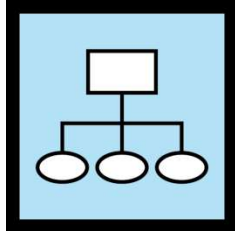


Insights from *The First 20 Hours* by Josh Kaufman

“This book is about my personal quest to test the art and science of rapid skill acquisition— how to learn any new skill as quickly as possible. The purpose of this book is to help you acquire new skills in record time. In my experience, it takes around twenty hours of practice to break through the frustration barrier: to go from knowing absolutely nothing about what you’re trying to do to performing noticeably well.” – Josh Kaufman

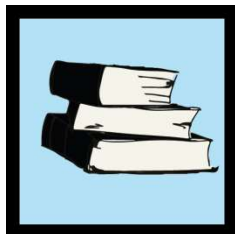
Here is a systemic way to become competent in any skill (mental or physical) as quickly as possible:



Deconstruct a skill into the smallest possible sub-skills

“Deconstructing the skill before you begin also allows you to identify the parts of the skill that aren’t important for beginning practitioners. By eliminating the noncritical sub-skills or techniques early in the process, you’ll be able to invest more of your time and energy mastering the critical sub-skills first.” – Josh Kaufman

One way to deconstruct a skill: imagine the opposite of what you want. Picture a situation where you’ll need to use your desired skill. With that situation in mind, imagine the worst-case scenario. For example, if you wanted to learn to white-water kayak, it would be helpful to imagine going down a river in your kayak and encountering a dangerous white-water rapid. As you hit the rapid, your kayak flips, and you’re underwater, unable to flip the kayak over and about to hit your head on a rock. To prevent this worst-case scenario from unfolding, you’ll need to know the following skills: how to roll a kayak right-side up when underwater, how to navigate a river and spot dangerous rapids, and how to control a kayak to avoid dangerous sections of the river. Each of these skills are ‘sub-skills’ of ‘kayaking.’ Thinking of a disastrous performance with your desired skill allows you to come up with an inventory of important sub-skills to initially focus on. By breaking down your desired skill into a set of sub-skills, acquiring the skill seems less overwhelming.



Learn just enough to practice intelligently and self-correct during practice

“Learning helps you plan, edit, and correct yourself as you practice. That’s why learning is valuable. The trouble comes when we confuse learning with skill acquisition. If you want to acquire a new skill, you must practice it in context. Learning enhances practice, but it doesn’t replace it. If performance matters, learning alone is never enough.” – Josh Kaufman

Spend less time studying how to practice and more time actually practicing. Gather a collection of trusted resources (ex: three or more top-rated books on Amazon) and quickly scan those resources for ways to practice certain sub-skills and to self-correct while you practice. Find a consensus of best practice methods from several resources. The moment you devise a practice plan and a way to self-correct, you should put down the books, turn off the lesson videos, and go practice. ***“Instead of trying to be perfect, focus on practicing as much as you can as quickly as you can, while maintaining ‘good enough’ form.” – Josh Kaufman***



Remove physical, mental, and emotional barriers that get in the way of practice

“There are many things that can get in the way of practice, which makes it much more difficult to acquire any skill.” – Josh Kaufman

Here are three barriers to rapid skill development to consider and eliminate prior to practicing a new skill:

- 1. Limited access:** If it’s too hard to get started, or it takes too long to get started, you’ll find an excuse not to start. If you want to learn to play the guitar, place your guitar in the middle of the living room with a sheet of music next to it. Doing so will make it easy and effortless to pick up the guitar and start practicing.
- 2. Distractions:** Skill development requires your undivided attention while you practice. Practice in areas that you consider boring while you are free from distractions: no television, ringing phones, or incoming e-mails.
- 3. Self-consciousness:** The fear of looking incompetent is the largest barrier to skill development. Adjust external expectations and laugh at yourself for the first 20 hours (without losing enthusiasm for learning the skill).



Practice the most important sub-skills (with feedback), for at least twenty hours

“Once you start, you must keep practicing until you hit the twenty-hour mark. If you get stuck, keep pushing: you can’t stop until you reach your target performance level or invest twenty hours. If you’re not willing to invest at least twenty hours up front, choose another skill to acquire. The reason for this is simple: the early parts of the skill acquisition process usually feel harder than they really are. You’re often confused, and you’ll run into unexpected problems and barriers. Instead of giving up when you experience the slightest difficulty, precommitting to twenty hours makes it easier to persist.” – Josh Kaufman

An easy and effective way to reach 20 hours of practice is to devote 1 month, 40 minutes a day, to practicing your desired skill (one skill at a time). I suggest practicing for 20 minutes after you wake up and 20 minutes before you go to bed. Before each practice session, set a timer for 20 minutes and push yourself to improve (struggle is ok, in fact struggle is essential to learning process). Seek instant feedback while you practice – use coaches, mentors, software programs, and video capture devices when possible. After 20 hours of practice, you’ll be in a better position to decide if you want to continue developing the skill.