

500 WORDS ON LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT



Learning is not child's play -
we cannot learn without pain

“Spoon feeding, in the long run, teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon.”

E.M. Forster

These 500 words on Leadership Development is for all leaders and managers who are interested in supporting their people through challenging times



Why should we expect effective learning to be fast and painless? We live in a society that rewards fast learning and seems to prioritise rapid outcomes over effort.

No longer is ‘no pain, no gain’ a mantra that is widely accepted and teachers who make learning unchallenging or taxing on our brains are applauded.

Aristotle said:

“Learning is not child’s play; we cannot learn without pain.”

By embracing this mentality we can shift our perception to accept that enjoying the pain of learning will make us smarter. “Pain” doesn’t have to be a bad thing to avoid; you can benefit from being challenged. Treat your brain like a muscle. Constant exercise will strengthen your cognitive capacity.

A ‘painful’ learning experience will make you smarter. Here’s how:

Easy learning is self-defeating as the effects are illusory and never long-lasting. If you are being challenged, you are doing yourself a favour. If what you learn becomes too easy, it loses its value.

When learning is easy, we become overconfident. Studies have shown that when students believe they’ve “got it in the bag,” they actually don’t know the material as well as they think.

“The wrong kind of praise creates self-defeating behaviour. The right kind motivates students to learn.”

Carol Dweck

When you start something new, whether it be at work, school, or in everyday life, you experience decreased happiness in the moment and lower levels of enjoyment. You do suffer. But later, when you look back, you feel happier and more satisfied with what you’ve accomplished. Research suggests that you need to go through temporary stress to reap the benefits associated with increased competency.

By stretching your brain you are actually ensuring it stays fit and healthy. Neuroplasticity is the selective connections between neurons in our brains. Doing new activities helps to build new brain cells and strengthen relationships between them. So, in effect, your brain benefits when you tackle the unknown.

So don’t avoid the pain. The brain never stops changing and adjusting. The challenge of learning keeps it young and active.

How to deal with the pain of learning - reframe pain as a signal.

Feeling pain is an indicator you’re learning. Also, it is a helpful indicator of the areas you need to strengthen. Pain is a clear signal that you are doing something new. Neurons that are weak, unused, or that don’t fit the job are pruned and neurons that are exercised gain strength and develop more connections.



These thoughts will help you deal with the pain:

- Be happy that it is difficult: knowing that "painful" learning actually helps.
- Focus on the long-term - don't try to learn everything overnight
- Accept it's going to be bumpy and unpredictable – seek it!
- If you get stuck, take a break but remember to return
- Don't accept the first answer
- Practice makes perfect

And remember your brain never stops changing and evolving as long as you keep challenging it and refusing to avoid the wonderful pain of learning.

Yours,
Dr Marcus Gottschalk
CEO at CLP

