In order to excel in your work, in your life, or as a leader, you need to commit to continuous learning. Many leaders know this, but many more are missing the opportunities for powerful learning that could really help them get ahead on their goals.

Leaders are encouraged to learn “on the job.” The problem is that many of us don’t. Either because we’re too busy, we forget, we don’t know what we need to learn, or we don’t have the resources we think we need, we end up learning by chance or command. Neither one is very powerful.

*Learning by chance* means you take opportunities to learn whenever they show up, but you don’t necessarily go looking for more. A conference brochure arrives; it seems interesting; you go. A friend recommends a book; it looks good; you read it. You take opportunities to learn as they come to you – in other words, when it’s convenient.

*Learning by command* means you learn when someone else demands it. When your colleagues tell you that you need to learn to be more decisive, or when your profession requires that you get an advanced certification, or when your boss sends you to a workshop to learn specific skills, you are learning by command.

There’s nothing inherently wrong with these approaches to learning. Any learning that advances your expertise and builds your capacity may be worth your time. Or it may not, and that’s the problem. You have so much potential, and there are so many opportunities to learn, and there is so much to be gained by learning that it simply doesn’t make sense to relegate your learning to the whims of chance and command. You need to learn by choice.

*Learning by choice* means carefully setting up your own learning opportunities based solely on what you need to get better results.

Learning by choice is based on a number of assumptions.

**LEARNING IS LEADERSHIP**

Learning is an essential component of leadership. Some experts go so far as to say learning is leadership, a leader’s constant quest for the improvement of the business, people, and results. As a leader, what do you need to learn? What leadership skills, strategic practices, or management techniques will help you be more effective? Look at your results, and notice where
there’s room for improvement. What do you need to learn in order to improve those results? This is the kind of learning that supports powerful leadership.

**LEARNING IS PROFIT AND COMPETITIVE EDGE**  The soul of business is innovation; the soul of personal leadership is the innovation of the self. You can’t have one without the other. If you want to have, run, or be part of a business that succeeds in a time of change, you need to be willing to change, as well. Think about it. If another company is doing better than yours, what do you need to learn to be better able to compete? If you personally are stuck in a rut in your career, what do you need to learn to get a more competitive edge? Without asking these questions, you will start to languish in mediocrity, and that’s no place for a leader. Refuse to buy into the assumption that the economy, the market you’re in, or your products are creating your results. If you’re not happy with what you’ve got, go out and learn what needs to change. You’ll feel more in control, and you will learn to lead the way to a more powerful and profitable place.

**LEARNING IS LIFE**  In addition to learning for all of the practical and rational reasons that contribute to your effectiveness as a leader, there’s one more: learning is part of the fun of life. When was the last time you picked up a new sport, game or hobby? We learn these things not because we have to, but because we want to. Your vision and goals will be infused with a new sense of exuberance when you commit to learning what you need to learn in order to achieve them. You will know that you can do anything you want to as long as you know how to learn.

Learning is an essential component of leadership, but not all learning experiences are equally powerful. Learning by choice means understanding exactly what you need to learn in order to achieve your vision.

Try this simple exercise to sharpen your approach to learning.

- Think about your vision or an important goal.
- Brainstorm. What do you need to learn in order to achieve this vision or goal?
- Choose one area in which to focus your learning, and choose the one that is likely to have the biggest impact.
- Ask yourself, “What’s the most powerful way I can learn in this area to get the best and fastest results?”

This approach will steer you away from learning by chance and help you choose your learning, so it’s more strategic and leads directly to your vision.

If you really want to lead well and live well, you must learn to *learn* well, too.

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