

What are the obstacles to learning?

Enemies of learning are those human tendencies, personal habits and/or cultural norms that make learning difficult and often prevent people from accomplishing the very things they want most. Here is a partial list:

1. Being unable to admit we don't know (e.g. don't want to look stupid)
2. Having the pretense of knowing--(e.g. I already do that, know that, have heard that)
3. Not granting permission to others to teach you anything (e.g. I'm a professional, I don't need this training)
4. Needing to look good (e.g. low tolerance for mistakes, incompetence)
5. Being blind to your cognitive blindness (don't know we don't know; can't see own biases)
6. Needing too much clarity--show me "HOW"-- (e.g. low tolerance for complexity, uncertainty)
7. Not having time (e.g. impatience; need to see immediate relevance; short-term, detail focus)
8. Make and take attitude (e.g. not willing to dive deeply; theory discounted)
9. Being overly serious and self-important (e.g. I have the answer; I'm the one who really cares; this is so important there is no room for playful inquiry, laughter)
10. Being trivial/cynical (e.g. everything is a joke, unimportant, whatever, it won't matter anyway, this too shall pass.)
11. Confusing obedience with knowing (e.g. wanting approval, tendency to comply without question—"My boss told me to." "It is the policy.")
12. Confusing knowing with learning (e.g. not wanting to inquire into, want to be "right")
13. Confusing learning with gathering information (e.g. credentials vs. wisdom)
14. Excluding emotions from learning (e.g. I hate math. I'm nervous whenever I have to share.)
15. Excluding the body from learning (e.g. I'm hungry; have a headache)
16. Lacking questions about our questions--(e.g. What is the hidden assumption? Why have we always done it this way? What about this really matters?)
17. Taking the obvious for granted (e.g. not questioning what is right in front of us, tradition)
18. Being addicted to novelty--(e.g. unwilling to dwell, rigor)
19. Living in permanent assessment (e.g. assessing everyone and everything all the time--more assessing without action or enough time for that action to yield results)
20. Thinking "I have to do this by myself" (e.g. not knowing when/how to seek assistance; not giving oneself permission to ask for help)
21. Believing in independence (e.g. what I do is separate from and not impacted by others)
22. Judging yourself as you attempt to learn (e.g. self-conscious, inhibited)
23. End-gaming (e.g. jumping to the goal without taking the necessary steps in the process— leads to superficial learning)
24. Being unaware of our own stories (e.g. the things we tell ourselves; our models of reality)
25. Confusing our model of reality with reality
26. Belief that "talent" matters more than motivation/effort/practice (ability based thinking)
27. Denigrating passion
28. Encouraging uniformity (e.g. mechanistic thinking)

(adapted from talk given by Julio Olalla; Newfield Network) Updated: 3/19/2010