Bitesize Business Breakthrough

...in the time it takes to drink a cup of tea

New Skills Fast

Support tools and resources

Build your team's skills and you build a better business… but how?

Wouldn't it make working life so much easier if there was a quick and easy way to learn new skills or enhance existing ones?

We are all capable of learning new skills: people learn to drive, learn a language, bring up children, rehearse lines for a play or film, take up a sport, move house…

As a race, humans are actually quite good at learning, adapting to change and catching up. After all, there was a time where no one had a mobile phone or used a computer!

So why does learning a new skill strike fear into the hearts of some people?

If you want your business to grow and be successful, then making time for skill acquisition is required and, in fact, essential.

So, ask yourself this one question:

> **How much time do you allocate to learning new skills or enhancing existing skills in your business?**

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STOP thinking that skill acquisition is a long, drawn-out and difficult process

START seeing skill acquisition as a 20-hour pathway you and your team can follow

1. The one 'BREAKTHROUGH QUESTION' you must ask to help yourself…

The skills that you and your team possess form the backbone of the success of your business, but what happens when things move or change in your sector? Do you stand still, or do you continue to progress?

To grow your business, you know you have to grow, develop and stay one step ahead of the competition, otherwise you and your business will be left behind.

But how do you do this? How do you ensure that you and your team can adapt and move with the ever-changing environment around you? How do you ensure you are ahead of the competition, aware of the latest developments in your market sector and ready to react to them and with them?

To do this, you and your team have to learn new skills or enhance the ones you already have. But you're busy, and learning anything new is time consuming, right?

It's crucial to the future of your business that you make time for this.

So, let's ask the question again…

How much time do you allocate to learning new skills or enhancing existing new skills in your business?

2. Your 'rapid skill acquisition' checklist

1. Real desire is the first step – choose a lovable project

Only if you truly want to do something will you invest the time, energy and commitment needed to learn the new skill.

2. Focus your energy on one skill at a time – one and one only

Choose one skill – shelve all the others for now and focus on this one skill for 20 hours. Focusing on this one skill will ensure that the team will be involved and not distracted by other things.

3. Define your target performance level – set SMART goals

Remember, you only have 20 hours, so set realistic targets. Use SMART goals to help you (more about those later) – don't be overambitious, write down what 'good enough' is and where you realistically want to get to with this skill as a team, and then work towards achieving that.

4. Deconstruct the skill into subskills

Looking at the skill as a whole can be overwhelming, so break it down into manageable subskills – then work on completing these one by one. For example, bringing a new piece of software into your business and teaching everyone to use it can feel like a lot to do, but it's not likely that all of your team have to use it straight away. Start with the team members who have a critical need, and then break that down into time for each one. As these initial users become more comfortable with the software, they can teach the rest how to use it, and the workload is distributed.

5. Have your tools readily available

If the new skill requires a workbook or time with an expert, make sure this is organised. Also, limit distractions – phones, calls, other team members – as these all eat into the learning time.

6. Remove the handbrakes

Ensure that you and your team have the right time and space to learn the skill. Make sure the office is quiet, phones are off, team are all present and that no client calls or meetings are booked. If you are offsite, make sure the environment is conducive to learning – this can be something as simple as the area being well-heated and well-lit. Having to deal with these obstacles during the session means that you cut into the time set aside for learning.

7. Make dedicated time for practice – commit diary time

This sounds simple, but it's probably the hardest to achieve. You are busy, your team are busy, there is always something to do. So, this time needs to be in the diary and not moved; it also needs to be repeated regularly. Skill acquisition is better when the learning is regular. This might mean that low priority jobs are sacrificed for a time.

8. Fast feedback helps fast skill acquisition

Getting feedback is crucial to learning progression. Make the feedback targeted so that your team have daily or weekly things for which to aim, but remember, make them realistic – no one likes to continually miss a target. You might think about recording some of the learning so you can watch it back and highlight areas for further work.

9. Respect the clock

Make sure you make the most of the time you have for learning a new skill. You could start a stopwatch at the beginning of the learning session – your team members see this reducing, and as they become more accomplished, the time spent learning will not feel as long as it might have at the beginning.

10. Quality trumps quantity

Getting the skill right is more important than the acquisition speed. In the beginning, failure is okay, as mistakes are always part of learning. The quantity of practice must remain the same.

3. The 10-step checklist applied to learning the ukulele

In his book *The First 20 Hours – How to learn anything fast*, Josh Kaufman describes how he learnt a series of skills, investing 20 hours for each skill. He went from knowing basically nothing about these skills to attaining a level of competence in yoga, touch typing, the ukulele and windsurfing.

He learnt the ukulele in just 10 days and then performed a 20-minute solo for total strangers.

Using his 10-step checklist, here is how he did it:

1. Real desire is the first step...

He wanted his baby daughter to grow up in a house with live music. He committed to playing the ukulele in front of a paying audience in just 10 days' time.

2. One and only one...

He parked all other skill acquisitions until he had mastered (to a reasonable level of competence) the ukulele and was able to sing at the same time.

3. Set SMART goals...

GOAL: Play the ukulele in 10 days' time whilst singing along to a paying audience, and every night to his baby daughter.

4. Deconstruct your skill into subskills...

Kaufman's approach to learning the ukulele included the following subskills:

- Tuning the ukulele

- Strumming patterns

- Finger patterns for the chords

- Finger picking

- Playing and singing at the same time

5. Have your tools readily available...

Ukulele. Tuning device. Chords book.

6. Remove the handbrakes...

Kaufman had a quiet environment, turned his phone and TV off and reminded himself he would get better.

7. Commit diary time...

He worked the time around his work-life routine – he didn't try and find time, he planned for it.

8. Fast feedback helps fast skill-acquisition...

He recorded and videoed himself playing the same song so he could see where he went wrong.

9. Respect the clock...

He started and finished at the time he set for himself.

10. Quantity trumps quality!

He allowed mistakes in the beginning. Initial progress was slow, but regular 1-hour sessions (quantity) saw quality improve.

4. SMART goals

Smart goals help focus the mind, and this is essential if you are going to acquire a new skill in 20 hours.

When you have chosen your skill, write down what 'good enough' feels like in this first 20-hour stage of skill acquisition.

A SMART goal can help you set a realistic standard for the effort you are putting in.

The SMART goal concept is accepted as a practical and easy-to-remember mnemonic strategy for goal setting. The research from Locke and Latham supports the effectiveness of setting SMART goals.

- **S -** goals must be **Specific**
- **M -** goals must be **Measurable**
- **A -** goals must be **Achievable**
- **R -** goals must be **Relevant** to you
- **T -** goals must be **Time** bound

However, one element of SMART can get in the way of your high performance!

The A in SMART is **achievable** rather than **ambitious** – remember, you only have 20 hours, so the goal needs to be just out of reach, requiring you to work right at the edge of your learning. Setting wildly ambitious aspirational goals will only demotivate you.

5. Skill acquisition vs learning vs training

Skill Acquisition

Definition: The process of breaking down a particular skill and practicing it to become competent

Term: Long or short – depending on future learning and training

Focus: Immediate need and long-term life achievements

Audience: Individual

Aim: Specific job, business improvement or personal goal (to play the ukulele)

You simply decide what to practice, figure out the best way to practice, break it down into manageable sections, make the time to practice (20 x 1-hour segments) – then practice.

There is no silver bullet, just focused time, strategic effort and investment in something you really want to do. With the right tools and environment, you'll acquire new skills rapidly.

Learning

Definition: The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study or experience or through being taught

Term: Long

Focus: Career development, personal achievement

Audience: Individual

Aim: Conceptual and knowledge development

If you want to acquire a new skill, you must practice. Learning then enhances practice, but it doesn't replace it. If performance matters, learning alone is never enough.

Training

Definition: The action of teaching a person a particular skill or type of behaviour

Term: Short

Focus: Immediate needs

Audience: Many

Aim: Specific job or related role

Training and learning require skills acquisition. For example, basic skills in operating a personal computer are paramount for engaging in any computer-related training or learning. Subsequent training only reinforces the core skills.

Rapid skill acquisition is the ability to learn a new skill to a degree of competence in 20 hours. You can then improve this skill to a far higher level with further learning and training if you want to.
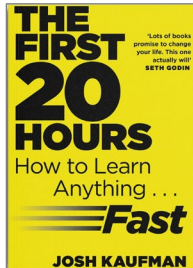
6. The book and other resources

The First 20 Hours – How to learn anything fast – Josh Kaufman

Good people and good systems, working together, can result in remarkable results. Josh Kaufman is a best-selling author who brilliantly unpacks a system for rapid skill acquisition that you and your team can easily put to work. Like Seth Godin says: *"Lots of books promise to change your life. This one actually will."*
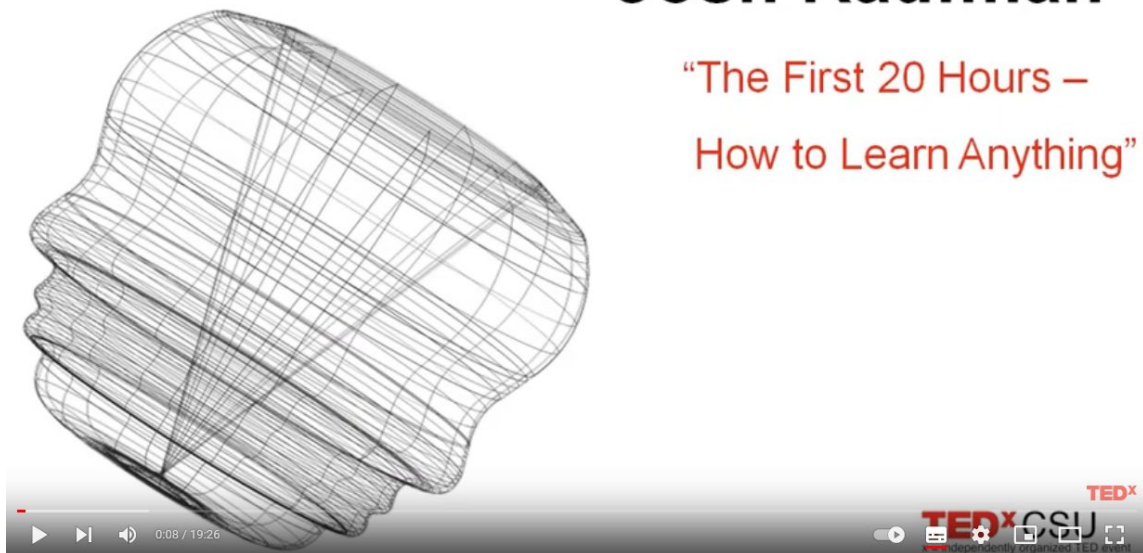
Buy *The First 20 Hours – How to learn anything fast* here

Other resources:

Please watch this video, in which Josh Kaufman describes how having his first child inspired him to approach learning in a whole new way.

The First 20 hours

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For a more detailed discussion of rapid skill acquisition, please watch this podcast. It's called the *Young and Profiting Podcast* and this one features Josh Kaufman.

Josh talks about the importance of limiting learning to just 20 hours, helps you deal with the emotions of starting something new, the 4 steps of learning something new and what the learning curve looks like. Although the podcast is over 40 minutes long, the discussion related to rapid skill acquistion actually finishes at 28 minutes.

The content is valuable, insightful and it's well worth a listen.

[Listen to the Podcast here](#)