

Barriers to Learning

Is it possible that there is something right in front of your eyes and that you miss it? How does it feel? Fooled? Well, our brain gets fooled quite easily! This has interested a lot of thinkers. We can be better learners if we understand these barriers. A small demo or as Baba Ranchod Das would call it green chutney - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo> , do watch this video completely and you'll experience precisely what I have stated. Even though I have stated that you would be fooled, even though you are trying to be careful, you did fall? How? If you didn't see the video so far, please go and watch it. This is one of the first barriers to break- do what is asked, to get more out of this.

We found something very interesting through our recruitment process. More than 1000 students participated in it through the last one year. We give students a document to read and we ask them to write what they have understood through that. They complete two assignments; they visit the website and then appear for an interview. We get very generic answers to "what is Sciensation". They tell us – "kids byheart answers", "I did not like learning in school" or "it is about creativity in learning". A big question to be asked here is – what did you learn from the document? Didn't you know this before? Did you read the document to defend your ego? Did you want to prove that you are right? That education system is bad and your opinion is right? Did this ego stop you from reading a few specifics? Even now, are you missing some details in this document?

Let us say you are appearing for an interview for an internship at a restaurant. The chef cooks something, gets you to taste it and asks you for observations. What if you tell him/her that the dress is neat, that the place is clean and that the food is tasty? Did you have to observe to tell them this? If it is a good restaurant, do I have to visit it to tell that? Observation starts when I come out of the comfort of the known! You are comfortable at home- what you know. But you may have to come out, start seeing something new, like a kid. What pattern do you see in cutting, can you compare it with something else, what similarities and differences? There is so much to observe if you want to.

Any good employer looks for openness and learnability in an internship applicant. We do not expect skills or knowledge in an intern. One applies to an internship because one wants to learn. There is a difference between an internship and a part-time job. A job is a source of employment and livelihood, while an internship is a nursery bed for talent to sprout. So, we assess if a candidate can learn if given an opportunity. So, the quality of observations made is an extremely important criterion. A candidate with good learning capabilities is more likely to make good observations. It is like a quintessential Indian middle-class mother breaking a ladyfinger, before purchasing. You get to see the quality of a student through the quality of observations.

There is a very interesting Telugu movie called Key. In this movie, different people get into an interview room. They are put in a situation. They are given a pencil and a white paper. They are not given a question paper; they are told the time limit. People try to think smart, in terms of what the question paper is. This was actually brilliant because IQ (Intelligence quotient) without EQ (Emotional Quotient) is extremely dangerous. These people were trying to prove themselves smart. They were thinking- I am a smart fellow, even though the question paper is not here, I will find it and the others won't. But in the process, they end up hurting the others. You want the job, you are fighting for the job, but would you let the others fall? Do you have compassion? Well, situations can really help in assessing candidates.

Forget about how you manage other people. Your own internal rivals or bad qualities can be assessed through situations. Any good recruitment process with concur with famous lines of another Telugu movie "Trinethra is watching". Every move of yours is observed- the way in which one talks, one writes an email, time taken to respond. In an interview environment, a candidate tries to impress and is artificial. But when you watch a candidate over a period of time, you get to see the natural behaviour or natural instincts of a person. So what are your internal enemies- ego which kills openness to learning (humility) and lack of trust which kills confidence or boldness, there are many more, read up EQ.

Ego and Trust are two very important forces to be understood if one has to emerge as a good learner. Ego brings in a very closed mindset. When you are asked to read something, the chances are very high that you would only pick elements that interest you. We tend to be very "selective" about what we pick up – from videos or books or classes. But what is the point of learning, if we can't see something new? So how do we break this ego? Well, reflection can play a very important role here. At the end of the learning session (reading or listening or watching) ask yourself the three-key take-aways. If they come very close to what you already know, then you were probably not very open. Can you challenge your friends to do the same and compare your points with theirs? This way you get to see what you've missed. Secondly, if you are giving answers which are no way connected to the reading material, you were just looking for an ego massage. So, next time, do read it properly and completely.

Why is Trust important? When you were asked to watch the video, did you click it immediately? Great, if you did. Do you follow what your mentors say? Is it just laziness which stops you? If there is true trust, would you not do it and reap the dividends/benefits? If Dhoni plays a masterstroke as the captain, shouldn't Joginder Sharma just trust Dhoni and execute the plan? What is Joginder uses opposite intelligence and doesn't trust Dhoni? Does it mean being a slave? Can you be independent and yet trust the leader? This is a profound concept in economics. The countries where there is more trust are developed nations today. In India, do leaders trust people? Do people trust leaders? Do businesses trust customers? Do customers trust businesses? When trust emerges, stock markets go up. When trust is too much, stock markets go down, so the right balance is desired. Like-wise one needs to trust a leader/teacher and balance it with constructive criticism, not cynicism (always negative, trying to prove them wrong). Once you conquer Trust and Ego, you would have conquered yourself.