

# Learning from Experience

*There is no failure – only feedback.* We were not born into the world with the ready-made capacity to succeed 100% the first time we tackle any task. We have to learn and to continue learning. And yet so often we blame ourselves or others for the least imperfections, beating ourselves up instead of learning from the experience. If we are dissatisfied with what we do the first, second, or twentieth time we do it, then great! – it's an opportunity to learn to do it better, using our dissatisfaction as fuel for developing our skills. If you think back to some of the difficult, even painful, experiences in your life, you will probably find they were also the sources of the greatest learning. Here is an excellent way of learning from such difficult experiences....

## **Stage 1 – Looking back at a difficult experience**

1. Think back to a difficult event in your life. As you do, take care to stand outside of it (dissociated) in your mind, looking at it as if it's on a TV or cinema screen.
2. As you watch it unfold from this 'outside' point of view, notice what was happening at the other time, including what other people did that contributed to the situation. Notice how it was impossible for you to control every aspect of what was happening.
3. Notice what you did (your behaviour) at the time. What were you trying to achieve?
4. Come back fully into the present. What could you learn from that incident so that it – and experiences like it – won't happen again in the way it did then?

## **Stage 2 – Making use of the feedback**

1. Thinking of that experience or experiences like it, ask: What would you like to have happened instead? How could you have acted in order to achieve what you wanted?

2. Now run through the experience in your imagination, watching it – as an outside observer – on your mental screen. Watch yourself behaving differently, and watch how the situation resolves itself in a better way. If there is any aspect you are unhappy with, play it through again until it feels right.
3. If you are satisfied with that, imagine stepping *inside* the picture (associated), living it out in the way you would like it to have happened. Be there in your imagination, seeing it through your own eyes, acting how you would like to have acted and getting the result you would have liked.
4. Then blank out your mental screen. Go back to step 3 a number of times, reliving the situation in the way you would have liked it to happen – then blanking it out. (You can speed it up if you want.)

Take what you learned from that past experience to help you in the future. Leave behind any pain associated with it, and move on. You can treat other difficult experiences like this, using them to become more and more successful in the future.

### **Stage 3 – Learning from good experiences**

You can go through a similar process with good experiences.

1. Think of a situation that went well for you.
2. This time, go back in your imagination *inside* the experience (associated), living it as if you were there, feeling again any good feelings accompanying it. Enjoy the memory.
3. Notice what happened, and ask: what exactly did I do that made it such a success?
4. Stepping back outside of the memory, think of other situations like that one. How could you use your successful behaviour in that past situation in other situations in the future? How good would it be to do this consistently?