

Chapter
7

Deal with Challenges

During your pursuit of a worthwhile learning goal, you continually face challenges. Overcoming challenges is one reason achieving a goal is so rewarding. Sometimes though, challenges can seem overwhelming. This chapter deals with some of the common challenges you may face. It also shows you how to use various techniques to help overcome those challenges.

This is a summary of the Challenges chapter from the Memletics Accelerated Learning Manual. You can find more information on the manual by visiting <http://www.memletics.com/manual>

In this chapter, you will find ways to overcome many of the common challenges you may face during your learning journey. Developing a better understanding of these challenges, as well as techniques to address them, helps you move forward faster when these challenges arise. The challenges we tackle in this chapter include:

- **Motivation.** Lack of motivation is often the largest issue that arises when times get tough. However, lack of motivation can also come from other sources as well, such as misaligned goals or internal or external conflicts.
- **Fear.** Fear and nervousness, in many guises, degrade learning performance in several ways. I describe fear's dual nature, and how to combat fear with knowledge, understanding and other techniques.
- **Mistakes.** Rather than seeing mistakes negatively, learn to see them as steps towards your goals. You can learn from your own mistakes, as well as the mistakes of others.
- **Pressure.** I outline some tips on how to deal with the impact of pressure on various techniques, both during learning and at other times.
- **Wrong assumptions.** You can use the ACT model to overcome wrong assumptions.

A tip before we begin. Medical students often develop the symptoms of a disease they are studying. If you read this chapter and suddenly believe that your *lack of motivation* comes from a *deep internal conflict* about *possible success* and the impact a *mistake*, due to making a *wrong assumption under pressure*, would have on that success, stop for a moment! Are you suffering the Medical Student Syndrome? I cover this in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Keep it up—deal with motivation issues

In any challenging exercise you have times when your motivation is low. This is just one more challenge that you need to overcome to continue towards your goal. In this section, I explore some topics that you may find helpful in identifying and resolving motivation issues.

Issues with goals and objectives, and internal conflicts, are a major cause of motivation issues. Reviewing your own past performance can help. Other people can also be of great help. They can give you feedback and guidance. They can also act as motivators, whether they know it or not. Sometimes you may have some management issues to deal with, such as too much tracking, too many distractions or too many outstanding issues. Lastly, I cover some other points that may help. Let's explore these topics.

Content in the book includes:

- Detailed discussion on a range of motivation issues
- Goals and objectives: Use of internal motivators and external motivators (eg reward and punishment), goal relevance, goal difficulty, and inconsistencies.
- Internal conflicts: Change anxiety, learning versus performance orientation, and risk perception.
- Learning performance: Getting feedback, affirming learning ability, and reviews of how far you've come
- Enrolling others to assist: Talking to other people, using consistency, helping others, and using the importance of the goal as motivation (eg gung-ho "Important work" motivation).
- Management aspects: too much tracking, distractions, other responsibilities, and issues.
- Further points: Changing focus for a while, enjoying the journey, review further references, and getting further help.

Knowledge—your weapon against fear and nervousness

Fear has a dual nature. It's both a protector and an inhibitor. You can use this understanding to help defeat fears that hold you back, as well as learn how to use knowledge to manage fears and stay safe.

In any learning activity involving significant challenges, you may sometimes feel nervous. What underlies this nervousness? It's usually fear. Fear of accidents, not being able to handle an event, not being able to recall information, or even sometimes fear of success.

In this chapter we explore some activities that can help you find the right balance between too little and too much fear. Firstly, I describe a "balanced model" of fear, showing that both too much and too little fear can harm your livelihood. An effective way for controlling fear is to make it known. Accept you have the fear and then find more information. Understand the particular issue causing the fear. Fear of failure is a common issue, less known though is fear of success. You can use positive experiences to help you work through fearful events. As well, there

are techniques to help you disassociate yourself from a past or feared event if it holds an irrational amount of fear.

Lastly, I cover three more techniques and tips that help you control fear. These are how to uncover hidden fears, how to control breathing to control nervousness, and tips for exams and tests.

Let's explore all these topics.

Content in the book includes:

Use the balanced model

- Finding the right balance between too little fear (reckless, foolhardy) and too much fear (static, paralyzed).
- How fear is usually (but not always) a warning from your body or brain that you may be putting yourself in a dangerous situation.
- Different fear positions for different activities.
- What influences your approach to risk and fear, and assertions that can help move you towards or away from risk and fear.

Remove the fear of the unknown – make it known

- How to remove much fear by making it known, and tips on how to do so.
- What to do with “worst case scenarios,”
- Tips for finding out more about exams and tests, journeys into new areas, and finishing training.
- Further assertions to help remove fear of the unknown.

Understand fear of failure

- Understand more about the fear of failure
- See how “positive thinking” can actually be harmful or dangerous. Learn how to apply positive thinking in the right place.
- Symptoms of fear of failure, such as escape mechanisms (fight or flight, procrastination, sleep), anxiety (stress, nervousness, neck and back aches, out of control feelings, sleeplessness, hypertension, and more), and irrational self talk.
- Steps for how to manage and overcome the fear of failure.
- What to do if persistence doesn't help.

Understand fear of success

- Describes how sometimes your fear may not be of failing – it may actually be fear of success and what that entails.
- Symptoms, including sabotage.
- Questions to help explore whether you may have some underlying fears of success, including life changes, complications, moving from structured to unstructured learning, additional pressures, and possible decline.
- Suggestions for dealing with fear of success.

Positive past experiences – use as anchors

- Suggestions for using positive past experiences as anchors to overcome fears.

Negative experiences – disassociate yourself

- How to separate emotions from negative experiences or imaginations, using mental imagery or visualization.
- Describes a disassociation technique called the disassociation movie.
- How you can also use this technique for phobias

Strategies for common issues

- Three strategies for common fear-related issues. The “seventy by seven” technique is useful for uncovering hidden fears. Breathing normally is a key element of handling nervousness. Lastly, I give some tips on handling exams and tests.
- How to use the “seventy by seven” technique
- Tips for breathing normally to unlock nervousness, including visualization, shunt, overcoming hyperventilation, learning to laugh (the benefits of laughter and seeing the funny or humorous side of things), using other people to help you (eg the naked audience, or a colleague helping you out), relaxation, and using other Memletic Techniques.
- Four ways to minimize or overcome nervousness associated with an exam or test. Includes understanding the source, realigning views, reframing the purpose, role reversal (for demonstration or oral style tests), and relaxation (the 90% rule).

A final note

A closing reminder is that *fear is usually a warning from your body or brain that you may be putting yourself in danger*. Sometimes your fear signals real danger. If you are putting yourself into unknown or dangerous circumstances, pause and take a step back. Ask yourself how you can make it more known. How you can discover, understand and reduce the risks?

Mistakes—shortcuts to faster learning

Many people avoid mistakes at all costs, however mistakes are a key part of learning. You progress faster by accepting and making the most of your own mistakes. Another shortcut is through using the lessons from mistakes that others make.

Content in the book includes:

Your own mistakes

- Further points on the importance of making mistakes while you learn.
- Key factors that determine how well you handle mistakes, including attitude, reaction and learning from them.
- Points on attitude, including accepting mistakes (but not accepting danger).

- Steps for dealing with mistakes immediately, including acknowledging it, rectifying it, planning a response (if required), verbalizing it, making a note, and not hiding it.
- Tips for learning from mistakes, such as capturing them, getting assistance, replaying them to understand lessons, and documenting feelings.

Other peoples mistakes – your shortcut

"It is necessary for us to learn from others' mistakes. You will not live long enough to make them all yourself." (Hyman George Rickover)

- How to use the mistakes of others to accelerate your learning.
- Where to find information on the mistakes of others.
- Examples of two aviation accidents / disasters caused by human error and mistakes, and tips on learning from them (even if you are not in an aviation field).

Under pressure—impact on techniques

A technique may work well when you practice it in the comfort of your home or classroom. When you get out and try it in the real environment though, you may find it doesn't work as well as you expect. This is often due to pressure.

I've found that pressure causes issues with techniques both during learning as well as after you've learned something well. Let's look at both these situations.

Content in the book includes:

- Examples from my own experiences in flight training, both during training and afterwards.
- Tips for recognizing and changing techniques when they don't work well under pressure.

ACT! Recognize and act on assumptions

Wrong assumptions are a problem in many fields. You can improve the assumptions you make by becoming more aware of when you make them. Recognizing assumptions can be challenging in any environment. This section helps you recognize assumptions and deal with them.

There are two main kinds of assumptions:

- **Conscious assumptions.** You consciously accept a piece of information as a fact, while understanding that it may not be.
- **Unconscious assumptions.** You unconsciously accept a piece of information as a fact, without questioning whether it is. These are the dangerous assumptions, however they are also difficult to detect because they *are* unconscious!

We all make many assumptions about the world we live in. In our time pressured society, making assumptions allows us to be as effective as we are. Imagine if every day we had to check that each part of the car worked before starting it. Imagine if we had to call the local transport office to make sure the train is

coming that day. Think about having to ring the bank every day just to check our money is still there.

There are two parts of assumptions to consider:

- **Strength.** Our assumptions become stronger with experience. The car starts most of the time. The train usually arrives. Our money stays where it is (well, if we don't touch it). The more we experience the expected outcome, the more we treat the assumption as fact.
- **Impact.** The need to question assumptions usually arises when the impact of our assumption being wrong has an effect we would rather avoid. However, this is difficult if you don't realize you have made an assumption.

Unfortunately, wrong assumptions cost our society much time and money. Wrong assumptions by pilots (and others) cause accidents and loss of life. Many aircraft accident investigations show the pilot made an assumption that led to the accident or incident. Some of the most common are "I can get through the weather" and "I have enough fuel."

The key to staying safe is to turn unconscious assumptions into conscious assumptions. Once they are conscious assumptions, you can then use a simple process to decide whether the assumption is safe.

In this section, I provide you with a technique I call the *assumption buster technique*. This technique is a good way to deal with unconscious assumptions. You can apply this assumption buster technique to check assumptions you make in any field, not just aviation. You can train yourself to recognize and act on assumptions before they become issues or problems.

There are two steps. The first is to set up triggers for common assumptions. Assumption triggers are visualizations and assertions you can review that help pull your assumptions from the unconscious to the conscious mind. The second step is to ACT on them when they arise. ACT stands for Assumption, Contingency, and Test.

Content in the book includes:

- What are assumption triggers, how to obtain them, and how to activate them using visualization and other techniques.
- Using the ACT technique to move from a conscious assumption to action.
- Includes an example of making assumptions about the weather in aviation – and how to deal with it using the ACT technique. Also includes examples possible triggers in an aviation context, such as weather, fuel, location, "I'm OK," and other people's actions.
- A discussion on the medical student syndrome, where medical (and psychiatry) students pick up the symptoms of the disease or disorder they are studying. Discusses why this is relevant to this chapter on challenges.

The Medical Student Syndrome

Another variation on wrong assumptions is one I briefly discussed in the introduction to this chapter. This is the *Medical Student Syndrome*, where medical (and sometimes psychiatry) students start to believe they suffer the disease or disorder they are studying. These students then make a second mistake.

They do not try to test their thinking, for example by discussing it with a doctor or specialist. There have been many cases where students have convinced themselves they suffer the disease, only to have tests prove them wrong.

I've included this anecdote because you might do something similar as you read about the challenges in this chapter. After reading this chapter, you may feel there are one or two issues relevant to you. That's fine. Reread the information on those issues, try the techniques to resolve them, and keep moving forward.

However, you may find yourself rationalizing why it's so difficult to move on while you suffer from several of these challenges. If so, try talking to someone or at least write down your thoughts. You may be suffering a similar syndrome to those medical students. Talking to someone else or putting pen to paper often highlights mistaken assumptions. Be open to them! If you get defensive, that behavior may show you are defending thoughts that you want to believe are true.

Lastly, be aware you may also talk yourself into believing something to justify inaction. If you have a history of procrastination, review the section on motivation to help you keep moving.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, you've seen some of the challenges that may arise on the journey to your goals. These can happen to anyone. Now you have some tools and techniques you can use to resolve those challenges faster.

The first challenge we dealt with was motivation. Motivation issues are often the key cause of people giving up on their learning goals. You have now seen some of the common motivation issues so you can deal with them more effectively if they arise.

The next challenges were nervousness and fear. Fear is often an issue when there is some danger or risk in a training course, or when there is significant personal change. You now have some ideas for balancing your fear, dealing with fears, and handling positive and negative experiences. We've also covered some further techniques for uncovering hidden fears, controlling breathing, and excelling in exams.

The last part of the chapter dealt with some other common challenges that arise while learning. Mistakes often concern people, however you now know that both your mistakes and the mistakes of others are often valuable lessons that help you along the way. Pressure also has an impact on some techniques, so be prepared to try others if this arises. Wrong assumptions can sometimes be inconvenient, if not dangerous. Using the assumption buster technique, you can bring unconscious assumptions out so you can deal with them properly.