Five Day

Learning Diary

Adapted from Dr Peter Honey’s Learning Log
Learning Diary
Adapted from Peter Honey’s Learning Log
A way to enhance learning from experience

Introduction
We all learn from experience. Without it we would be condemned to repeating our mistakes over and over again and be incapable of adapting to change. Most of us take our learning from experience for granted, however.

This Learning Diary has been created to help you become more conscious of your experiential learning during one working week so that you can manage it more effectively.

If you are conscious of what you are learning from experience you:
• are clear what you have learned
• can communicate your learning to other people
• know how you learn and therefore improve the way you do it
• have a recipe for continuous improvement and for helping others to improve
• keep ahead of and are ‘comfortable’ with change
• learn from success, not just from mistakes
• are better able to transfer learning from one specific situation to a broader range of other situations
• are more purposeful, determined to extract learning even from unremarkable routine experiences

Learning from experience is a process that can be broken down into 4 stages, as shown below.

Stage 1 Having an experience
Stage 2 Reviewing the experience
Stage 3 Concluding from the experience
Stage 4 Planning the next step
The four stages are mutually dependent on one another. No stage makes sense, or is particularly useful, in isolation from the others.

**Completing the Learning Diary**

The Learning Diary assumes that you have had an experience from which you wish to learn. It is designed to help you:

- review the experience (stage two of the learning cycle)
- reach conclusions (stage three of the learning cycle)
- plan what to do better/differently (stage four of the learning cycle)

Use the following procedure each time you make an entry:

1. Start by thinking back over an experience and selecting a part of it to focus on in your log.
2. Write a detailed account of what happened during the period of activity that you have chosen to focus on.
3. List the conclusions that you have reached as a result of thinking about the experience. These are your learning points.
4. Finally, decide which learning points you want to implement in the future and work out an action plan that covers:
   - what you are going to do
   - when you are going to do it

Spell out your action plan as precisely as possible so that it is realistic and you are clear how to implement it.

**An example of Learning Diary entry**

The following pages contain five learning diary entries that you can complete throughout one working week. An example is given below.

**My description of what happened**

I called a meeting to discuss the Wainwright project. I wanted to air problems, gather ideas and agree the best course of action in the circumstances.

I was surprised that people seemed to be holding back. They seemed reluctant to join in a ‘brainstorm’. In the end the meeting adopted my idea – but I felt a distinct lack of added value from the meeting.

Afterwards I asked some of the participants independently why they hadn’t been more forthcoming. They said they felt sure I had already made up my mind and was merely going through the motions of involving them.
My conclusions/lessons learned
How easy it is for people to misunderstand my intentions. In fact I did have a preferred solution in mind when I called the meeting, but was only too happy to ditch it if something better came up.
I need some way of communicating my starting position more clearly so that people know the extent to which I'm open to suggestions or whether my mind is already made up.

My plan to do something better/different
In future I will 'label' my meetings:
Directive i.e. ‘I’ve already reached a decision and I’m going to tell you what it is.’
Consultative i.e. ‘I’ve already got some ideas but I’d like yours before I reach a decision.’
Collaborative i.e. ‘I’m open minded and I’d like us to reach a decision together.’
I’ll introduce this system at the start of our next meeting.
Monday to Friday Learning Diary

Monday

My description of what happened

My conclusions/lessons learned

My plan to do something better/different
Tuesday

My description of what happened

My conclusions/lessons learned

My plan to do something better/different
Wednesday

My description of what happened

My conclusions/lessons learned

My plan to do something better/different
Thursday

My description of what happened

My conclusions/lessons learned

My plan to do something better/different
Friday

My description of what happened

My conclusions/lessons learned

My plan to do something better/different
This Learning Diary covers Monday to Friday but you don’t stop learning when you leave work on a Friday night. The same principle can be used to record what you learn from experiences outside of work.

**Reviewing and Implementing your Learning Diary**

One or two weeks after you have completed the five day Learning Diary, check back through your entries and make a note of which resolutions you have implemented and which you have not. Now answer the following questions:

What have I learned about the plans I implemented successfully as opposed to those where I was unsuccessful?

Why have I not implemented some of my plans?

Of the plans I have not yet implemented, which am I no longer interested in and which am I still keen to action?

How am I going to remember the plans I still want to action?

Finally, what have I learned about the process of keeping a Learning Diary?