



## Learn to Lead

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Leadership Series – Part 4 of 4 – Agility

Through the series we have discussed leadership in general along with the 4 core skills – Self-Awareness, Communication, Influence, and ending with **Learning Agility**.

**Learning agility** is the capacity to acquire new skills, knowledge, and insights rapidly, and apply them effectively. It involves not only the willingness to learn but also the ability to embrace change, make sense of new information, and adapt our behaviour accordingly. People with high learning agility tend to be more resilient, innovative, and adaptable.

“Learning agility is the willingness and ability to learn, de-learn, and relearn. Limitations on learning are barriers invented by humans.” Pearl Zhu

This quote suggests the things that sometimes make learning difficult are not part of the learning process itself, but are more like hurdles we've made up in our minds. So, if we change how we see or think about these obstacles, we can overcome them and learn more effectively. Let's break this down a little further and consider how we can improve our ability to overcome the barriers.

**Willingness to Learn** – This refers to being open and eager to acquire new knowledge or skills. It's having an attitude that says, "I'm ready to explore and understand something new."

**Ability to Learn** – Having the capability to actually grasp and absorb information effectively. Knowing your learning style really helps. It involves using your brain, senses, and other tools to understand and retain new things.

**De-learn** – De-learning means letting go of old information or ways of doing things that might not be as relevant or effective anymore. It's about unburdening yourself from outdated knowledge or habits (even though they may feel super comfortable).

**Relearn** – Relearning is the process of acquiring new knowledge or skills to replace what you've de-learned. It's like updating your mental software to stay current and adaptable.

**Limitations on Learning** – This refers to anything that holds back or restricts the learning process. It could be self-doubt, fear, closed-mindedness, or any obstacle that hinders the natural curiosity and growth.

**Barriers Invented by Humans** – These are obstacles or restrictions that people create, knowingly or unknowingly. It could be things like preconceived notions, biases, or rigid beliefs that hinder the open-mindedness needed for effective learning.

Therefore, learning agility is having the mindset and skills to embrace new knowledge, let go of outdated stuff, and continuously update yourself. The idea is that often, the only things stopping us from learning are the mental barriers we create for ourselves. So, being open, flexible, and ready to adapt is the key to limitless learning.

In our fast-paced, ever-changing world, the ability to adapt and learn quickly has become not just a valuable skill but an essential one. As our profession evolves, technologies advance, and new challenges emerge, those who possess learning agility are better equipped to navigate these shifts and excel in their careers. In dentistry, this has never been truer than right now – so let's explore the concept of learning agility, its significance, and how you can cultivate this essential skill to stay ahead in a constant changing environment.

**Navigating Uncertainty** – In a world characterised by uncertainty, being adaptable and open to learning is essential. People with learning agility can quickly pivot, adjust, and find new opportunities when faced with unexpected challenges.

**Remaining Relevant** – Our profession and job roles are constantly evolving. Learning agility enables individuals to stay up to date with the latest trends, technologies, and best practices, ensuring our continued relevance in the workplace.

**Problem-Solving** – When confronted with complex problems, those with high learning agility can break down the issues, seek new information, and develop innovative solutions, making them valuable contributors to the situation.

**Leadership Potential** – Learning-agile individuals often exhibit strong leadership potential, being one of the core skills. They can inspire others to embrace change and encourage a culture of continuous improvement.

There are a number of ways to develop and nurture learning agility by:

**Embracing Challenges** – Challenge yourself with tasks or situations that are outside your comfort zone. Embracing challenges, whether they involve learning a new skill or taking on a leadership role in a project, is a way to develop learning agility.

**Seek Feedback** – Actively seek feedback from peers, mentors, and those who you trust. Constructive criticism is a valuable tool for personal growth. It provides insights into areas where you can improve and highlights your strengths.

**Expand Your Comfort Zone** – Don't settle for the status quo. Regularly step out of your comfort zone and engage in projects or activities that require new skills or knowledge. This may involve putting your hand up to try something new at work or pursuing hobbies and interests that challenge you.

**Develop a Growth Mindset** – Adopt a growth mindset that embraces challenges and views failures as opportunities for growth. Believe in your capacity to learn and improve, and understand that intelligence and abilities are not fixed traits. With a growth mindset, you're more likely to embrace new challenges and persevere in the face of setbacks.

**Continuous Learning** – Desire to commit to continuous learning (not because we have to). Whether it's through formal education, online courses, or self-directed reading, stay curious and expand your knowledge base. Lifelong learning is a cornerstone of learning agility.

**Networking** – Connect with professionals from diverse backgrounds. Engaging with people with different perspectives can expand our horizons and foster learning agility. Networking exposes us to new ideas, approaches, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

**Experimentation** – Don't be afraid to experiment and try new approaches. Learning agility often involves trial and error. When we experiment, we gain valuable insights that contribute to your adaptability and problem-solving skills.

**Reflection** – Set aside time for reflection. Consider what you've learned from your experiences and how you can apply those lessons in the future. Regular reflection enhances our ability to make sense of new information and adapt our behaviours accordingly.

**Adaptability** – Practice adaptability in your daily life. Be open to change, whether it's a change in workplace procedures or a shift in your personal routines. Embracing change as an opportunity for growth is a hallmark of learning agility.

**Collaboration** – Collaborate with colleagues and peers to learn from their experiences and perspectives. Sharing insights and working together on projects can broaden our knowledge and strengthens our ability to adapt.

**Inspiring Learning in Others** – To develop as leaders and as people, we need to be active, agile learners. Leaders need to be in a mode of constant learning, valuing and seeking out experiences to fuel leadership development, and recognising when new behaviours, leadership skills, or attitudes are required – and accepting responsibility for developing those.

**Cultivating a Culture of Learning** – For leaders, learning agility is also about inspiring learning in others and creating a culture of learning.

Learning agility is not just a skill but a mindset. Embracing change and staying open to new knowledge and experiences can make a significant difference in your career and life in general. By continuously developing your learning agility, you'll not only stay relevant but also thrive in a dynamic and changing environment.

And with Learning Agility, our leadership series wraps up—here's to thriving as leaders with a flexible mindset and the groove of continuous growth, whether its in your professional life, home life or navigating everything in between.

***"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more - you are a leader" -John Quincy***

