

## BUILDING YOUR LEARNING TOOLKIT

Think of your learning toolkit as both a concept and an object.

Your conceptual toolkit is filed in your brain. It's the knowledge and skills you automatically apply to do your job. Tools that you've created by practicing them until they've become habits. Another type of toolkit is the one that's tangible. It may include documents that you refer to often such as your phone directory, your calendar, your credit cards, and document templates you use repeatedly. You can expand this toolkit to include all kinds of documents that can serve as tools.

We all learn from many sources: books, audiotapes, videotapes, articles, reports, handouts, and our own written notes from workshops and meetings. In this mountain of information there are gems of learning that we want to remember and use. Most people forget something they've learned within 24 hours unless they take some immediate action to turn what they've learned into something they can use again; i.e. a "tool."

Here are some suggestions for building a toolkit:

1. If a tool is an entire book that you've highlighted, keep it in view and make a note on your "to-do" list to reference it. Very few entire books will earn the "right" to be tools that you use frequently.
2. Anything worthwhile that you read potentially contains bits of information that can become useful tools. When reading business books, journals, and articles:
  - ❑ Choose a hard copy version so that you can write on it;
  - ❑ Scan the chapters to get a feel for the big messages and the various topics;
  - ❑ Read just the parts that you want to read – you don't have to read the entire book;
  - ❑ Highlight as you go and write notes in the margins; and
  - ❑ Write and type up your notes...before you resist...read the next suggestion.
3. Writing is a strategic thinking activity and helps program learning into your brain: good information that you've already invested time and maybe money in trying to learn. Isn't it worth an additional 30 minutes to gain ongoing value from your initial investment?
  - ❑ Write up not only highlights of great books; also write and type highlights from training events, lectures, and even coaching conversations with your manager and mentors.
  - ❑ Keep it simple by writing in phrases and bulleted lists and if it's a tool for your use only, you don't even need to proofread it. Just be sure to capture the "what" and the "how to apply it" information, give it a name that you will remember, and file it where you will be reminded to use it.

4. Organize your documents well so that you can find them.
  - ❑ Name (and rename documents you get from others) with simple titles such as “Toolkit Building Tips” vs. June 2011 Workshop Handout;
  - ❑ Use folders and sub-folders to keep files organized. For example, your desktop folder might be called “My Development Plan” and a subfolder labeled “Leadership Tools” might include tools named “Delegating” and “Situational Leadership”;
  - ❑ Keep all files (not just your toolkit) clutter free. Cluttered files = cluttered thinking and wasted time. When people send you articles and other documents, keep only what you know you will need or want (and rename it to make it easy for you to locate);
  - ❑ When you get an updated version of a document, delete previous versions to avoid confusion; and
  - ❑ Make it a weekly habit to clean up your folders and get rid of stuff.
5. Create a learning journal. When writing in your journal, label each page with the name of your tool and use phrases and bullet points to include just enough information to remind you of how to apply the learning. When starting a learning journal, seek advice from colleagues who use this technique.
6. Keep these tips as a tool and use it as a reference guide for not only building your toolkit but also as a template for writing a tool that you plan to share with others.
7. Start to organize your toolkit within the next 24 hours.

Share this approach with one other person within the next week. Teaching really helps to make learning “stick.”