

The 4 Stages of Learning

Unconscious Competence

Think of driving a car; it comes naturally to you, even though it may not have when you first started learning. This is the stage of the master, when you don't have to think about it.

Conscious Competence

You know how to do something but you have to think about it and each step in the process. Learning can still feel awkward and "clunky" as you are not as polished as you'd like to be.

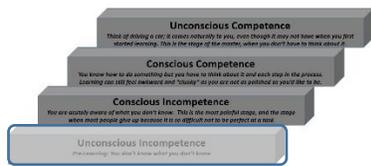
Conscious Incompetence

You are acutely aware of what you don't know. This is the most painful stage, and the stage when most people give up because it is so difficult not to be perfect at a task

Unconscious Incompetence

Pre-Learning: You don't know what you don't know

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Unconscious Incompetence

The first level is called “unconscious incompetence.” In other words, you don’t know what you don’t know. For instance, if you wanted to learn how to drive stick-shift car after driving an automatic for years, then that time just before you made that decision to learn is your stage of unconscious incompetence. You don’t know that you have to

push in the clutch pedal in order to put the car into a certain gear, what happens automatically in a car with an automatic transmission.

Conscious Incompetence

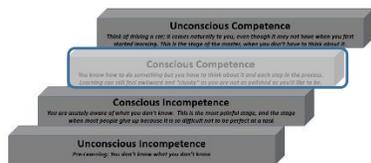
The second stage is called “conscious incompetence.” This is where I take you out to a parking lot and start teaching you how to push in the clutch pedal while letting off of the gas pedal. I tell you what you will feel and hear in the car that will tell you when to move the gear shift to the correct spot. This is the most painful stage in learning and the stage when most people give up. Most people don’t like to feel as though they don’t know something or can’t do something perfectly. You hear people say, “I don’t like looking stupid,” “I hate this!” “I’ll never get the hang of this,” “Why bother?”

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It may help to know that everyone goes through this, no matter how smart you are. Einstein experienced this; so does Bill Gates. You have to stick with the learning process long enough to be able to move through this to the next step. **It will happen!**

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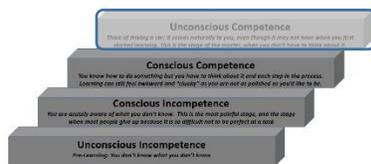


Conscious Competence

Soon enough, you move into the stage called “conscious competence.” Whew! You got it, kind of. You can perform the activity or task you are learning. You may have to think of the steps involved or remind yourself with a mnemonic. You might have to hold out your hand and pretend to shift gears in the air to remember where third

gear is. You might stall the car occasionally now but not like when you were first learning. You are, indeed, competent at the task, but you still have to think about it.

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Unconscious Competence

The Holy Grail of learning is the last stage, called “Unconscious competence.” To continue our driving analogy, this is when you arrive at your destination with no recollection of driving there. You went into “auto pilot” and the slight movements you make on the steering wheel to keep you in your lane going straight just happen

unconsciously. You don’t have to think about what you are doing anymore. It just comes naturally.

This is the stage where innovation starts to occur. You know how to do something well, like “the back of your hand.” So then you start figuring out ways to improve the process, to do things better, to think of methods that no one else had thought of before. You are the inventor, the alchemist, the dreamer. You begin to change the world!