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# Shifting Into Gear

## BEST PRACTICES

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Definitions of “learning” can vary considerably depending on who you ask. For me, I’ve always related it back to my days in college - where my whole existence was to read, memorize, and regurgitate information out of necessity. As I’ve matured, however, so has my understanding of learning.

Recently, I took on the pursuit of learning to drive a manual transmission. I spent my evenings reading countless articles on the topic and mentally walking through the steps - from the turn of the key to that initial shift into gear.

Once I felt comfortable, I began applying that learning to a driving simulator (one of my favorite types of video game). Having the ability to take a car out on the track, or to the California coast, allowed me to practice in a controlled environment and experiment with various situations. Many simulated cars were wrecked, and their transmissions blown.

The day finally came to put my virtual learning to the test. I climbed into the front seat of my friend’s car, engaged the clutch, turned the key, and prepared to back out of the

parking spot. For those who have never driven a manual vehicle, it requires a certain finesse between clutch and gas, do it wrong and you and your passengers are sent whipping back and forth wildly. To put it simply... I did not have such finesse. While it took me much longer than anticipated to make it down the block, learning took place during every stall and every jerk.

What I’ve come to realize is that with each new client I meet and project I manage, these same steps occur. It’s my job to learn about and delve into the business problems our customers face - working alongside them towards a solution.

Clientek’s approach to project management makes this easy. No matter the engagement, the first stage of any project is to conduct what we call an inception sprint. During this phase I take the time to meet with the customer, discuss their business problem(s), walk through their current state, and read any available documentation. This process allows me to fully understand how they are currently doing things and highlights where areas for improvement may be.

Following inception, I then work with my team to put together a proof of concept. Similar to honing my skills on the driving simulator, I take what I've learned about the business and create something that showcases our intended approach to accomplishing the end goal. While these POC's don't convey the entire solution, they are useful in understanding where stalls and jerkiness may take place.

The final phase of every project is implementation - where I jump into the driver's seat and engage the clutch. Everything I've learned to this point is primed and ready to go. Now, just because I have a solid understanding of how to drive a stick-shift doesn't mean there is nothing left to learn. As the project progresses, it's essential that I continue to adjust the solution in the form of the user stories for our teams execute against. This flexibility is what delivers a smooth and comfortable ride.

Putting focus on learning-as-you-go is what gives me the ability to change and adapt while navigating bumps in the road. Much like how I learned to feather the gas during a downshift to maintain momentum in a turn, constant adaptation is pivotal to making strides towards delivering the best solution.

It is through continual learning that I've become successful in my role here at Clientek. Much like my ability to drive a manual transmission, delivering the best solutions to our clients requires a constant state of learning. Whether I'm delivering on projects or shifting gears, learning is what keeps me moving forward.

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