

## Episode #46: How Can You Apply “Deliberate Practice” to Your Work?

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

In today’s podcast I invite you to apply the concept of “Deliberate Practice” to your work.

I’m your host, coach Percy Cannon.

In our last episode I suggested you consider choosing, as the most important priority for each member of your team, one of the three strategies from the book *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, by Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema.

In the book, the authors stipulate that you cannot be everything to every potential customer. You need to choose a winning business model that will unify the disciplines represented in your team.

1. **The first discipline was Operational Excellence.** The key characteristic of this discipline is to develop efficient internal and external operating procedures.
2. **The second discipline was Product Leaders.** Companies following this discipline show the ability and determination to make products and services that customers clearly perceive as delivering superior benefits.
3. **And the third discipline was Customer Intimacy.** Companies choosing this approach offer a unique range of superior services, such as ones that represent the best total solution for their respective customers.

I emphasized that, regardless of which discipline you chose, it’s crucial to have true customer centricity as one of the core values in your organization. Use it as a cultural checkpoint for the type of employees you want to have on your team.

Let’s now switch to today’s topic: How can you apply “Deliberate Practice” to your work? If you have not heard of Deliberate Practice, I’m going to leverage the definition and examples provided by Geoff Colvin in his book *Talent Is Overrated*.

Deliberate Practice is an activity designed to improve your performance. It produces the best results when you have a teacher or coach who is an expert on the domain you are trying to improve. This teacher or coach usually designs a program, accompanies you throughout the process, and holds you accountable for the goals set for it.

Good teachers and coaches know how to push you in the area in which you are trying to improve. They do so by going just beyond, but not way beyond, your current limits. The author calls it “The Learning Zone,” which is between your comfort zone and panic zone.

In my early corporate years, I had a manager who played the roles of both my teacher and coach. He constantly pushed me outside my comfort zone. On one occasion, he called me to his office the day before he was leaving for a long vacation. He had a huge pile of documents to be reviewed and addressed. By the way, this was before the email days... We went through the whole stack of documents, one by one. They came in all flavors—short and long, internal and

external, from senior and junior people, for immediate response or requiring further work before answering. For each document he gave me instructions on how to reply—and the responses he wanted were primarily high-level. He was very clear that he expected me to take care of all the pending actions during his absence, and if worse came to worse, I could always seek help from his boss.

I felt clearly outside my comfort zone and borderline into my panic zone... I felt very relieved when he came back a few weeks later. Fortunately, I didn't make any major mistakes.

Although I doubt the concept of Deliberate Practice existed back then, my manager sure used it with me. I probably learned more about the business and the organization during his absence than any of my peers. And this and other similar instances for sure accelerated my career growth.

Deliberate Practice is important for all of us because to learn how to be a great performer—or to sustain a great performance—you need to become a professional student. Strive to be among the small number of people who do not stop the Deliberate Practice necessary to be a top performer. Even as you and I age, we have a choice to make on how much we want to invest in your own performance.

If you have people report to you, is there a way to apply Deliberate Practice in your organization? The short answer is a big YES, especially if you make it an intrinsic part of the culture. Here are three ways to do it:

**1. The first one, as you may anticipate, is promoting coaching and mentoring programs.**

Although great performers regularly push themselves to achieve more and grow faster, a coach or mentor can certainly provide the domain expertise and accountability to partner with employees in their development.

- 2. The second one is performance feedback.** While individual employees can certainly monitor their performance and achievements on their own, nothing beats the unbiased feedback of a different pair of eyes.... Don't be stingy with the quality, quantity and timing of feedback to your employees, especially during the still prevalent remote working conditions. Move from one-shot, annual feedback to high-frequency, instant feedback. Make it a habit to allocate a couple of minutes after a meeting is over to let one of your employees know what he or she did right and what could be improved. Go straight to the point. Pinpoint. No need to beat around the bush.

I learned this from one of my early mentors. Back then, evaluating advertising storyboards was a big part of my work as well as my team's. Being clear and concise with our comments to the advertising agency that was presenting the storyboards was important. We established the practice of instant replay right after we had major meetings with the agency. The senior person would give feedback to each team member on what worked well and what didn't. Very powerful...

- 3. And the third one is to develop teams, not just individuals.** Beware that the change you want to instill in your organization starts at the top, with you. Don't just look at individual performance abilities but also at each employee's attitude and capability to perform as team

players. In a previous podcast I mentioned the top three virtues of *The Ideal Team Player*, outlined by best-selling author Patrick Lencioni:

- Be humble. Admit mistakes, ask for help, and praise others.
- Be hungry. Go the extra mile to deliver results above expectations. Demonstrate this passion and personal responsibility not only for individual objectives, but also for the greater good of the team.
- Be people-smart. Show active listening and empathy for other team members. Treat others the way **THEY**, not **YOU**, want to be treated.

Are you ready to embrace Deliberate Practice for yourself and your organization? Geoff Colvin points out that, according to research from various sources, the difference between expert performers and average adults is a life-long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain.

Success is not reserved for a small number of people who were born with the right type of talent. It is available to you, me and anyone who is willing to invest in it.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. In the next one I will commemorate the first-year anniversary of this podcast, summarizing the major topics covered in the last 12 months.

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This is coach Percy Cannon, working to help you ***make the rest of your life...the best of your life®***.

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### Percy's BIO

Are you an executive or manager in a large corporation who wants to accelerate your career growth and promotability? Percy provides corporate executives, managers and leadership teams with customized coaching programs that help them develop the skills and capabilities needed to significantly increase their business results through others and accelerate their career growth.

Percy is an "alumnus" from three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, with whom he spent close to three decades. Since 2011 he has been helping corporate executives, managers and employees ***make the rest of their life...the best of their life®***.

Percy has worked in the United States and across several countries in Latin America as an Executive Coach, Leadership Team Consultant and Keynote Speaker, serving companies such as Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Citibank, Tiffany, DSM, Farmatodo & Avianca.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC", a certified "Go-Giver" speaker &

coach, and a CAPA PRO member, the official consultant and practitioner alliance for several methodologies from best-seller author Patrick Lencioni (e.g., “Organizational Health”, “The Ideal Team Player”, “The 6 Types of Working Genius”, “The Truth About Employee Engagement” and others).

Percy published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*). He launched his first iPhone & iPad application, *LifePlan*, in English & Spanish, in 2016, and his podcast, [\*The Career Accelerator\*](#), in May 2020.

He is a consulting partner at Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida. He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently. Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

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