

The FAST Pathways® Academy – Your Responsibility Boundary

Getting your responsibility balanced can be really important to maintaining Wellbeing. Take on too much, and you're likely to start feeling overwhelmed. Too little may leave you feeling at the mercy of whatever's going on, ramping up your stress, and denying yourself the opportunity to learn and improve from your experiences. But there's a third reason that responsibility's so important...

The world's complicated, so we've evolved efficiency habits to stop our brains from overloading. These habits run outside our conscious awareness, so we often don't even notice. Here's one of them.



It was charmingly illustrated by a teacher... Imagine you're sitting in her class, and she's given each student a piece of paper with three words on it. She says each word is an anagram of another – that she'll ask you to look at them one at a time, and to put up your hand when you have the anagram word.

Your first word is **WHIRL**. You're looking at it, trying to figure out what other word you can make with all those letters.

Hands are going up all around you. Before you have it, she asks you to go on to the second word... **SLAPSTICK**... Same thing – you're trying to figure it out, and hands are going up all around. How would you be feeling? The third word is **CINERAMA**. Do you see the anagram?

Most people don't – or at least, the people who were given those first two words. They're actually not anagrams at all (so don't worry if you couldn't figure them out!). The hands-up half of the class began with different words. They had **BAT** and **LEMON**, which easily arrange to **TAB** and **MELON**. Having started on those words, most people have no problem at all rearranging **CINERAMA** to **AMERICAN**.

Even among students, who are meant to be used to rising to a challenge and persevering through tough tasks, it takes only 2 failed attempts for the brain to switch off to even trying. For the habit called Learned Helplessness to kick in. They didn't deliberately choose to give up, not to see the third word. But they missed it all the same. Scary....

That's why taking action on whatever stresses you can is so powerful. Even if there are gaps you can't close, taking action to reduce them a little bit keeps your brain out of efficiency mode. Because the more gaps you're experiencing that you can't do anything about, the more you'll stop spotting the ones that you could do something about. But by being willing to be responsible, and taking action to close or reduce a gap, any gap (even if it's not the biggest or most disruptive), you keep your brain out of Learned Helplessness, keeping your noticing open to all those other gap-reducing opportunities. It's a powerful shift.