



Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



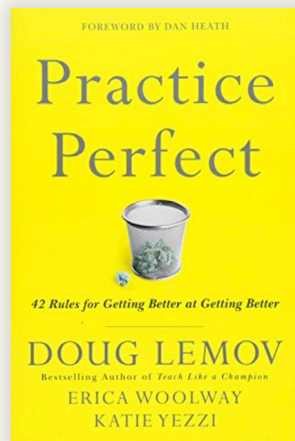
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Practice Perfect

42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better

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In a world where we tend to focus heavily on wins and losses, **Practice Perfect** claims that if we want to experience greatness, we need to spend more time obsessing over practice. The book, written by education experts Doug Lemov, Erica Woolway, and Katie Yezzi, provides 42 applicable rules on how we can “get better at getting better.” Split into six sections – rethinking practice, how to practice, using modeling, feedback, creating the culture of practice, and making new skills stick – the authors provide context, behavior, and examples of how to perfect practice.

Key Quote

“We become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions.” Aristotle (as quoted on p. 204).

Key Concepts:

What follows is a selection from the 42 rules **Practice Perfect** suggests for transformation – of a classroom, a school, an organization, a team, an individual – by radically improving skills through focused, intense **practice**. The authors suggest choosing just a few rules to start and then growing your repertoire gradually.

Rule 1: Encode Success

“A critical goal of practice, then, should be ensuring that participants encode success – that they practice getting it right – whatever ‘it’ might be” (p. 25). Practice makes perfect, so to “encode success,” practice with intention.

“While failure may build character and tenacity, it’s not as good at building skills” (p. 26).

Rule 2: Practice the 20

The 80/20 rule is a pattern where 80% (of the outcome) comes from only 20% of our effort. If the goal is to be great, focusing on the most important aspects – the 20% – allows individuals to become better.

For example, Xavi Hernandez, a top soccer midfielder, practices a ball passing drill, known as rondo, every day with his teammates. While it is a simple drill, they believe “the value of the drill doesn’t decrease as they get better at it; it increases” (p. 30).

Rule 4: Unlock Creativity...with Repetition

Your mind is in its most creative state when it has the processing capacity to think about the bigger picture. Professional athletes and performers describe how the game “slows down” for them, which allows them to see the opportunity in the game or performance.

Reflect on when you have had your most creative thoughts. If it’s when you’re doing a task that you’ve done a thousand times and can complete automatically (such as brushing your teeth, driving in your car, or jogging), it is likely because you have been able to automate certain skills.

“Creativity, it turns out, is often practice in disguise, and to get more of it, it often helps to automate other things. If you want to unlock creativity at certain critical moments, you might identify skills required at those moments and automate them in order to free up more processing capacity for creative thinking” (p. 37).

Rule 10: Isolate the Skill

Since not all drills isolate skills, begin by teaching and practicing the simplest form.

Consider aspiring surgeons. Suturing is a complex skill often used in surgery. “The novice needs to know how to hold the surgical instrument, how to make the knots, how to close wounds, how to suture through scar tissue, how to select suture materials, and how to suture when drains and tubes are needed” (p. 62).

Before operating on patients, the novice will continue to isolate the skill by practicing on oranges, suturing tubes, and cadavers.

Rule 11: Name It

Identifying and naming a skill creates a common language, eliminates wasted time, and can help clarify the framework.

A memorable and logical name should amplify the meaning to bring the skill to life. The name you give a skill should not be too long, too vague, or composed of insider jargon. For example, Lemov used the term “100%” during teacher training to cue teachers to keep all of the students in a classroom engaged.



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Rule 14: Make Each Minute Matter

When practicing a skill, there is often wasted time, which erodes the effect of practice. There are multiple areas where there can be wasted time, such as time spent milling around, waiting time, long directions, not being attentive, too much discussion, and overlooking the small moments.

By identifying and remedying this by breaking into small groups or naming a drill, for example, each minute of practice could be more effective.

“The difference between a great practice session and a good one – and often the difference between a great organization and a good one – is established in systems like these that allow your productive work to be obsessively efficient. Without these systems, practice sessions are characterized by one thing above all others: the wasting of time” (p. 78).

Rule 15: Model and Describe

Modeling and describing help blend together skills and understand nuances. When the skills of modeling and describing are in balance, it provides context for the critical decision-making parameters.

For example, if an employee is starting a new challenge, begin by breaking down the task with an outline. Next, provide simple language for each step and identify where the outline has the opportunity for improvisation and which sections are inflexible. Finally, model the situation with another colleague and record the skill. This allows the learner to use the description and the model to replicate it.



Rule 16: Call Your Shots

Making your intentions transparent to the learner allows the learner to be prepared to look for the nuances.

For example, if a junior employee is shadowing a sales meeting, the learner may mistake the silence as uncomfortable and may miss that it led to a better-negotiated contract.

“The real danger in using modeling without calling your shots is that it could start the cycle of practice off incorrectly, with the learner practicing the wrong thing – something peripheral or even detrimental to success” (p. 90).

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Rule 23: Practice Using Feedback

People practice taking feedback by signaling, but often arrive at an “OK plateau,” a point at which they stop improving at something despite the fact that they continue to do it regularly” (p. 110).

To force yourself out of autopilot, intentionally practice using feedback. It leads to an increase in consciousness and steepens the improvement curve.

When delivering consistent feedback, create an expectation of asking staff members how many times they tried it or how it worked when they tried it – rather than what they thought of it. This creates accountability to use the feedback, not just accept it.



Rule 25: Shorten the Feedback Loop

The speed of feedback is critically important because as time passes, the learner's mind and body forget the situation. And as a coach or learner, "plan for feedback to be a regular part of practice" (p. 118).

Rule 27: Limit Yourself

When individuals receive multiple pieces of feedback at once, their attention becomes fractured, the feedback is diluted, and their performance decreases.

Although you may see multiple areas of improvement, focus on fewer things.

Rule 31: Normalize Error

You can create a culture that normalizes error by challenging and allowing individuals to make mistakes. Then, respond to "the errors in a way that supports growth and improvement. You do this not by minimizing or ignoring mistakes, but by supporting people in fixing errors before they become too ingrained" (p. 145).

In the book, *Moonwalking with Einstein*, the author Joshua Foer set out to improve his memory and researched the records of the United States Memory Championship. The data revealed that when individuals hit an "OK plateau," the key is to learn from other experts and practice failing.

"Practice doesn't happen in a vacuum." The authors believe that "great practice, then, is not merely a triumph of design and engineering, but a triumph of culture" (p. 139).

Rule 32: Break Down the Barriers to Practice

Identifying, naming, and anticipating barriers to practice allows you to help overcome them.


If an individual is resistant to practicing in front of an audience, practice privately in a one-on-one session. If they don't find it very realistic, allow the freedom to make it more realistic.

In a 2012 article in the *New Yorker*, musical great Itzhak Perlman said "practicing in front of others gives you an 'extra ear.' We mustn't be afraid of the critical lens brought by extra pairs of eyes and ears as we work to improve" (p. 149).

Rule 37: Praise the Work

"Praise the actions that you want to see from your players, your children, or your employees, and these actions will multiply" (p. 170).

Stanford social psychologist Carol Dweck studied the impact of praise and achievement. Her work found that students may underperform when they're praised on traits (like "I'm great at math") because it leads them to believe that their achievements are natural and not within their control. Instead, praise the behavior that influences the outcome.



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Rule 38: Look for the Right Things

When an individual is performing, watch the actual performance and provide feedback on the discrete skills.

Since managers can't be everywhere, have the individual invest in their own performance by using video to record the task, then ask them to provide a critique. It helps with accountability and encourages dialogue.

Rule 39: Coach During the Game (Don't Teach)

Teaching during a game or performance confuses individuals. During a game, coaching should reinforce with reminders the skills that were already taught in practice.

Rule 42: Measure Success

Coaches may review a game and have an idea of how it went, but it's even more important to measure the impact of practice.

Leaders or coaches should "look at games (or lessons, surgeries, or sales pitches) as a series of data points. Instead of subjectively evaluating how your team played, look for specific data that reflect the skills you have practiced" (p. 189).

Measuring practice will help refine and ensure that you're practicing the correct skills.

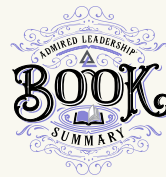
Conclusion

With forty-two rules, Practice Perfect provides effective ways to focus on practice. The actions taken can improve results in your organization and family. By committing to intentional practice, you will "get better at getting better."

Lemov, D., Woolway, E. and Yezzi, K. (2012). **Practice Perfect: 42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better.** San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



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