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Encourage Deeper Learning With Deliberate Practice

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The difference between inadequate performers and independently productive ones is the right type and amount of practice. Practicing a skill over and over doesn't always make it perfect. It's not a matter of Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hours either.

To learn something properly, we must combine learning with deliberate practice. A challenge when teaching in the business world, since people are often mandated to attend training and aren't allowed to truly practice what they've learned. As a result, training becomes a waste of time and money for everyone involved.

For learning professionals, integrating deliberate practice into your sessions encourage deeper learning and makes it worthwhile for everyone. Use these tips to develop practice methods that are more deliberate and purpose-driven to help students increase mastery.



Developing Deliberate Practice Methods

Teaching the concepts and theory of something new is one thing; helping learners practice well enough so they understand and use the information appropriately is another. In today's fast-paced business world, you don't have the time to help people practice enough, so they have a good grasp of the concepts and how to put them to good use.

Creating practice sessions that include these four characteristics help your users retain more of the information they learn. People will understand both the concepts and how to put them into practice.

1. Practice with Specific Goals

Effective learning starts with specific and measurable goals based on what people need to get out of the training. That is, instead of tying goals to the content you cover, link

them to tasks and activities that learners need to do back at the office. Learning to master a feature set of a software product is great, but not if it doesn't apply to their daily work lives. Practice so they can use it during their workday to achieve business goals (reduce time, produce better reports, save money, etc.).

2. Practice Based on Prior Knowledge

Learning is cumulative and, ideally, should build on what we already know. If learners aren't familiar with the concepts or software features, you cover in a training session, there's no point in teaching advanced skills. When learners have little prior knowledge of the topic, it makes sense to start teaching from a different point and build up their knowledge. Practice activities should help them build on what they're learning and serve as a foundation to move on to more advanced topics.

3. Practice for the Right Amount of Time

How much time do you need to practice something to ensure you've learned it? The real answer is whatever is sufficient to achieve the identified goals (and certainly not the 10,000 hours we're familiar with.) The appropriate amount of time is a combination of the skill level or knowledge people had before they started learning, and the identified goals they need to reach. For example, total beginners with no experience in your software tool will need more time to achieve their goals than people who've used an earlier version of the app.



4. Practice with Appropriate Feedback

Feedback is part of the learning process; appropriate feedback is part of the deliberate practice process. Instead of merely indicating mistakes and correcting behavior, learning professionals should provide more concrete steps on how learners can improve. As John Hattie, an educational researcher at the University of Melbourne, Australia, explained to EdWeek, that feedback should help users understand what they don't know, what they do know, and where they go next.

When people have limited time for training at the office, it's vital to ensure they make the most out of the time they do have. Deliberate practice helps them engage more deeply with the material, identify what they do and don't know, and give them a clear pathway to future learning. Your users will enjoy learning about your products since they will have a better understanding not just of your software but also how it applies to their workdays.

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