

By Sheresa Holmes

**R**esearch shows that within a month of attending a training exercise, individuals forget on average 90 per cent of what they learned!

Imagine if you were shown once as a child how to brush your teeth, but never given the tools (toothbrush, paste, sink, water) to practice brushing them daily; or if you were taught to tie your shoelaces but never switched from Velcro to laced shoes. Recalling the steps on how to brush your teeth or tie your laces after one demonstration, and then having to do the actions yourself, would not be as second nature to you as they are now. This is because education is not learning. Yet, if you are a manager who has sent any team member on a training course, you may have expected a significant improvement in performance from one four-hour event.

#### Information overload

The reality is that we receive too much information every day, making it practically impossible to remember everything we are exposed to. In fact, the beautiful thing about the human brain is that it filters information based on what we need most in our daily functioning. However, the reason why most people cannot retain information is ironically, that they have not trained themselves to do so.

When we hear of the forgetting curve being the decline of memory retention over time, we think of phrases such as 'use it or lose it'. However, the concept also highlights how easily we as humans tend to revert to old habits – like trying to recall information only when critical. Yet, if training efforts are to drive behavioural change, the information must be reinforced regularly.

Here is one broad way you can actively and intentionally work on your memory and learning following training sessions, with specific examples for clarity:

We learn based on our perceptions and needs at the time information is received. Imagine that Sean is in a science class and does not understand an important equation for weeks, while Michelle grasps the concept in the first class. Sean's knowledge and ability to reason through the equation must reach a certain threshold before understanding is achieved.

#### Scheduled reinforcements/reminders

To the learners reading this article, you can schedule times to:

- Recall and apply the information perhaps every day for a set period, which could be as short or long as you need depending on the subject. I have personally reviewed my strengths report from an assessment once a week for six months. While this may be particularly challenging for most people as other demands often seem more pressing; it is important to ensure that time invested into learning opportunities is not in vain.

- Highlight things you can do that will further your understanding in the area of training. This could be reviewing your company's policy, listening to podcasts that provide further insight, or simply creating a checklist. The purpose is to recall the same information in different ways – infographics, videos, books, audios that may highlight smaller segments of the information.

To the managers and supervisors, it is important for you to take note of the specific things each trainee has learned from a session;



Organisations must consciously develop learning habits in their team and creating environments that support employee learning. (Internet image)

# Combating the forgetting curve when training

and focus on those few things that resonate with them. Let's use a scenario.

Your company has invested in occupational safety and health training for ten individuals. Following the whole-day session, you can call a short meeting to discuss what was learned, remembering that each employee's takeaway will likely be different.

Shanika sits on your health and safety committee and learns that medication should not be included in your company's first aid kit based on local labour legislation. It is your responsibility to then follow up and ensure that this is done. This means scheduling opportunities to check in on how trainees have been applying their takeaways.

By the way, if you did not know that it is against the **Safety and Health Act**, please follow suit and remove all medication from your kits!

To conclude, I will ask the question – how well do we train ourselves and our teams to recall and apply information from the training sessions they attended?

Since reinforcement builds retention and enables change; you can imagine that



Sheresa Holmes (FP)

organisations with the most successful training initiatives, have learned to slow or lessen their forgetting curve. This requires consciously developing learning habits in their team and creating environments that support employee learning.

While I know it sounds like a lot, if you are a manager, the reality is that coaching is what you signed up for, as most learning (70 per cent) occurs on the job. Please do not leave learning and behavioural change solely up to your employees.

As opposed to focusing on the information to be learned, focus on the learning environment in which the information must be applied – your organisation. What support is available to trainees; and how do you provide more of it? What barriers are there for employees to make behavioural changes? How can you measure results to ensure you bring about the desired change(s)?

Sheresa Holmes is training officer of the Barbados Employers' Confederation.