



Stanford eCorner

Experience Can Create Blind Spots

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Leadership educator and author Liz Wiseman warns of people's tendency to fill in gaps in knowledge by assuming things based on previous experiences. If people think they recognize a pattern, Wiseman says they may stop seeing new data points, perspectives and possibilities.



Transcript

So in my research I studied about 400 different scenarios. Pieces of work, projects like debug a program, write a proposal, teach a class, build a campus. And we looked at how experienced people did that and how people who are rookies doing it for their very first time did that work. Looked at the common elements. Here's what we found. The first thing we found is that experience creates a number of blind spots. Now with experience, we obviously get knowledge, wisdom, we gather data points which actually informs our powers of intuition. We build confidence, we build networks, but we create blind spots. What happens when we know the pattern? What happens when we know the code, so to speak? What do our minds do once we have seen a pattern before? Audience Member You stop innovating. Liz Wiseman You stop...

Audience Member ...innovating. Liz Wiseman You stop innovating. What do you stop seeing? Audience Member Possibilities. Liz Wiseman You stop seeing opportunities, you stop seeing possibilities and sometimes, we start, as my teenager say, making stuff up like "Mom, you just make stuff up." Sometimes, we fill in the gaps. Is there someone with a nice loud voice who would read this for us? Audience Member I will. Liz Wiseman Yeah, thanks. Make it loud for us. Audience Member It doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word appear, the only important thing is that the first and last letters are in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without problem. Liz Wiseman Okay.

And keep going for us, you've done a really nice job and it sounds good too. Audience Member Your mind is reading this automatically without even thinking about it. Liz Wiseman What happens when we know the pattern? We fill things in. And sometimes we start answering questions before the question has actually been asked. Sometimes we stop seeing new data points, we stop seeing contrary points of view. Often once we know the patterns, we stop seeking feedback, input. As was said, we stop seeing new possibilities and with experience typically comes bad experience and scar tissue. And what do our scars - you might think about the scars that you have on your body, what do they tell you? They remind you about your mistakes that you've made. This one reminds me do not bet your husband a cheeseburger that you can hit a ball at 70-mile per hour in the fast pitch cage, don't do that again. And I have a whole set of scars that remind me not to do things that didn't seem to work out very well the first time.

And as you enter into the workforce, you will have ideas that touch on people's scar tissues, and they will quickly say, no, no, tried that, didn't work. Experience creates a number of troubling blind spots.