

With the rare exception, as professionals we are expected to perform at a high level in the workplace. Careers, salaries, and promotions are largely based on our performance and can determine the direction that our lives take. Atul Gawande speaks at length on the expectations for performance placed on those in the medical field, but in particular surgeons. Gawande stresses that in order to meet and exceed expectations in the medical field, the professional must constantly be open and motivated to learn. This is interesting considering the cost of the risk could mean lives, if the professional chooses to learn or not. Gawande states, “Our decisions and omissions are therefore moral in nature. We also face daunting expectations...The steps are often uncertain. The knowledge to be mastered is both vast and incomplete” (4). Professionals are expected to perform at high levels, and in order to do this we must continually educate ourselves. Granted the risk and result doesn’t affect others actual lives, but it could have an effect on others and our own well being and way of living.

The motivation and expectation to continually learn in any work environment is imperative to successful and productive performance. However, there is a distinct difference between training and learning, and Gawande’s detailed experiences reflect the learning that occurred after his period of training or schooling. The public believe that all professionals come out of schooling ready to succeed, and perfection is an expectation. Gawande explains, “We want perfection without practice. Yet everyone is harmed if no one is trained for the future”. Training usually occurs before individual learning, and is guided and controlled by others. The most influential learning occurs when an individual is forced to persevere and is motivated to use the knowledge they obtained during their training to improve their well-being and perform in the workplace. Simply put, training is the schooling we participate in to gain a basic skill set; learning occurs when we are asked to use those skills to solve a problem and perform. Gawande reiterates that schooling or training can only prepare a surgeon for what is known, but due to the unknown and unpredictableness of their job, surgeons are forced to learn in the workplace or lives are at risk. This directly supports the argument that a majority of learning happens outside of the school atmosphere in a semi-uncontrolled environment.

In a majority of work environments mistakes are inevitable, but with mistakes come the best opportunities to learn. Not all performance in the workplace can be successful, but Gawande states that these complex, unique, and new learning opportunities are what make professionals better employees and better human beings. Gawande believes that doctors should make the most of medical mistakes, and that the uncertainty causes “anxiety and exhilaration to make us get better”. A profession that is relatable to some extent is teaching. Schooling provides teachers with the knowledge and basic skill set to manage a classroom and teach certain subjects; however, every student, like every medical case, is different. Therefore, the teaching needs to be modified and the teacher needs to learn on their own how to guide the student and help them grow. Similar to the medical field, teachers are now being evaluated on performance. This makes some educators nervous. Gawande mimics some of their fears explaining, “the hardest part of being a doctor, I have found, is to know what you have power over and what you don’t...we have at our disposal today the remarkable abilities of modern medicine. Learning to use them is difficult enough. But understanding their limits is the most difficult task of all” (154-

157). There are many situations in a student's life that a teacher cannot control, and understanding the limits of a teacher's training and abilities is very hard; however, similar to doctors, these factors are rarely taken into consideration when evaluating performance. To varying degrees, teachers and doctors hold lives in their hands, and high expectations on their performance and success are held by all affected.