



MOVING FROM KNOWER TO LEARNER

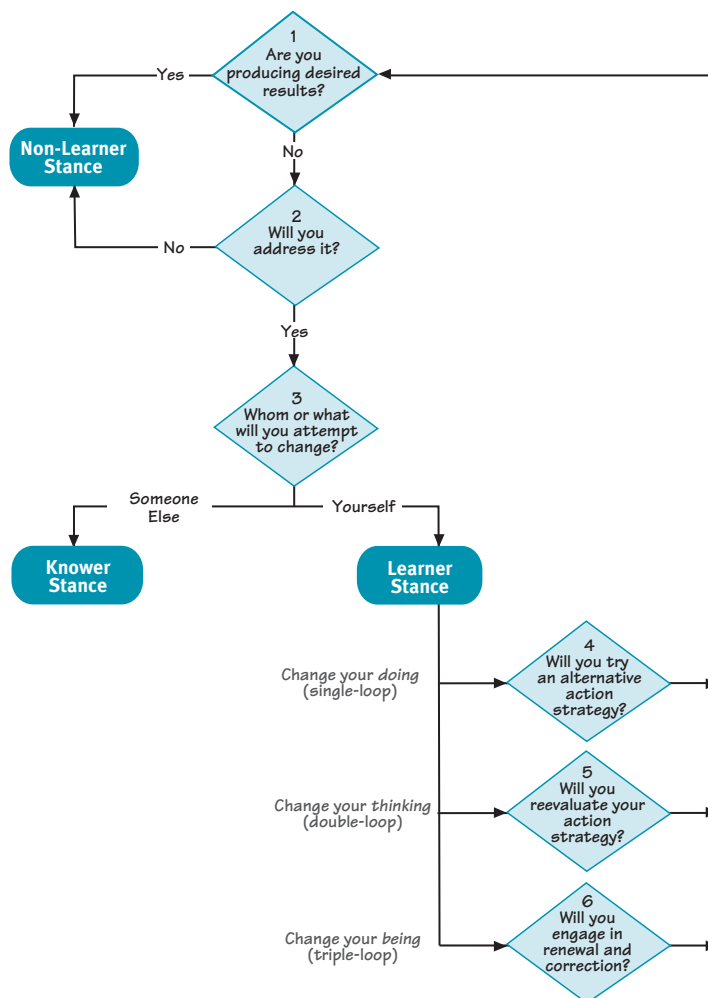
BY BRIAN HINKEN

Contrary to popular opinion, learning is not the process of merely accumulating more information. You have “learned” something only when you can produce a result you were unable to achieve before.

The Learner’s Path, illustrated here, describes the underlying process of learning. In considering a given issue, when you answer questions 1–3 successfully, you have become a learner and must now decide how deep you will engage your learning. The deeper you go with your learning, the more leverage you will have for creating sustainable results. If you decide to address question 4, you are engaged in *single-loop learning* (changing your *doing*). If you address questions 5 and 6, you are engaged in *double-loop learning* (changing your *thinking*) and *triple-loop learning* (changing your *being*), respectively.

The non-learner stance can quickly morph into a knower stance if you are less than honest with yourself or if you try to blame others for subpar results. Knowers get stuck on any of the first three questions when they can’t “go public” with their true answers. Learners successfully traverse the path because they can openly reveal their answers and are willing to be influenced by others or by data that contradicts their beliefs.

THE LEARNER’S PATH



Knowers	Learners
Publicly deny current results are less than desired unless the cause can be attributed to someone or something beyond their control.	Publicly and unconditionally acknowledge current results are less than desired.
Publicly deny responsibility for addressing less-than-desired results unless the cause can be attributed to someone or something beyond their control.	Publicly and unconditionally accept responsibility for addressing less-than-desired results.
Publicly deny the need to try an alternative action strategy to achieve desired results unless the cause can be attributed to someone or something beyond their control.	Publicly acknowledge the need to try an alternative action strategy.
Always blame an external challenge or circumstance to explain less-than-desired results.	Always examine their "ability to respond" to explain less-than-desired results.

Knowers operate (perhaps unknowingly) from a set of thinking habits, called “the secrets of a knower.” These thinking habits serve them well in protecting their egos, but have devastating effects on their ability to achieve their desired results.

Most of us have some knower tendencies. Fortunately, we also have the capacity to become “recovering knowers” by working to overcome these secret thinking habits.

Begin by walking yourself through the Learner’s Path questions whenever you realize that you are no longer achieving your desired results. Notice where you become stuck. Then use the chart below to discover: (1) the necessary “willingness” you need to cultivate, (2) the associated discipline used to develop that willingness, and (3) some specific, high-leverage practices. ■

Secrets of a Knower	Capacities of a Learner
The tendency to let other people and circumstances define desired results	The ability to bring something new into existence
The tendency to force group members to comply in order to get things done	The ability to co-create collective aspiration
The tendency to focus attention exclusively on one’s own little piece of the world	The ability to see their role in the whole
The tendency to protect oneself during conversations	The ability to distinguish between “myself” and “my view”
The tendency to direct and debate during group interactions	The ability to generate collective insight

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TEAM TIP

Walk through the Learner’s Path whenever you realize you are no longer achieving your desired results.

Learner’s Path Questions	Necessary Willingness	Primary Learning Disciplines*	Practices of a Recovering Knower
1. Are you producing desired results? [NO]	Acquire a desire	Personal Mastery: developing personal effectiveness and the ability to create the results one most desires	You are pulled by internal desire because you uncover your personal mission and vision. You understand success includes failed attempts. You identify your current reality and desired results, and act to move the reality toward the result (based on Robert Fritz’s structural tension model).
	Acquire a desire (collectively)	Shared Vision: creating collective aspiration and mutual commitment	You use four practices (share all valid information; give free, informed choice; ensure participation; and align with personal vision) to generate commitment and co-create collective aspiration.
2. Will you address it? [YES] 3. Whom or what will you attempt to change? [YOURSELF]	See your role in the whole	Systems Thinking: understanding the whole (including one’s own part), and how structures and systems are interconnected	You see the web of interconnections and influences by looking deeper (at patterns and structures) using the iceberg model, and looking wider (at feedback loops) using various types of causal loop methods.
4. Will you try an alternative action strategy? [YES]	Pursue a new view	Mental Models: reflecting on one’s attitude and perceptions, thereby increasing mutual understanding and insight into oneself	You seek reciprocal understanding with others by considering multiple perspectives using tools such as the ladder of inference and left-hand column, both developed by Chris Argyris.
	Pursue a new view (collectively)	Team Learning: generating collective insight by transforming how a group thinks and interacts together	You generate new collective insights through mutual learning by using the practice of dialogue and other conversational methodologies.

* From *The Fifth Discipline*, by Peter M. Senge.