

How to follow through on learning a new skill in the new year

January 22 2016, by Thea Singer



Credit: Graphic by YoungHee Jang/Northeastern University

"Mindfulness, motivation, mindset." Susan Ambrose, senior vice provost for undergraduate education and experiential learning, uses those words to describe the three "cognitive pillars" of co-op.

She used them again when we asked her how members of the Northeastern community could follow through on one of their top New Year's resolutions as revealed in our news@Northeastern poll: "to learn something exciting, like a new language or how to play an instrument."

Here are five tips from Ambrose on how to make that declaration stick.

- Understand what kind of learner you are. Consider your motivation—that is, why you want to learn this skill and what you need to be able to do so. Ambrose for example, wanted to learn how to play the piano because, she says, "I love music and thought it would be soothing to be able to sit down and play a piece." That meant the basics—scales, chords—mattered, but so did being able to play a song, the "soothing" part. Hence the theme from the film *Free Willy* became both her motivator and her reward: It put slogging through do-re-mi in perspective and showed her "I can do this!"
- Approach the experience as an exploration, not a risk. This is where mindfulness and mindset come in. How you perceive a new endeavor can make a big difference in taking the leap. "You want to nurture a growth mindset, not a fixed one," says Ambrose. That means shifting from seeing something new as frightening to seeing it as exciting and interesting—as opening up a new world. "Think of it as moving beyond your current way of thinking, of expanding your vision," she says.
- Start small: Concentrate on the components first, then play the game, sing the song, join the (Spanish? Italian?) conversation. One of Ambrose's goals is for every Northeastern student to have a global experience. But how do you broach the subject with students who've never traveled outside the U.S.? One step at a time. "We ask them to try two weeks abroad, say, participating with Engineers Without Borders building a new drinking water system in Uganda," she says. "They come back thinking, 'This was really cool!' So we suggest a six-week Dialogue

of Civilizations program, overseen by a Northeastern faculty member. After that great experience in, for example, China, we say, 'What about a four-month study abroad program?'"

Gaining mastery of a new skill follows the same trajectory. Say you want to learn to [play](#) tennis. You first learn the components: how to serve, volley, lob, move around the court, relate to the net. You practice, practice, practice. Then you integrate the components and take on a game. "Think about how you learned to drive a car," says Ambrose. First you cautiously manipulate the gas pedal, the brake, the right and left signals until finally you're breezing down the highway. New components continue to crop up—Do I back in, or go front end first, to parallel park?—and then you integrate them, too, into the whole. "You can transfer this trajectory to learning a language, playing the piano, scuba diving—anything," she says.

- Don't go it alone. Feedback and coaching are crucial to gaining mastery, says Ambrose. "You only learn what you practice with good feedback, because otherwise you can practice the wrong way and end up with bad habits."
- Remember that learning takes time. You often have to go backward to go forward. Be patient and generous with yourself.

Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: How to follow through on learning a new skill in the new year (2016, January 22) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-01-skill-year.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.