

EFS SERVANT LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

"Master your thinking or your thinking will master you."

*In this issue we will address how to grow and transform your thinking and old patterns that may hinder your growth and development as a leader. The articles were taken from two books: **Unlearn** by Barry O'Reilly and **Unsafe Thinking** by Jonah Sachs.*

EFS SERVANT LEADERSHIP

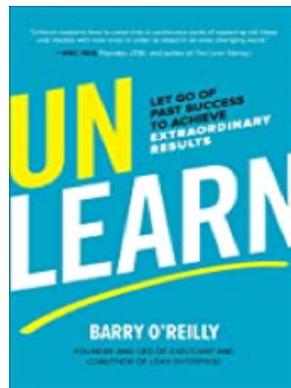
Topic this Issue:

Break through Old Thinking Patterns

NEWSLETTER



WHY UNLEARN?



There comes a time in the life of every individual when doing the things that brought you success in the past no longer delivers the same results. You wake up, walk into your office and sit at your desk just as you always have. But suddenly you're stuck, stagnating, unsatisfied, or struggling with what was once your secret to success.

This is the paradox of success. While thinking and doing certain methods may have brought you success in the past, it's almost certain they won't continue to bring you success in the future. Disruption does not actually apply to organizations. The truth is it applies to *individuals*. Exceptional leaders have discovered it's not how smart they are, how much they know, how long they've been in an industry or what they have learned. It's the ability to recognize when to unlearn and when to let go of past success and their outdated thinking and behaviors, and innovate new mindsets and methods to achieve extraordinary results.

In times past, an individual's knowledge would last a lifetime. Indeed, knowledge would be passed down for many generations and still be highly useful. Yet, as the pace of innovation increases, once-useful knowledge now becomes rapidly obsolete. The answer is not only to learn. We struggle even more to know what to let go of, move away from and *unlearn*.

EFS SERVANT LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

Unlearning is the process of letting go of, moving away from and reframing once-useful mindsets and acquired behaviors that were effective in the past but now limit our success. It's not forgetting or discarding knowledge or experience; it's the conscious act of letting go of outdated information and actively gathering and taking in new information to inform effective decision making and action.

Consider what great leaders and the great companies they lead have in common. They have cultivated a capability within themselves to innovate, adapt, and anticipate the future. They invest in experiences that enable them to grow; they seek situations that are uncomfortable, uncertain and the results unknown. They create mechanisms to experiment quickly and safely gather new information to evolve into something better.

They succeed over the long term by not holding on to what once brought them success. How they succeed isn't magical; it's methodical. It's not down to serendipity or luck — they have intentional systems.

HOW TO UNLEARN



Accordingly, unlearning isn't a one-and-done event — it's a system: a system of letting go and adapting to the situational reality of the present as we look to the future. It's recognizing that whatever it is that we have previously done may no

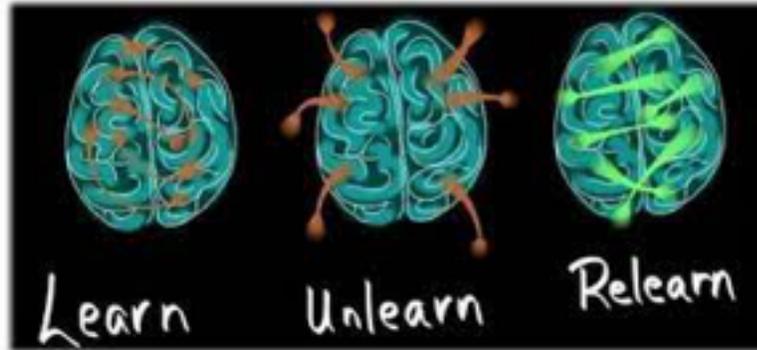
longer be useful at this moment. Your mission is to develop the capability to know when to move away from outdated information, take in new information to inform your thinking, and adapt your behaviors as a result.

The Cycle of Unlearning

The system of unlearning is based on a three-step approach to individual and collective growth called the Cycle of Unlearning. Adopting the Cycle of Unlearning doesn't rely on being smart, or lucky, or desperate or all of the above. It relies only on you — your courage and commitment to use it intentionally in your work and your life to achieve extraordinary results.



EFS SERVANT
LEADERSHIP
NEWSLETTER



Step one: Unlearn. Unlearning does not lead with words; it leads with action. You can't just say, "Yeah, of course I want to unlearn." You must first embrace your purpose by clarifying your why and your what. Why exactly do you want to unlearn? What specifically do you want to unlearn?

Do you believe this is important? Are you open to it? Are you curious? Do you agree there could be a better answer other than your own, an alternative way to achieve better results? When you can answer, "yes" to these questions, then it's time to focus on the specifics of what you want to unlearn.

Step two: Relearn. There are immense challenges to relearning effectively, and we create many of these challenges ourselves. First, you must be willing to adapt and be open to information that goes against your inherent beliefs — that may be at odds with what you have always been told or taught to do. Second, you may need to learn how to learn again. Finally, you must create an environment for relearning to happen in a meaningful, yet often challenging, space outside your comfort zone.

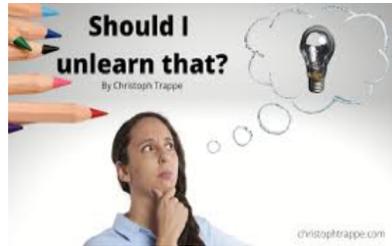
Step three: Breakthrough. Once you learn how to relearn and open yourself up to new information flows, networks and systems from every possible source, you are poised to develop the kind of breakthrough thinking that has the potential to vault you into the lead. Breakthrough is the result of unlearning and then relearning — it's the new information and insights that come out of the first two steps of the Cycle of Unlearning. The information and insights are extremely powerful because they inform and guide your behaviors, perspective and mindset.



**EFS SERVANT
LEADERSHIP
NEWSLETTER**



UNLEARNING THE OBSTABLES TO UNLEARNING



Often the most challenging obstacle to unlearning is **ourselves: our old thought patterns that make us blind to new possibilities and new ways of improving.** Obstacles may be internal, external or contextual, but whatever their origin, they conspire to keep us

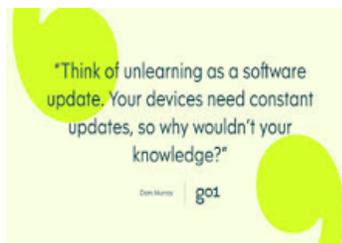
firmly stuck in the status quo.

They include:

- **Our leadership conditioning;**
- **Our knowledge threshold;**
- **Our biases;**
- **Our desire to always be correct;**
- **Our focus on reward and recognition;**
- **Our ability (or inability) to deal with uncertainty and risk;**
- **Our curiosity (or lack thereof);**
- **Our environment.**

The way we view success can be an obstacle in itself because success can limit our willingness and curiosity to unlearn. The more successful people are, the more fearful they become to try untested methods or alternative techniques because they're afraid their stellar record, prestige or personal brand will be destroyed.

UNLEARN



We can unlearn the old patterns and practices that continue to hold us back by addressing a series of specific necessary conditions. Resolving each one of these necessary conditions represents a step through the Cycle of Unlearning

and closer to our final destination: breakthrough.

Necessary condition one: Identify a challenge you wish to address. Ultimately, unlearning depends on you selecting a challenge — an obstacle to remove or opportunity to

**EFS SERVANT
LEADERSHIP
NEWSLETTER**

enhance — that will have a positive effect on your performance. The very first step in unlearning, therefore, is to decide exactly what it is that you will focus your efforts on. Perhaps you've got a long-time product that isn't performing as well as it used to, or your own efforts at personal development aren't bringing the results that you hoped for, or maybe you or your team seems to be stuck in a rut you can't get out of.

Necessary condition two: Define success as though you have dissolved or conquered the challenge. The key to any good experiment is to define success before you start. The same is true of unlearning. But people often struggle to define good aspirations or outcomes. In that case, it's helpful for people to tell stories of what success might look like if they solved the challenge they decided to tackle. What would they be doing? What might be happening to them, the people they work with and their customers? How would it be different from today? Visualize or tell the story of what it would look like six months, a year, or three years after they solved that challenge. What are the behaviors you, your team or your customers would be exhibiting to confirm that you had addressed that challenge and not only solved it but dissolved it forever? What would be faster, cheaper or better quality? Write it down. Doing this will help you start to get a picture of where you want to be, what you may need to get you there and any concerns that might be holding you back. But the most important part of the exercise is to **THINK BIG!** It's your aspiration or outcome to own, so be audacious with the extraordinary results you will achieve.

Necessary condition three: Channel courage over seeking comfort. Seeking comfort over channeling courage often results in taking the easy option of avoiding situations where you feel you're not in control of the outcome. As a result, you're stuck in the status quo and not growing.

Voluntarily moving outside your comfort zone requires courage. It requires a willingness to be vulnerable. In her book *Rising Strong*, Brené Brown says, "If we are brave enough often enough, we will fall; this is the physics of vulnerability. When we commit to showing up and risking falling, we are actually committing to falling. Daring is not saying, 'I'm willing to risk failure.' Daring is saying, 'I know I will eventually fail and I'm still all in.' Fortune may favor the bold, but so does failure."

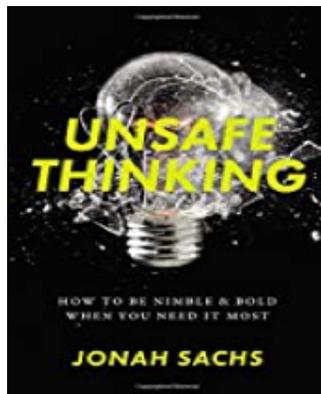


**EFS SERVANT
LEADERSHIP
NEWSLETTER**

Brown’s concept of vulnerability illuminates perfectly what is required to unlearn — being willing to put yourself out there, to really go outside your comfort zone and to be courageous rather than to be comfortable.

Necessary condition four: Commit to, start and scale the cycle of unlearning. The critical next step is to make a very firm commitment to moving forward through the Cycle of Unlearning and then doing just that. But this is not a one-and-done cycle; it is a scalable system that allows you to tackle bigger, more ambitious and more audacious challenges as you iterate more quickly and frequently the Cycle of Unlearning. Each iteration builds upon the previous one as you build your courage, curiosity and capabilities to strive for excellence in whatever it is you wish to achieve.

**FEAR AS FUEL: HOW TO
EMBRACE ANXIETY AND BREAK
THE SAFE THINKING CYCLE**



Mahatma Gandhi, now a global symbol of courage in the face of danger, wrestled mightily with the fear of not fitting in and being judged. Well into adulthood, Gandhi suffered debilitating shyness. He never became entirely comfortable with social interaction, but he came to see his struggles with himself as an important source of his power.

As he grew older, Gandhi spoke of his shyness, which had once brought him tremendous shame, as one of his key assets. To his trait of speaking hesitatingly and slowly, for example, he attributed the fact that he hardly ever regretted a word he had said. That, he reflected, was a key to his leadership.

We all feel anxiety when setting out on a new and uncharted course. How we contend with that anxiety makes all the difference. Trying to stop ourselves from feeling anxiety only makes the cycle more pernicious. Psychologists call the act of suppressing negative emotions “*experiential avoidance*.” People



**EFS SERVANT
LEADERSHIP
NEWSLETTER**

spend enormous amounts of energy trying to master the art. But the effort is worse than useless. Experiential avoidance actually has the effect of exacerbating unwanted emotions.

Rather than trying to avoid or fight our anxiety, those who study its nature say we should learn to become more comfortable with the discomfort of it, which lessens the impulse to react in a fight-or-flight fashion and frees us to be more creative in our responses to challenges. *But how can we build up this tolerance?*

Cognitive psychology has shown that the simple process of becoming aware that we're having an automatic, emotional reaction and coaching ourselves to accept the feelings rather than trying to avoid them can be extraordinarily powerful.

If we can welcome a bit of discomfort with a belief that it is a necessary signal of the potential for growth, we can feel the cortical arousal, give it a moment (or a day) to pass and then retake control of our actions. With a foundation of courage and a mindset that embraces rather than shrinks from anxiety, we can learn to master discomfort and change long-held thinking patterns.

