

# Completing the Learning Cycle – and Beyond

## Introduction

One of the most useful models I have found for understanding the learning cycle is the model described by Thomas Gordon as the “conscious competence learning stage model”. What I plan to do in this article is describe some of the “symptoms” of each part of the cycle, what learners need in this stage and give some practical illustrations.

## Origins

According to the Business Balls website, “The California-based Gordon Training organisation, was founded by Dr Thomas Gordon. He states that their Learning Stages model (called ‘The Four Stages for Learning Any New Skill’) was developed by former GTI employee, Noel Burch over 30 years ago.”

## Stage 1 - Unconscious Incompetence

This stage can be best described as “blissful ignorance”. It’s the stage where learners actually don’t see the need for the particular skill at all. And if they think about it at all, it’s to assume that it’s either way beyond them or too easy to bother with. What’s needed in this part of the cycle in order to move onto the next stage is pain of some sort. Learners need to find themselves in situations where they struggle and realise that they actually do need to learn something. Let’s use the analogy of driving. In this stage, it tends to be assumed that anyone can drive and that it’s really easy to learn. The person may not want to learn until they are faced with a situation where they have to learn how to drive.

## Stage 2 - Conscious Incompetence

This is the most painful stage for learners, particularly adult learners who are used to feeling a certain level of competence in other spheres of their life. It’s a sobering experience to realise that you are not very good at this new skill. It can feel humiliating and vulnerable for the learner. Instructions and information will need to be given, repeated and delivered in several different formats: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic before even the rudiments of the new skill are acquired. It is very tempting at this stage for learners to want to give up. They need encouragement, support and practical examples of people who have successfully mastered the skill. Feedback on performance needs to be given frequently. They may also need some gentle reminders of their initial motivation. To return to the driving example, in this stage, lessons, support, encouragement and practice are crucial for successful negotiation of this stage.

## Stage 3 - Conscious Competence

In this stage of driving, the car has a large L plate and instructions are followed with painful accuracy. Learner drivers in this stage can be seen repeating instructions to themselves, checking manuals. Manuals, tutorials and self-learning resources are a critical support as the learner gradually begins to gain confidence and realise that while the skill feels unnatural and forced, he/she has actually made progress. The skill can be practised but only with a full conscious effort and full attention. Further practice is essential to move onto the next stage. One useful technique for moving onto the next stage is to teach the skill to another.

## Stage 4 - Unconscious Competence

If you have ever driven to work but have absolutely no memory of doing so, you have become an unconsciously competent driver. When people are at this level, the skill looks effortless. The unconsciously competent person can often do other things along with the skill. This can be a dangerous stage for trainers in it’s very easy to forget that what is now effortless for them is still in Stage 1 or 2 for their learners. At this stage, trainers may need to become learners again--perhaps by attending a training course, watching other trainers at work, or going back to acquire a totally new skill.

## Stage 5 - Beyond Unconscious Competence

There is some controversy about a “fifth stage” of competency. I personally like the idea of “reflective competence”. This competence means that not only can the person practise the skill with grace and ease, but he/she can also step outside themselves to see what they have done and identify the steps and their underlying thought processes. They become observers of their own skill.

## Summary

The steps of this cycle are sequential in that each one must be gone through. The skill of the trainer is in making the transition from one stage to the next only as painful as is required! It is also very useful for trainers to regularly put themselves back into a state of conscious incompetence...perhaps not in their training but just to get in touch with the vulnerability of that Stage 2 place.

### About the Author

Provides links to trainers, owners, resources, racing economics, partnerships, calendars and discussion.

Source: <http://www.productsherbal.com>