The 4 Phases of Learning

Learning,
Personal Growth,
Skill Development,
Coaching, and
Even Teaching
Often lead a learner through
Four Learning Phases...

“But in learning/coaching sport the Four Phases are used continuously”.

All coaches and players face the progressive steps of the Four Phases of Learning whenever they come to the practice at the rink. Practices, whether they are coached or just a player practicing on her/his own, all lead players though the four phases of learning to truly affect behaviour change.

The 4 Phases are:
Phase I – Unconscious Incompetence
Phase II – Conscious Incompetence
Phase III – Conscious Competence
Phase IV – Unconscious Competence

We start unaware in...

**Phase I – Unconscious Incompetence**
This is where any learner starts. A player is not aware of the skill/behaviours needs. The toe drag move will help to illustrate the point. Players (particularly beginners) often do not realize this is a move that is part of a hockey player’s repertoire. Their mind does not know about the toe drag move. Hence they have no mental consciousness of the move; meaning they are unconscious of it. Naturally they are also incompetent at performing the move. They just never do it or even recognize the need for it.

To get to Phase II awareness occurs...
An awakening occurs...

**Phase II – Conscious Incompetence**
To move to Phase II conscious awareness of the behaviour/skill (toe drag) has to occur. The player has to realize, from some source, the toe drag move or any other skill for that matter is part of hockey. Coaches, peers, even watching the NHL or junior hockey can create this mental shift bringing the skill into focus for the player. Now the player moves from unconscious to conscious by recognizing it exists. But when the player tries to execute the skill at the rink, he realizes he is still not competent. Once this realization is properly internalized the player is ready to work or practice toward personal change and development.

To get to Phase III ‘practice, practice, practice’ must take place...
**Phase III – Conscious Competence**

Once we get fully into this third phase as a learner we can now execute the toe drag with style and “flare”. We do it as thinking rational players. We know how to do it and can do it, *when we think of doing it* or the coach tells us to use it. The behaviour or toe drag move does not yet happen naturally. One must think of it, be conscious of doing it, for the behaviour to occur. But we CAN now do it competently as we have practice and learned conscious competence. The player may think the learning process is now over, but it is not.

Reaching the pinnacle of Phase IV requires practice to achieve “rote” execution...

**Phase IV – Unconscious Competence**

To get to this level where the behaviour comes naturally without thought requires every learner to keep on working or practicing using and using and using the skill. Eventually, one day the skill is used without a thought. That’s the start of unconscious competence. Many repetitions of remembering to apply the skill/behaviour are still needed to “span the bridge” from Phase III to Phase IV. Perfect execution finally occurs when the skill/behaviour being learned it is done thoughtlessly. It’s natural. It is part the person as a whole, as breathing and walking are.