

Closing the Knowing and Doing Gap

It's common to participate in professional development events yet not end up applying the new knowledge or skills over the long haul. A phenomenon referred to as the "knowing-doing gap" or the "education-application gap." What can we do to help?

Be Intentional

The first step is to make a conscious commitment to carrying material and experience from the training into your work life. That sounds obvious, but you may hold assumptions beneath conscious awareness that prevent such commitment. Does your behavior indicate an unexamined assumption that growth will occur automatically as a function of participating in training? Or perhaps you believe it's not quite the right time to commit to the ongoing effort for growth, or you're waiting for feelings of inspiration. Perhaps your sense of perfectionism gets in the way of starting, since you may not yet know exactly how to get started, or what the path to success looks like exactly.

Set Concrete Goals

No, not goals for what successful growth will look like, but goals for applying the knowledge and practicing the skills included in the training.

What are the specific behaviors you want to increase or decrease? Are there specific contexts in which you plan to apply your new approach? What metrics would indicate success in meeting your goals of applying and practicing? What is realistic in terms of the actual time commitment you can make to this process?

Form Implementation Intentions

Implementation intentions are "if-then" and "when-then" statements or rules that guide future behavior by removing the need to make a decision each time those situations arise. They also serve as memory cues for enacting the intended behavior. So, consider the contexts in which you intend to implement the new behavior and form explicit "rules." For example, "When X happens, I will do Y," and "If X occurs, I will respond Y."

Leverage the Power of Your Calendar

Insert specific reminders throughout your calendar to prompt continual awareness of your intention to apply and practice the new material.

Also include specific times to reflect on, and assess, the process of practicing new skills (and reminding yourself).

Create Recurring Email and/or Text Reminders

The free app RemindMe can be set to send reminders to your phone on whatever schedule you create (including random). The website emailfuture.com allows you to easily send emails to yourself that arrive at some future time you set.

Effective Clinical Teaching in the Outpatient Setting

Monitor/Record Your Intended Behavior

Monitoring behavior often has the effect of altering it, primarily by making us more conscious of what we do. Is the intended application of the material something you can monitor and record on an ongoing basis? If so, how will you do that? With markings on an index card you keep with you, or notes in a file on your phone?

How will you remember to record your behavior? When specifically will you review the results?

Preach It, Teach It, and Declare Your Intended Changes

Intentions that are shared verbally with others are more likely to be followed up on. Similarly, sharing new knowledge keeps it in your conscious awareness, and may help convince (or remind) you of its value. Plus, advocating something while not living it yourself may produce dissonance or a sense of hypocrisy, thus motivating change.

Be Accountable to Others

Is there an individual (or group) you can ask to serve as your accountability partner? Inform them of your intended change and then ask them to provide feedback when they notice particular behaviors. If the intended changes are not something they may witness themselves, are there specific times you can schedule checking in to report on your progress? That expectation of having something to report may motivate you.

Take Charge of Rewards and the Environment

What concrete rewards will you use to reinforce each instance of your intended behavior? At the least, how will you verbally reinforce yourself for having performed an instance of what you are trying to do? Also, are there ways you can alter your environment to slant it toward your intended behavior change (e.g., make it easier to remember to perform the new behavior or more difficult to perform the old behavior)?

Set Times to Reflect

Enduring change comes from reflecting on our experience so that we can incorporate those lessons into our cognitive schemas. Be sure to schedule recurring times for self-reflection on what you tried, how well it worked, and what you would do differently next time.

Also, what do you still need to learn? How could you go about learning it?

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