

doi: 10.14456/jiskku.2021.18

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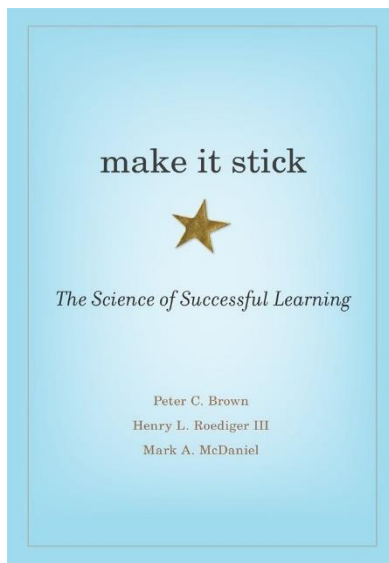
Book Review

Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning

Brown, P., Roediger, H. III, & McDaniel, M., (2014)

ISBN-13: 978-0674729018: \$31.00

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One day after reading a book, I became frustrated because I could not retrieve from my mind what I just entirely read. I only had bits of knowledge from the reading material. I wondered why it was. I wanted to interrupt the cycle of forgetting and to improve my capacity to learn. I desired to reinforce the staying power of the information in my mind. So, I said to myself that before devouring a set of books, a plan for my personal and professional improvement, I must first start with something fundamental, something about learning properly. Then, I searched on Google about my concern. I inputted “best book on learning.” After a split second of waiting, *Make It Stick* was shown at uppermost right part of the search list and I immediately bought and downloaded that in my Kindle.

It actually has good reviews and that motivated me to read the book, with the hope that it could provide me strategies to make what I read stick and last. I can say that it definitely did not fail. *Make It Stick* was written by Henry Roediger III and Mark McDaniel, both cognitive scientists, with the aid in storytelling of Peter Brown. I personally like this book since the knowledge in it aids me to learn well, a prerequisite before venturing to acquiring knowledge and

skills. For me, it was unprecedented since through empirical evidences, they debunk the many notions of so-called “effective learning strategies.”

I learned from my Education subjects in college that when students learn through their preferred learning styles e.g., visual, kinesthetic, auditory, the higher the retention of learning. The book disproves it, however. The authors say that there is no empirical evidence that supports this idea. And they say that the varied the styles used in learning, the better, even if they are not preferred by the learner. Meanwhile, a colleague recommended that in order to understand any book, I should read it many times. I recall that some of my college teachers shared to me the same advice. But the authors, once again, debunk it. They argue that rereading is ineffective and not even equal to learning. They instead recommend to pause from time to time and retrieve from the mind what was read and to reflect how such information can be beneficial.

I gained here that there are three types of retrieval—generation, reflection, and elaboration—which are excellent to make learning stick. (1) Generation is the process of trying to solve a certain problem without being told how to. Later the answer and its steps shall be given, making the learner know where he got things correctly and wrongly. Pre-test and post-test technique is an example of this. (2) Reflection means connecting what has learned to prior experiences and explaining how such learning could be beneficial to the learner and to his environment. (3) Elaboration refers to giving a material a new meaning by explaining it in one’s own words.

In this book, they discuss the three types of practices—spacing, interleaving, variability—which are necessary if one want to learn a skill or knowledge. (1) Spacing means giving spaces when learning. It means not tackling a certain lesson rapidly and one-time big time. For example, one wants to read a book on the introduction to linguistics which is comprised of several topics. He can first study topic 1 on the first day, topic 2 on the second day and so on. Learning is not effective when one hastes to read the entire book in a day only. That’s definitely overwhelming and won’t aid him to learn effectively. (2) Interleaving is mixing up the various components of a certain topic. For example, if one is learning about the simple machines. Studying lever, wheel, axle, and pulley all in a varied manner, one can reinforce learning. (3) Variability is the act of learning a lesson in varied ways. For instance, one is learning to dance *tinikling*, he can read a

book about it, watch a dance video, and physically practice the dance. Variety of learning a lesson strengthens learning.

“Mastery in any field, from cooking to chess to brain surgery, is a gradual accretion of knowledge, conceptual understanding, judgment and skill (page 18)”

An expert was not born as an expert. He was a learner first, a very gritty learner. I never learned a person who exhaustively studied a skill in a day and then became a master immediately. There’s no such thing as that. Aside from it takes time, it should be learned gradually and should be practiced regularly so as not to rust. This reminds me of Duckworth’s *Grit* in which she emphasizes that grit is a tool for success. She defines the virtue as passion and perseverance to do a certain undertaking. That is, grit is also needed in mastery. In order to be a master in any discipline, a person should possess a comprehensive knowledge, understanding and skills. I should remind myself from time to time about this.

“Persistent illusions of knowing lead us to labor at unproductive strategies (page 21).”

I thought that whenever I listen to a teacher’s lecture that I know exactly the lesson. In fact, it is an illusion. Illusions of knowing emerge when one becomes familiar with the lesson. But familiarity is not tantamount to genuine learning. Plus, one strategy I do to learn a certain a topic is to keep rereading a chapter and after which, I would think that I have a complete grasp of the topic. But as what the authors say, rereading is ineffective. It is not a guarantee that I really learn. Hence, it is an illusion and futile act. I surely would do the research-based strategies to learn effectively. Change is coming!

“The active ingredient is simple but nonetheless profound realization that the power to increase your abilities lies largely within your own control (page 183).”

Learning is never extrinsic. It doesn’t occur outside. A psychological principle states that learning occurs within and activated by the learner himself. In schools, there are teachers. But they are just facilitators of learning. They help in carefully designing and managing the curricula and learning ecology so as to make lessons absorbable and expedient for us. The ultimate power of learning lies really in the learner. I did not know that when I was in elementary and high school. And I hope that learners know such and that their teachers are explaining it to them because this would be of great help. I think, through this fact, responsibility in learning will be reinforced and that drop-outs will lessen.

“Remember that difficulties you can overcome with greater cognitive effort will more than repay you in the depth and durability of your learning. (page 160).”

Desirable difficulties pertain to the hardships when one encounters learning, but they are desirable since they do not hinder learning and instead help a person to make learning stick. They fortify the neural connections in our brain. However, I was not a fan of difficulties since I viewed them unpleasant. But, I think that will negatively affect my learning and performance. So, if I really want to change myself for the better, then I should shift my paradigm and instead look at a certain obstacle as a way to learn more and be better. Embracing difficulties is healthy for any individual since it teaches problem-solving, decision-making and makes brain really work. Indeed, the hard makes it great. Simple and easy journey toward learning is just thrust on short-term memory and won't give a transformative experience.

“Not all of all intellectual abilities are hardwired. In fact, when learning is effortful, it changes the brain, making new connections and increasing intellectual ability (page 226).”

I planned to undertake a speedreading course, but I cancelled it after reading this book. I did not pursue it anymore since what matters for me now is to learn and not devour books with superficial understanding. I want to make sure that whenever I read, I learn effectively and that it is ingrained in my long-term memory. This quote reminds me to do the classic hard work way and not to make shortcuts. When I was in high school and college, I favored the easier route. Little did I know that it will reap untoward repercussions. Now I am resolved to devote huge amount of time and effort to learn effectively. Let it be reading or in any course I do, when learning is effortful, the retention is long-lasting. I would stick on that. Had I learned this, I would have performed better in school. But it's not late. I could apply this learning still in many aspects of my life.

Reference

Brown, P., Roediger, H. III, & McDaniel, M., (2014). **Make it stick: The science of successful learning**. The Belknap Press