

Beyond Knowledge: Developing Skill Mastery through Project Management Training

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Regardless of the type of job you currently hold or the industry you work in, you've most likely gone through some sort of training program. You've probably noticed that some training programs and activities stick with you beyond the training itself, while others are easily forgotten. What accounts for this difference? At Cheetah Learning, we discovered for training to have lasting impact, it must engage all four levels of learning. Most corporate training works at the first two levels of awareness and knowledge; it is then left up to you to figure out how to apply the knowledge. The educational experiences Cheetah Learning develops, in contrast, incorporate skill development into their activities and provide you feedback throughout this process so that you can create value with what you know.

In order to show why skill development and mastery are so important, we first need to define the four levels of learning:



Figure 1: The Four Levels of Learning

Level 1 - Awareness. This is the level of learning where you become aware of the range of knowledge possible but have not yet acquired that knowledge. For example, many people think there is nothing to doing Project Management. They are not even aware there is a whole body of knowledge relating to how to do your projects more effectively. When they start to realize that there are in fact numerous skills they could acquire that would help them become more successful with their projects, they have achieved the first level of learning - awareness.

Level 2 - Knowledge. Once people are aware there is a lot more to managing projects than they originally thought and they do, in fact, manage quite a few projects in their lives (even if they are not called a "Project Manager"), then they have intrinsic motivation to acquire more knowledge about how to better manage their projects. This is where most other Project Management training programs come in - they teach you key Project Management terminology and practices, and help you develop an understanding of examples in which this knowledge is put into use. Learning by example, however, is not the same thing as learning in your own environment. Everything always seems to work out so nicely in the examples, doesn't it? This is where the limits of "knowledge" are most obvious. To do the hard work of putting skills into practice in the complicated, messy reality of life, you need to move beyond Knowledge to Skills.

Level 3 - Skill. When you develop real skills in an area, you have advanced beyond the level of being able to understand just hypothetical situations. You are now able to identify the most relevant areas of your knowledge and make them work for you. For instance, in Cheetah Learning's Cheetah Certified Project Manager (CCPM) program, you develop strong negotiation skills by applying what you learn about negotiating based on your unique personality type. You not only know the various negotiation techniques that can throw you off, but you are able to swiftly and appropriately respond to these in the heat of the moment because you developed the skills to do so in the Cheetah training program.

Level 4 - Mastery. Skills are closely tied to mastery. Mastery, however, is only reached when you make consistent deliberate practice with your skills - and it always takes time. For example, you reach mastery with your negotiation skills when you consistently practice negotiating using the processes you have learned. Mastery is no small achievement - when you reach this level in one or several skills, you develop expertise in this area.

What does it mean to have developed expertise in an area? The National Research Council's 1999 study on experts revealed that experts in a wide range of fields all

displayed the following four abilities: noticing patterns others can't see, organizing their knowledge, understanding context when making decisions, and quickly retrieving a wide range of knowledge. When you become an expert in your field, you not only perform to your highest level of ability, but you become an indispensable resource to others on your team.

Achieving great success in your career requires reaching a mastery level of learning in one of your areas of innate strength. Training programs are a key step to reaching mastery, but the program must be focused on application of knowledge in your own environment. If the program revolves around only memorization of information or lectures with no opportunity to apply what is described, then learning takes place only at the lowest level. When deciding where to go for PM training, make sure to invest in a program that moves you beyond awareness and knowledge and into the realms that matter most - skills and mastery.

About the Author:



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun, and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the author of the Cheetah Success Series, and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 50,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle is recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle's articles have appeared in more than 100 publications and websites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#), is carried by over 400 publications.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Owner/President Management (OPM) program and holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.