artefacts valued by others. Underpinning all these lurked change, an ability to transform their own personal knowledge & behaviours.

Learning is an engaging process that moves you from the unfamiliar to the familiar. It's a mental transformation whose path steps through novelty, expertise, and mastery. In a cognitive sense, effective learning revolves around the formation of new associations; Learning stimulates “Circuit Making” activities. As Hebb intimated, “Neurons that fire together, wire together”.

But engagement is not automatic, barriers can easily pop up to impede that path of learning. This is especially true when a person is operating in an unfamiliar environment, or out of their routine. So are there ways to make Remote Learning more engaging, efficient, and effective?

Yes there are, and these involve choices that strengthen personal control. Take ownership of your learning environment, the associated technologies, and, your learning intentions. As Stephen Covey said, direct your finite energies to “Control, what you can Control”.

Organise your Environment

A dedicated “Learning area” may not be possible when operating Remotely. You'll need to find Compromises between working & social spaces. Consider choices that affect the impressions you form in the eyes and minds of Others, as these enhance your chances of Learning success.

- Attend to Light & Sound - Nonverbal clues help you communicate effectively, so pay attention to how you look and sound. Ensure the front of your face is well lit, rather than shrouded in shadow. Headphones help too, especially when the environment is a mixed-use space. A good microphone helps you get your points across to others; the acoustics do matter.
- Consider Ergonomics - Holding a PC on a knee whilst seated a sofa or lying in bed may be OK for social media. However, that's not learning. Instead, use an upright chair with laptop stable on a table. Avoid handheld devices too, as they are tiring to hold, and it is harder for others to engage as they watch unstable imagery.
- Set Boundaries - Clearly delineate a Learning area, and keep your learning activities within that space. Move out of that space when you've need to socialise. That physical separation helps create a psychological separation. This lightens the cognitive load, which makes for more enjoyable learning experiences.

Take Charge of the Technologies

There's a growing range of technology platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom, Adobe Connect, and WebEx. Although most of them do similar things, each tends to function in different ways, and use slightly different terminologies. To increase your comfort & confidence levels with the technologies, spend time in "Practice". As a result, you'll spend less time chasing technologies, and have more time to immerse yourself in learning. This can also enhance your reputation, as you'll realise your tech savviness can help Others collaborate more effectively too.

- Understand the Range of Tools - Learning platforms provide a range of sensorial capabilities that allow Participant to engage using text, image, sound & video. Take time to discover in advance how each Tool works. It's good to feel comfortable in areas such as: writing (text, questions & polls), drawing (emoticons, annotation & whiteboard), speaking (voice, music), viewing (camera, video) and collaborating (groupwork, breakout rooms). Rehearsing with a "Buddy" is a rapid way of skilling up.
- Limit Interruption & Distraction - Effective learning requires thinking, yet brains can't focus on and think about two tasks simultaneously; Multitasking is not attainable. Yes, humans can switch between tasks quite quickly, but that rapid switching has a price; it impairs cognitive performance. Kill all interruptions to engage with the learning task at hand. Oftentimes those interruptions are driven from Apps (e.g. email, messaging, & games), which place demands on your PC. Closing down other Apps not required for Learning has machine performance benefits too. Keep open only those needed for the Learning session.
- Maximise Machine Performance - Video based learning platforms place heavy demands on a PC. Two things directly impact performance and hence your learning experience: Demands that Apps make, and, Internet bandwidth. A faster Internet connection makes a difference. Where others with high bandwidth needs share your router, they may impact response too. Dedicated local connections work best, so the LAN tends to beat WiFi.

Hold Positive Learning Intentions

Well-designed remote learning programs incorporate both synchronous and asynchronous components. Synchronous elements are structured online activities conducted in real-time. They're designed for engaging, collaborative participation and practice. Asynchronous elements are conducted off-line by Participants. They're activities designed for acquisition of new knowledge as well as deeper, more personal reflection. In order to maximise the learning outcomes, be sure to give equal weight to all elements when engaging with Remote Learning.

- Show Up Prepared - A Participant's level of preparation is a key factor in the success of remote learning. Asynchronous components are integral to a Program. Completion beforehand is vital for a Program to cohere; it isn't "homework". Asynchronous elements afford opportunities for more personalised and relevant learning experiences. So plan for it, set time aside, be prepared, diligently complete each module in advance.
- Collaborate Actively - A mediated learning experience may initially feel different to F2F, especially as remote learning requires that everyone connect & collaborate. That said, the more you do it, the more comfortable you will feel. The confidence you'll gain through active collaboration will help you to help Others who may feel a little less comfortable. You'll also realise that your influence grows as you draw on what Bandura termed "Social Learning"; how verbal and nonverbal actions model & positively reinforce more appropriate behaviours to Others.
- Manage your Attention Span - "Bite-sized" learning is short, simple & specific. It requires little "Attention" and can be an effective way to quickly learn how to do some thing. It can be effective for "Know How". But, to know "What, When & Why" typically requires a more intensive investment of time. Remote Learning Programs are not just a sequential series of simple "Bites"; they demand much greater "Attention", and screen based "Attention" requires concentration. This can be mentally exhausting, so it's vital to frame realistic

expectations beforehand. Chunk the learning down into manageable blocks that afford you sufficient time to recover, to recharge, and to go again.

To Activate Your Learning Muscle, Take Ownership

The concepts outlined here relate to our “Soft skills”, how our feelings about Remote Learning inform our thoughts, how our thoughts inform our decisions, and how those choices shape our actions. The good news is that each of us is at the centre of that narrative. This means that in taking control, we can exercise positive influence to achieve more engaging experiences.

Yes, Remote Learning can feel more intense, more draining, and perhaps at first, a little less engaging than F2F sessions. However, as we increase our exposure and make small changes, we’ll notice it can be more collaborative, touch more of our senses, and feel more personalised.

Real Learning rests in the struggle they say, thus a core challenge in a Remote Learning world is in knowing how to focus that struggle in more productive ways. Engagement requires that we embrace it, perceive the differences, then adopt & adapt them to work in with our own learning preferences. Do this, and we can maximise its potential as we reap the benefit of both worlds.

In closing in on the “New Normal”, my thoughts turn back to “Ancient Rome” and the “Old Normal”, where the Romans used to say ...

“Quidquid discis, tibi discis”

“Whatever you learn ...” they said, “... you learn for your self”.

Still today, the individual remains the beneficiary of their own learning. Despite the challenges of Coronavirus, in Learning, ownership remains the key; nothing has changed, nor will change.

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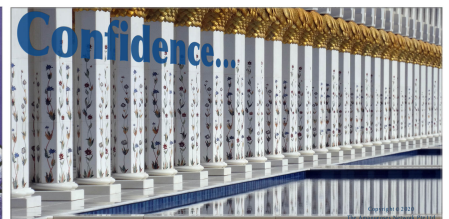
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