



HUMAN BEINGS LEARN BY TRIAL AND ERROR

By Phil Golding

Unrealistic expectations placed on children to get things right first time is a very sad and common theme. Children often impose these expectations on themselves as well. As a therapist, this is one of the most common stories my clients share with me about their dysfunctional childhood experiences. Once their awareness is awakened to the destructiveness of this unrealistic expectation, it is often a shock to my clients to realise how much their lives have been adversely affected by it.

In reality, one of the most joyful and satisfying experiences a child can have is the freedom and encouragement to explore new things. There is a certain thrill about approaching a new project in various different ways, suffering a bit of frustration at times, but with some gentle guidance and encouragement, finally mastering a new skill. If the parental guidance is appropriate, what the child will remember the most is the excitement of the achievement. All the mistakes and frustrations along the way will not be regarded as a problem. Instead, they will be regarded as the natural stepping-stones to success. As a result of this positive mentoring, the child grows up confident in his/her natural abilities and creative power. Disappointments are taken in one's stride without a sense of reduced self-worth.

How different it is when a child is expected to get a task right the first time. The child is criticised and ridiculed when he/she naturally lacks understanding or stumbles over new challenges of coordination and problem solving. Fear and shame quickly invades the experience. Trying new things soon becomes a source of anxiety. Lack of self-confidence and creativity is the inevitable result, along with a limited ability to effectively face life's challenges.

In reality, trial and error is a natural and essential mode of learning for any human being. Denying this is a fast-track to suffering. Everything takes time to learn, no matter how academically clever we are, and no matter how naturally adept

we may be at something.

Playing golf is a good analogy for this. You can digest a library full of golfing books and DVDs, but it is a very different matter when it comes to placing that little white ball onto the tee and slogging it straight and high down the fairway, especially if there is a group of onlookers. If you think learning to play golf is hard, try changing an old ingrained habit, such as regret or worry. It can be done, but it takes time, persistence and a lot of trial and error.

It is impossible to grasp the nuances of such complex tasks in a short time. Repeated experience is required to simply gain awareness of what there is to grasp.

How long did it take you to learn your trade, or to gain your diploma or university degree? How much effort did you put into that? Do you think mastering your human mind is going to be any easier? Think again. It is your life's work, and be sure that everything else in your life depends on it. Being skilful at caring for your mind in the now is the foundation of all your happiness and wellbeing in every area of your life.

Be very aware, therefore, of when you are being hard on yourself for not getting things "right". Fully mastering some deep issues may not even be possible in your lifetime, but learning to skilfully manage these issues certainly is possible. Other issues go less deep, and with persistence, can be completely overcome.

I am routinely helping people to manage and to even overcome self-defeating behaviours, just as I have overcome the chronic depression of my past. Often more orthodox therapists have given up on these people. My clients are often told that medication is their only solution. I have had the pleasure of showing them otherwise.

To achieve this success, each of these people has learned to accept and care for their human-self, using their own adapted variations of this powerful process. Their success was assured because they did not give up. They have learned to open their awareness to what is in front of them in each moment and make the most of it.



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