

# **THE CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE LADDER**

*Understanding the learning journey*

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**THE CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE LADDER**  
***UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING JOURNEY***  
**CONTENTS**

1	Intro to Understanding the Competence Ladder
3	Unconscious Incompetence
7	Conscious Incompetence
11	Conscious Competence
15	Unconscious Competence
18	Conclusion



# INTRO TO UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETENCE LADDER

This workbook is about understanding how we learn, as much as what we learn. And it's about how we apply that knowledge to our business. It's about understanding the phases of learning and how that affects our business, both short and long term.

Plainly, this is about business, the business of the mind, and the process of thought and learning. One of the aspects of our business that impacts that business daily is so simple you may not even give it much thought, ever.

How do you approach your business when you wake up every day? Some days are better than others, right? But you would admit that how you feel about it that morning affects your performance that day, wouldn't you? It's so simple yet impacting your very most basic performance from the moment you begin to the moment you call it quits for the day.

It's how you think about your business on that given day.

This doesn't mean that you have to wake up bright and shiny and bushy-tailed every day because that's unrealistic and fanciful; nobody wakes up like that all the time. Sometimes you just don't feel good, don't want to do it, or wish you were somewhere else. That's perfectly normal, and it's a part of being who you are. But you do have the power to control that or reign it in, or even just to acknowledge it's there and do the best you can.

This workbook is about understanding how impacting your frame and state of mind affects your business and its growth, performance, and longevity. And if you know or grasp these basic stages of development and learning, you are arming yourself with a broader perspective and a more significant base of understanding where you are at in your journey. And make no mistake, that's exactly and precisely what you are on, a journey that you began from the moment you invested in your business on day one to the

day present. And it will continue for as long as you have your business. You will continue on that journey. Because if you understand at least roughly where you are in your journey, you'll have a greater appreciation for where you were, where you might be headed next, and how that affects your performance. It'll help point you in the right direction to enhance that performance better and achieve the next level of success. It'll help you look for solutions to problems because you know those solutions are there, somewhere, if they aren't already in your grasp. And that helps combat depression, discouragement, and the dispiritedness that makes you want just to give up and quit.

But you aren't going to quit. Because you have this workbook to help keep you in the right frame of mind.

# 1 | UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE

The dictionary definition of incompetence is “*the inability to do something successfully or efficiently.*” And if we add unconscious to that, which is a state of unawareness, we understand the meaning of this stage. It's the starting stage, the stage at which we all begin in our journey of being successful independent business owners.

We are unaware that we have the inability to do something successfully or efficiently. We are unaware that there are skills we require or need to succeed, but we do not yet possess. And in this state, most often, our confidence exceeds our demonstrable skillset. It's most often described or likened to existing in a childlike state. It is blissful ignorance. It is abundantly important to remember that doesn't mean stupid; that's not what ignorance means. It simply means existing without knowledge. Simply put, we don't know a thing. Children certainly aren't stupid; indeed, they can be curious, inquisitive, bright, clever, and quick to grasp things. But they are entirely unaware of the true state of the world around them. And in this state, they are full of energy, excitement, and filled with wonder about new things. This is very much how we might describe ourselves when we take our first steps in becoming independent, self-employed business owners. We are full of boundless wonder and filled with hope in our new endeavor. We dream dreams of success and great things! There's certainly nothing wrong with this, and indeed in further states, as we discuss them, we'll find it crucial to remember that reservoir of wonder, energy, hope, and dreams. We'll find it very useful. And it will be a thing we want to tap into.

So, there is definitely a valuable characteristic of being in this childlike state that we naturally acquire, and we'll want to hold on to it. In truth, as we go along, we'll want to mold it, control it and harness its wealth of power we can use to fuel successes down the

line. But the other aspect we are concerned with here as it pertains to existing in a childlike state is innocence. Children are innocent, and that is as we are when we begin our journey. But one of the tragedies of this state of innocence is that children need to be protected from the world around them because there are things that can hurt them, and we deem it wise to protect them as long as we can until they can be properly taught what they don't know. And so do we need this same wisdom, but we don't always have someone protecting us as we go about gleefully embracing our new career or business.

Consider, all of us, every single one of us has or will exist in this state when we seek to begin our journey as small business owners. We'll decide for ourselves one day that we want to be our own practicing lawyer, or we want to open our own market or our own interior design business. Whatever it is, whatever dream we have, we will one day take that step of making it a reality.

And so, we do, we open our business, and jump into it like innocent children, that is, innocent of the world of things around us that pertain to successfully driving that business and innocent of the things we don't know about it.

Ok, so we've opened our small business, and we're full of dreams and excitement about how successful we're going to be. And we are brimming with confidence. We're supremely confident we're going to make our big splash in the world of small business, and we aren't even going to know what to do with all the money we make, with all the happy customers we have and all the accolades that come with our success.

We're also completely and totally unaware of the pitfalls and challenges that await us, like unseen obstacles that threaten all those dreams and successes.

We're also completely and totally unaware of the skills we need or the knowledge we need to possess and exercise to overcome those obstacles and challenges.



Now, the truth is we could exist in this particular state for some while. We may indeed see some measures of success, we may even receive a few accolades, and we may feel like we are well on our way down that road of small business wealth and abundance. And that state could and will persist until we meet those obstacles requiring skill sets we don't have. There's no determined time to how long we dwell in this state. But long or short, it is a temporary one because we will inevitably grow past it or abandon our quest as fruitlessly hopeless and fail.

The time will come when everything stops.

You run into some problem you don't know how to solve, and it is discouraging you try as you might; you just can't seem to get things going again the right way. Maybe the customers stop coming in, and you don't know why. Perhaps you aren't getting the traffic you need to your website. Maybe customers are in some way left unsatisfied, and you haven't the faintest clue as to why that is. Whatever it is, it stops everything, the money, the customers, the rave reviews, and it demoralizes you. Then disappointment and despair start creeping in because you simply can't figure it out; you can't overcome this obstacle! And it seems like all is lost.

You'll start a frenzy of looking and searching for clues, for solutions, for anything that might help divine what's going on and how you might overcome this obstacle.

There's also something else you'll start doing.

You'll start wondering what it is you don't actually know. And that is key, it is crucial, and that itself will bring you to the next step in your journey because you'll begin to understand that you can, in fact, overcome this obstacle. After all, you'll understand the solution does exist, and it is out there, the skills are out there, you just don't know what they are, you just don't possess them or know where to find them.

But once you've learned that or accepted it, you'll be ready to find those skills, acquire them, and implement them to overcome that obstacle and get your business moving again!

So, there is hope, and this isn't the end by any stretch of the imagination.

It's only the beginning.

1 In your own experience, what was the first obstacle you encountered that led you to the understanding of being in this state?

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2 When did you begin to understand that this wasn't the end but only the beginning of your journey? When did you realize you COULD overcome this obstacle?

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3. How did you feel once you overcame that obstacle and advanced into the next step?

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## 2 | CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE

Now that you've determined that there are obstacles that require skills you didn't have, you've awakened into the next step, the next stage of your journey. This state is Conscious Incompetence. It's the state of being aware that you don't possess the skills you need. But it's also the beginning of greater knowledge. It's being aware that you were in a state of ignorance, but you aren't anymore.

There's a far greater scope, greater breadth, and depth to the world around you as that pertains to your business. There are keys to exploring that; you just don't have them yet, or you don't quite know how to implement them well.

This is where that youthful energy kicks in and makes a difference, just as we said it would. That energy helps drive you to acquire those skills, search them out, obtain them, and practice them. Naturally, along the way, you'll encounter other obstacles, greater or smaller. Still, you aren't going to be as discouraged because you know they can be overcome, and indeed you'll be eager to overcome them because you know you have the ability to do so out there. You just haven't quite grasped it adequately yet. But you will. And you know you will. In a way, you might view it as a necessary but sometimes unhappy diversion from the larger goal of your business. That's natural, but it also hearkens you back to the wisdom of why you're doing what you're doing. That will help you overcome those obstacles that keep the business from flowing and your business from growing.

Maybe your customers were in some fashion less than happy, and you discovered maybe in some fashion you or your business didn't seem warm or approachable.

So, it's an obstacle, but it requires a skill you didn't possess but can, and so you do, and you start working on it. You discover it has

something to do with your branding process or marketing, and now you are actively practicing that skill.

Maybe it had something to do with your web traffic, and so you're working on your website. You're studying analytics, and you're looking at your page as a customer sees it, and you're discovering all sorts of new things.

The point is that there are a dozen different skills you're learning and actively applying. As you go along, you see that you are implementing that solution to overcoming that obstacle as you apply them!

It can be frustrating; growth and learning always are, but you know it's also rewarding too.

It requires patience, which is a skill all its own. But you are moving forward, and that is distinctly important because you are maintaining momentum. And where there is momentum, there is life, and life, growth.

Now at this point, all of this may just seem like a bunch of fantastical talk that doesn't really apply to your business because you're a practical and serious thinker who's busy with your business.

But you'd be wrong.

This is about a distinct and actual mindset. This is about having your head in the game and having your head in the right space. You know as well as anyone that you cannot succeed if you do not have the mind to do it. You can't solve problems unless you are patient, diligent, and smart about what you're doing and how you're doing it. Otherwise, you find yourself prey to discouragement and all sorts of negative feedback that can damage, hamper, and even stop your ability to overcome a given problem.

Think about some of your employees or yourself when you were younger. Consider how frustrated you or they became when they encountered a problem and couldn't overcome it. Consider how they or you even became more unable to solve that problem the

more you were overthinking it, panicking over it, or just plain dispirited. Then think about how a mentor or you yourself interacted with one of those employees, and you told them to calm down, step away, get a new perspective and look at the problem with new eyes.

Then you and they were able to analyze the problem differently and discover some solution that maybe wasn't even that hard to find, and maybe they, as well as you, grew in confidence.

That's exactly and precisely what you are doing here and now with this workbook. You are learning about the importance and reality of the right mental state. You are looking at the broader view or deeper view of where you are at, how you're looking at your business, and how you deal with the problems you encounter.

And you are logically seeking out and implementing solutions that work.

That's not fantastical at all.

That's sensible, practical, and wise.

That is the mark of someone who is taking themselves and their business seriously. And more importantly is because it has to do with the longevity of your business, the longevity of your success. Just think about how you feel in the morning when you check in to work, whether that be a physical place you go to, or you work from home. You are starting your workday in a particular frame of mind, and you know just how impacting that state of mind can be on the success of that day. If you're looking at things negatively, you are already hampering and impeding yourself when you don't have to. You're stacking the deck against yourself. However, if you start your day in the right headspace, you discover the day goes by a lot quicker, easier, less complicated, and a whole lot more fruitful.

That's exactly why you are reading this workbook and practicing its lessons

because you're serious about moving yourself to a higher level of competence in your business.

So, you take stock of where you're at. You've just begun the journey of growing your small business, and you saw some early success, but you came to an obstacle; you got discouraged, but you learned there were solutions to those problems. You just didn't have them yet.

So now you're in a place where you're learning, you're acquiring skills that will help your particular business get over that obstacle and move on. You are becoming increasingly aware you are in a learning state.

1 Think of one of the first skills you really learned that impacted your business in a helpful way.

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2 What skills do you not possess yet, or aren't using well, that you know you need.

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3. Is there a problem you have now in your business that seems daunting or unsolvable? What skills might you need to solve it?

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## 3 | CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

So, you've arrived at a place in which you know you've struggled to reach. And it may, in many ways, feel like you've reached the top. But in the back of your mind, you're well aware you haven't. You have evolved from a place in which you didn't know anything, and you weren't even aware you didn't know anything. You have dived into the world of small business and are chasing your dream with a childlike vigor, full of hope and wonder and possibilities. You didn't think anything could stop you until it did.

You were stumped, you wrestled, you worked hard to overcome your obstacle but try as you might, you couldn't seem to grasp it. Customers weren't coming in the door. There was a disconnect somewhere between the problem and your ability to solve it.

Then you started to realize there were skills you needed that were required to overcome this obstacle and get your business moving again.

You diverted your energies to discovering what those skills were and how you could obtain them. Then you set yourself to reapproaching the problem and redesigning your game plan.

And here you are.

You are aware of the skills you possess, and you're practicing them constantly, applying the knowledge you've gained to overcome obstacles daily.

You are abundantly aware that your dreams are indeed obtainable, and success can ultimately be had. But you've matured, and you realize it takes work and effort and strategy. It requires adjustments not just in your physical tools and business, but perhaps even more importantly; it requires adjustments in your mental state of mind and your intellectual skill set.

You have matured. And that's a key element of your dream of building your business.

You understand you can have it all. You just have to achieve it; you have to continue to practice the skills you have to a level of mastery. So, you know there's a level above where you are. You've just to work a little harder to get there. And so, you've set yourself to it.

You realize you've done some work, but plenty more work and challenges lay ahead. But more important than that, you know you're fully capable of doing it and meeting those challenges.

You've got confidence, and confidence well earned.

But this is also where new challenges await you because it's quite easy to fall into the doldrums of thinking you've got everything covered, and there's little more to learn. You've overcome some early obstacles, you met your challenges, you've discovered skill sets, and you've put them to work. Customers are coming through the door, you have good reviews, you're paying attention to analytics, and things seem to be doing alright. But that itself is a pitfall in the sense that it's so easy to fall into a routine that becomes stiff and unchanging.

After all, why would you want to mess with a good thing?

Because you are also aware, or you ought to be, that your market and your business is fluid and ever-changing. And you've got to stay on top of those changes. In fact, you've got to be a pioneer of those changes! You've got to look ahead and see how the world around you are constantly affecting your business and how you can take advantage of that. That's the smart business model, looking to take advantage of changes as you see them rather than allowing those changes to affect your business negatively. One example is social media. It's a profound and perfect example of how the world around you can affect your small business.

When it first came about and was just on the horizon, there were just certain ways of doing things, reaching out to customers, and helping your business grow. You had the phone pretty much, and basic advertising on radio, television, and print. And that was



pretty much the medium by which you could advertise, reach others, and communicate with potential customers.

But then came the internet and with-it social media, and this was a massive and impacting means of interacting with your customer base and growing your business.

But as we said, you could fail to meet that challenge, fail to see the benefits and opportunity there because you had fallen into a certain way of doing things.

You had a particular skill set, you practiced those skills, and you used what was in front of you and did things the same way you'd been doing them for however long you'd been in business.

That new invention, that new force in social and business interaction, was a major one that made some businesses and left others in the dust, destined to become dinosaurs who went extinct.

It's true; some businesses failed to see the potential and failed to remain fluid and change with the times. And that decision cost them their businesses, while others saw the potential, adapted their business, and they thrived, reaching levels of success they hadn't dreamed possible.

And that is because they understood where they were precisely in the scheme of things and where they were on the ladder of conscious competence.

And that is exactly what we are communicating here, that you need to understand where you are; it's a good place to be.

But it could be even better!

And this brings us to the last stage of the ladder, and it's a stage that will in many ways be confusing and even threatening because it may make you feel as if you've come full circle and you're right back where you started.

But the smart businessperson, you, will have matured into the understanding that yes, in fact, you are right back where you started. But through the use of a different perspective, you'll come

to understand that that is exactly where you should be, but it's also slightly different from what you remember. Because life doesn't work in two dimensions, it works in three. So, while you could indeed find yourself right back where you started, you're, in fact, at a higher elevation!

1 What skill are you practicing right now that you find necessary to the success of your business?

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2 What is the main obstacle you face right now in growing your business?

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3. How do you intend on overcoming that obstacle?

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## 4 | UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

In the last chapter, we mentioned finding yourself in a place that seemed like you were right back where you started. That's because it feels like you're seeing your business with fresh eyes and boundless energy and optimism. But you're also expecting to encounter new challenges and obstacles, and you will. But what places you at a higher elevation is that you are a master of your skill sets. What places you at a higher elevation is that your skills are now so finely tuned and practiced that they are second nature to you.

You practice your master-level skills without even thinking about it.

You have reached a level of unconscious competence.

But as a master, you already realize that you are indeed back where you started because you understand you will continue to learn, continue to master new skills and that there are worlds and levels of success you still haven't dreamed of. And in that sense, you are as ignorant, or unknowing, as the day you started your journey.

And that is exactly and precisely where you need to be.

The thing is, and it may be a thing that's taken you some time to learn, is that all this isn't just silly philosophical nonsense. It has a very real and very relevant, and deep meaning to your success as a small business owner.

That state of mind is what brought you to a place of conscious incompetence, of realizing that there were things you didn't know, skills you didn't have, and challenges you weren't prepared to face. And it set you on the road to discovering those skills and applying that knowledge you gained. It took you to a place where you

realized you didn't have any means of tracking your successes, to discover analytics and all the benefits that supplies. And finally, to study those analytics and apply that knowledge on a regular basis to consistently improve your performance.

That state of mind brought you to a place of discovery in social media marketing, branding, identifying your ideal customer, and how to reach them.

It brought you to a place of actively searching out the means and skills of producing your goods and delivering them to the customer in a more streamlined and efficient fashion that ended up saving you money, money you further invested in broadening your business.

And most importantly, that state of mind brought you to a place where you realized the challenges you faced were not the end but rather the beginning. And you discovered very real and relevant confidence in the work that you do. It created confidence in the administration and made your work more efficient and more profitable.

There are a dozen and one different ways your state of mind affects your business on a daily basis. And that's why you took the state of mind seriously.

And that's why you've invested in this workbook and workbooks like it to consistently improve performance and devise and discover new ways of making your business practice more profitable and more efficient.

Being unconsciously competent means, you're always learning and always keeping in the forefront of your mind that you don't know everything. Still, you're abundantly confident and skilled in what you do know.

Unconscious competence keeps you in a state of mind where you are operating at peak performance, which means so is your business. Do you own a gift shop? Do you manufacture goods of some kind? Are you your own lawyer? Or are you a practitioner of some other particular skill? Whatever it is, at the level of

unconscious competence, you know your skillset; you're constantly honing and sharpening it. You know the ins and outs of your business, and you know how to work efficiently and bring home a profit. And you know how to smartly invest that profit into broadening and strengthening your business and making it grow.

But you also know there's a world of things yet to learn, and you'll never stop.

1 What would you consider one of the first skills you learned on your journey to this place?

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2. Are you practicing that skill unconsciously now?

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3. How can you continue to improve the basic skills that got you here?

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# CONCLUSION

One of the things to remember about the ladder that is crucial to understanding it is that there are no hard and fast rules, and you're never completely in one or the other stage. Your fluid, you're always moving, and the stages overlap. You can be half in one and half in the other; you can be in different areas of each at the same time, with different aspects of your business. But the stages are there, and you do move through them, and if you know what they are, and you can match that with your present struggles and personal state of mind, you can roughly identify where you're at and gain some benefit from that.

We all face problems in our business, and we face them every day. And sometimes, they can seem pretty terrifying, pretty threatening to our longevity. But if we could understand where we were at what stage of our development, it could be of a lot of help. We could say, hey, we're facing this problem, but we aren't sure we know how to solve it. So, we might be able to divine we're in stage two, were consciously incompetent. So, we know we're lacking some skills needed to overcome this problem. But we also know those skills do exist; they can be found, they can be applied, and that problem is overcome.

We could look back at our progress, and how far we've come, we could say, hey, we've learned so many things, and so many of them we're doing without even thinking about it. We're in stage four, so maybe we go back to the basics, look at areas where we're a little deficient in, and look at areas that could use brushing up and improving. And consequently, we could discover a whole new level of depth in our business and how we approach our philosophy with it.

We hope that with this book, you'll be able to identify better where you are in your journey and look for the ways and means you can advance to the next step, succeed in places you couldn't or hadn't before, and keep growing. We hope that with this book, you'll

discover that the things you're experiencing aren't limited to just you, a lot of other fellow businesspeople have experienced them, and you can profit from that experience.

There's no reason you shouldn't, and every reason you should, continue to grow, learn, and work smart, not hard.