

HotIronKnowHow

How to thrive under high pressure

Guide 2: **HotIron**Learning

Swiftly learn any new skill

for personal & professional life

by striking skillfully while the iron's hot



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The HotIronLearning formula is about :

**How to learn-from-scratch
or rapidly improve
any skills you choose
for your personal & working life :**

This Guide is an interwoven collection of inspiring ideas and practical know-how that can prove profoundly helpful whether you're 16 years old or 70, learning alone or in partnership. Its flexible formula is ready-for-use by mentors, teachers, parents, partners, best-mates, boyfriends & girlfriends.

HotIronLearning

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- We lack ‘real-match’ experience with all its inimitable features.
- We fall short of hyper-realistic training and the pressures of the real thing on the day overwhelms us.
- We have too little experience of succeeding and are knocked-out by the competition before we acquire it.

Learning ingredient 4

4A: you need high-quality instant feedback

Arrange the training situation so that you receive immediate, in-the-moment, good-quality feedback in response to everything you try.

Timing is crucial to HotIron-KnowHow. You only learn well, or heal well, if your actions and their outcomes are brought closely together in time. It works best of all if the ‘feedback’ to your actions is almost immediate.

Nobel Prize-winning opinion

In his recent book, *Thinking: Fast & Slow*, that summarises his research findings, the Nobel Laureate Psychologist, Daniel Kahneman, states how “The acquisition of skills requires . . . rapid and unequivocal (good quality) feedback about the correctness of thoughts and actions...”

Kahneman’s book notes that what you don’t want is a long delay between actions and their outcomes, otherwise it makes it very hard to learn.

Some skills-to-be-learned come ready-made with a high level of naturally available immediate feedback

- swimming (because you'll sink if you don't do it right)
- riding a bike : your balance or lack of it tells you lots.
- learning a musical instrument : you can hear what you're doing right and wrong.
- driving a car : movements of pedals and wheels cause instantaneous effects.

In the above skills, it is counter-productive to reduce the available feedback. For instance...

- better than using those swimming-floats and water-wings which distort your relationship with the water, you can safely learn to swim by swimming in the shallow end of the pool, but you challenge yourself not to put your feet on the bottom.
- The would be bike-rider can learn on grass where errors of balance won't skin your knees.
- Immediate feedback can perhaps be achieved by a more advanced student being paired with a weaker student. (Both students will benefit from this interaction.)



Eleanor Roosevelt in 1898: she became a mother of six children (having lost both her own parents before she was 10); was wife of an American president; and was the prime mover in creating the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and sending ships to save German-Jewish children from the Nazis in 1939. And what a lovely sense of humour:

“A woman is like a tea bag –
you never know how strong she is
until she gets in hot water.”

You need to seek out good-quality feedback

Most skills-to-be-learned require you very deliberately to create a rich learning scenario so that you have high-quality immediate feedback and the opportunity for immediate practice till you're reliably competent. Note how this applies to...

- Learning a foreign language: you need to be patiently and expertly corrected by a native speaker otherwise you'll practice incorrectly.
- Partner-dancing : no amount of imaginary dancing will teach you what it's like to transmit or read the intentions of your partner, and to allow both of you to feel well-balanced.
- Learning a martial-art : no amount of shadow boxing or bag-work will teach you how to deal with a real-life opponent who will duck and weave, punch back at you and attack you in ways you least expect.

In such cases, training without a partner, without good feedback, is about as useful as trying to learn to swim without getting in the water, or how to horse-ride without getting on a horse. Whatever you're practising might be interesting and have comic value, but has very little to do with learning the real thing.

Learning a foreign language to fluency in a few months

An accomplished woman professional in her 30s recounted how she struggled un-successfully to acquire even rudimentary French and German in the school classroom for a whole decade. Many years later, it took her just three months to acquire a native-level of spoken and listening fluency in Spanish. She became so good, people even asked her which village she had grown up in. She achieved this standard by immersing herself in a Spanish-speaking community, speaking no English whatsoever, and allowing herself to be benevolently but continuously corrected and tutored as she attempted to communicate in Spanish with those friends around her.

In stark contrast to that ideal situation, it's easy to find oneself in a foreign country where the strangers around you don't bother to correct the barely intelligible nonsense you're speaking, which means you can't possibly improve.

A skilled training partner/opponent provides a factor we can't fake or imagine or substitute : it's their unexpected moves, their sporting attempts to put us off, out-wit us, fool us, out-think us, wrong-foot us, intimidate and muddle us. They throw surprises at us, and we can't do that by ourselves. Learning flexible, helpful responses in the face of such surprise

is a deeply valuable skill in every aspect of life, and this is particularly clear in mastering sports.

Likewise, if it's a team sport we're pursuing, then we need a team of determined and challenging players with whom to practice among.

The dramatic benefits of a really good training-partner might help explain why it is that top tennis players so often have sisters or brothers who have been equally enthusiastic players. Those future-champs had a great deal of early access to good practice-partners:

John McEnroe had very capable sporting older brothers, and at age just 19 won Wimbledon against the Swedish tennis legend Björn Borg.

Judy Murray is Scotland's leading tennis coach and is the mother of Andy Murray, Olympic Gold 2012 and Wimbledon Champion.

The Williams sisters had each other from the outset, and have won every possible tennis accolade a number of times.

Our efforts are well invested in finding or creating those rich training-partnerships with one or more individuals with whom we can hone our skills for dealing with their surprises.

It's noteworthy how the activities in life that automatically come with *'good-quality instant feedback to guide our immediate improvement there & then'*, are some of the most deeply rewarding: singing, swimming, bicycle-riding, kissing, and so much more besides.

4B: Have enough time to put things right

It's not enough to have good quality feedback; you need to have the time and space and encouragement to put right your performance there and then, by exploring what works best. Don't stop the training session 'till you're reliably competent at performing the mini-skill you set out to acquire.

4C: Measure what you treasure

Can you measure or film your performance so as to have indisputable evidence of how you're doing as regards key factors? Be sure to measure the factors that are most relevant to you, rather than being distracted by the factors that are easy to monitor.

4D: Reflect on your thoughts and feelings :

ask yourself what feelings and thought-processes caused you to do what you did. Ask your training-colleagues or coach for their frankest possible feedback.

What we tend to do wrong in training

- We interfere with the naturally-occurring feedback by mistakenly making things easier (using the equivalent of bike-stabilizers or water-wings).
- We pair beginners with beginners so the feedback is poor-quality.
- We give someone feedback minutes, hours, days or weeks later.

- We partake in training scenarios where people get frustrated if we're re-working a manoeuvre time and time again until we get it reliably right, and this atmosphere of 'disapproval' around us means we tend not to practice anything we can't do already.
- We stop the training session before we're reliably competent at the skill, and this is not only demoralizing it also means we've learned to do something poorly.
- We don't bother to reflect upon what happened, or dare ask others for their most honest critique.

Learning ingredient 5

Relax while learning

Learn to relax while training at a skill, because relaxation makes *everything* in life go better

No matter your keenly felt motivation to do your best, it will help you immeasurably when you learn to creatively channel that high-motivation so that it doesn't cause tension, because tension interferes with performance. Which is why ...

- the Olympic athlete is loosely shaking any remaining tension out of their body just a minute before the start of the race in which they intend to run their fastest ever time, while a billion people look on.
- the Cambridge Physicist in 1940 is lying in the dark in a hot bath, so that his relaxed mind is fast and flexible enough to crack the Enigma Code that the Nazi U-boats are using to sink the Allied shipping in the Second World War.



[Franco Origlia/Stringer]/Getty Images News/Getty Images

**To defeat Goliath in the valley of Elah,
David combines relaxation, focus & physical skills.**

Ever noticed what an elegantly relaxed stance is embodied by Michaelangelo's *David*? The intense determination in the facial expression, yet the loose-limbed, confident readiness.

Look at those over-large, capable hands, as if the sculptor wants to emphasise that this individual has developed not just their bodily athleticism, but their 'craftmanship' ... strong, skilled hands with which to take a good hold of the world. *David* doesn't only look beautiful, he can clearly do things beautifully, too.

When faced with a Goliath challenge of your own, be sure your strategy includes some natural methods of relaxation applied before, during and after the event.

Why are the athlete and the code-breaker so intent on relaxing themselves? They both know that relaxing during any activity of mind, emotion or body, will improve performance.

Relaxation is an essential skill worth developing, so here are three fundamental methods for doing so:

1. When training, go through the whole activity in slow-motion, i.e. no faster than one quarter speed, smooth and fluid but extremely slow. *'Slow-motion' is all by itself an excellent ingredient with which to calm and focus your mind-body system, thereby enhancing your ability to learn.*