



Stoking the Fires of Curiosity Through Executive Coaching

As in-demand job skills continue to mutate, helping team members lean into their learnability is one of the most vital responsibilities of a manager-coach.

Learnability is the new currency in talent management. If someone could put a sensor in your brain to track your desire and ability to learn new skills in order to stay relevant professionally, they would be measuring your “learnability.”

In the past, if a person picked up additional skills on the job it was a bonus. Something that made you stand out from the crowd and, if you were lucky, earn some recognition from the boss and a few more dollars in your paycheck. Today, in a work world that is reinventing itself at a ferocious pace driven by technological advances and globalization, the life cycle of skills is shorter than ever. Exercising one’s learnability is not an option; it’s the lifeline to continuing employability.

Everyone has some degree of learnability—but we all have different

styles of learning. The question for manager-coaches is how to facilitate the process of learnability in each team member.

Some years ago, I returned to school and was given the option of doing the coursework in person or taking an online program. I had always been a classroom-type person. I love learning, and I especially loved learning in a communal setting where you could talk things out and engage in give-and-take dialogue. Sit by my lonesome at the computer? No thanks.

Then I shared the dilemma with my executive coach and we discussed the pros and cons of each approach. As we talked about my learning style, I realized that pushing myself to try something different could pay dividends. She helped me understand that learning in the digital environment would not only allow me to master the content of the program, but also get valuable insights into e-learning modality that is revolutionizing all forms of education and communication. I

manage a virtual team. I live in an increasingly virtual world. Shouldn't I give virtual learning a try?

Long story short, I did—and it was a fantastic experience. My executive coach did what good coaches do: stoked my fires of curiosity about the unknown while giving me the confidence to dance on the edges of my learnability. As a result, I not only learned from the course material; I gained immeasurably from experiencing the methodology.

What your workforce knows today is simply not enough. Some experts predict that automation may replace 45 percent of job tasks in the near future. On the flip side of the coin, 65 percent of the jobs that will be held by Generation Z, the cohort just entering the workforce, do not exist yet. Helping your team “lean into learning” is one of the most important things you will do as manager.

Here are some recommendations to help bring out learnability in your team members:

- One size fits one. Talk with the employee and discover their learning preferences. Do they absorb material best through listening or reading? Do they like
- to understand from the ground up to arrive at a concept, or start with the big picture and drill down? Do they want incremental feedback and course correction along the way, or are they strictly hands-off?
- Stretching is the best exercise. Once you understand an employee's natural or habitual learning style, it's important for their growth that you gently push them to stretch in new directions. Suggest an alternative approach they may be curious about, as my coach did, and make sure they know you're holding a safety net so they can jump in with confidence.
- Stay attuned for micro-byte learning opportunities. The learning that sticks with us is often a small lesson that occurs in the moment. Giving employees license to dabble in areas of interest in non-structured ways can yield insights that lead to both personal and professional growth.
- Nurture your own learnability. Finally, let's not forget that the best way to BE a better coach for your team is to have a coach of your own. Find someone who can stoke YOUR fires of curiosity and encourage you to dance on the edges of learnability.

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