

How to learn from everyday experience

Experience is highly valued in the jobs market and it's something that you can't easily buy. However, the value of your experience is not measured in how many years you've been in a career or in how many companies you've worked for, the value of your experience is in what you have learned from it.

As a graduate management trainee I was told that '20 years' experience can be 1 year of experience repeated 20 times' and that learning from experience was the greatest goal of my early career.

Back in the 1980s when I was a graduate trainee, I seemed to have plenty of time to reflect on my working days and to fully consider the information and practical experience I was gaining. In the 21st Century it's easy to be busy all the time. It's easy to spend your days in meetings, reading and responding to email, writing reports, talking on the phone and generally filling your days with experience.

When do you get time to process your experiences, to think about what you've learned, to consider better ways of getting where you want to go? How often do you give yourself the luxury of just thinking?

This week in particular, make a special point of taking some time to think. If you commute to work, then take that as thinking time. No newspaper, no email, no phone calls, just your own thoughts. If you drive to work, switch off the radio or music (and your phone) and give yourself time to think.

Or take your lunch somewhere where you can be alone. Leave your phone on your desk and have some 'down time'.

Some people also find it useful to use a journal to capture their thinking and learning from experience. If you like to have a structure for that kind of thing here are some questions you could consider on a daily, weekly or monthly basis:

What have I done well recently?

What made it a success?

How can I apply that strategy elsewhere?

What has caused me stress recently?

How did that situation become stressful?

What could I have done differently?

How can I stop that problem recurring?

What is coming up that might present a challenge?

How can I prepare myself to meet that challenge?

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