

In search of your perfect Brain

Preface:

This little story is directed to all who are learning or desire to learn. That includes you. The presentation will be through the eyes of two characters, *Act* and *React*. They will be mentored by two real life young men whom we will call, *Pete* and *Repeat*. Pete and Repeat really do exist. Their stories are told as they mentor.

One of our mentors learned a most wonderful lesson as he served as Secretary to his Mission President. His first assignment was supposed to be completed on a given day, he had worked as hard as he knew how to finish it but when the designated day arrived he came to the President with an excuse instead of the results. As he began to give his excuses his President stopped him and simply said “there are no excuses, when I give you an assignment it must be completed and it must be completed on time, there are no excuses”. That shocked our mentor but it also changed his life. From that moment he took total responsibility for every assignment he was given and miracles began to happen, because without the help of Heavenly Father the assignments could not be done.

When you decide ‘**there are no excuses**’ you open your life to miracles because you must rely on your Heavenly Father as well as on your own work.

Chapter One, The Story:

Act and React are discussing their assignments, Listen:

“Can you believe that assignment” Act grumbled. “I already have successful study techniques, and they work well enough for me. How can I get better than an A?”

“I don’t think you were listening Act, didn’t our teacher ask all of us to find a better way, even if we were currently successful? I know that I certainly could profit from techniques that would help me ‘know that I know’.”

“React, that’s your problem, you always react. Don’t tell me you’re going to follow the teacher rather than me.”

“I always thought following you was the best way, but now I’m beginning to wonder. Maybe I could be more effective, maybe I could trick myself into thinking I’m smart. Wouldn’t that be something: React smarter than Act?”

“Now don’t get carried away with yourself, if we did look for a better way, what would we do first?”

“Well there is the first assignment, to memorize the statement: **I seek to understand truth and teach it with clarity. I listen and act quickly when moved by the Spirit. As I organize and teach properly each day . . . I answer my own questions. There are no excuses.** ... It even has your name in it, ‘Act’, but do you really believe it?”

“Wow, I just realized that I do. It probably expresses what I endeavored to do on my mission as well as any statement I could come up with. So for a mission I believe it, but for a Math class I’m not at all sure.”

“Well, let’s analyze it. Is Math part of all Truth and can the Spirit help us learn Math?”

“I’ll have to admit that I have always believed that the Spirit could help me in religious areas but I have relied on my own efforts in academic pursuits.”

“Why? Don’t you want the Lord’s help in learning too?”

“Of course I would, but doesn’t the Lord expect us to work and learn much by our own efforts?”

“Apparently he expects us to seek his help as we do our work. I remember hearing what Brigham Young told Karl G. Maeser when he started the school that was to become Brigham Young University, he said ‘You ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God.’ If they weren’t to be taught without the Spirit, obviously they weren’t to be learned without the Spirit either.

“And listen to what it says in D&C 88:78, 79.” React said emphatically, ‘Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand. Of things both in heaven and earth, and under the earth; ...’ certainly that includes math.

“I am really taken by the phrase: ‘and my grace shall attend you’, isn’t that promising our Savior’s help to make up for our own inadequacies?”

“Wow, that’s impressive, React. I do need to invite the Lord’s help in learning all things. Also, if the grace of our Savior is available to those who teach diligently then ‘organizing and teaching properly’ will answer our own questions, right?”

“I guess that’s right, but it does require faith . . . Now I understand why our teacher said the first step to finding a better way is faith. Joseph Smith’s quote means more now: ‘*doubt and faith cannot exist in the same person at the same time*’. If I doubt, I can’t find a better way.

“If I have the faith to take a couple of steps into the dark, like our teacher said Pres. Lee and Pres. Packer have taught, my way will be lighted. All it takes is to act rather than react, but that is difficult for a person with my name.

“My habits all lead me to react rather than act.”

At this moment Act and React were interrupted by two people who had been listening to their discussion, they were sitting on the opposite side of the table Act and React occupied.

“Pardon this interruption, I am Pete and my friend here is Repeat. We couldn’t help overhearing your little discussion and we want to reassure you.

“We have been where you are now. We understand your doubts. We understand your fears. We know there is a better way.

“In Pres. Kim B Clark’s first devotional (given June 7, 2005), he mentioned a story from his own experience where unbelievable results occurred in one of his classes and then he concluded ‘we learn and teach at several levels’. The first is obtaining facts and information, the second is the ability to use the information to solve problems, and the third is when that information teaches us about ourselves, strengthening our character and values.”

Repeat jumped in, “Act, it is possible to get A’s and still be at level one. React, ‘knowing that you know’ something is at the second or third level. Pete and I have been able to learn at the second and third level now for several years and we know you can too.”

“That’s right”, responded Pete. “Furthermore, you are on the right track about faith being the first step, but it is even more important than you know. Your faith must be personalized into hope. I struggled for several years considering myself not capable of succeeding in college. I doubted my own abilities constantly. It wasn’t until I realized that my doubts were the problem not my abilities, that gave me wonderful hope. I had to do what Joseph Smith also taught, I had to make a sacrifice to change my faith into hope; I had to sacrifice my doubts.”

“How did you do that?” React asked hopefully.

“I replaced my doubts with action, but not just any action.

“What was the next assignment your teacher gave you?” asked Pete.

“Act, what did he assign? All I remember is something about capture, expand, teach and evaluate. I think he lost me along there somewhere”, reflected React.

“It is to write another ‘positive action statement’, our own, answering the question ‘Why am I at BYU Idaho?’

“By the way, I didn’t really understand what he expects. Could you help me with that?”

“That is one of Repeat’s strengths, I’ll let him help you. Go ahead Repeat.”

“It is like beginning a journey. If you do not have a clear destination in mind can you ever get there?”

“Of course not,” smiled React, “but isn’t it obvious why we’re here at BYU Idaho?”

“Is it,” reflected Repeat, “why are you here React?”

“To graduate.”

“That’s like saying you want to go on a journey somewhere in the World but you are not sure where. Can you be a bit more specific?”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you want to graduate in and is graduation the only reason you are here?”

“I’m not certain what I want to graduate in, but I have time before I must decide, don’t I?”

“So . . . you’re standing in the terminal, wanting a ticket to somewhere, you don’t know where, and you are not concerned because the last flight hasn’t left yet. When will it be time to make your decision . . . and won’t your ticket cost more since it must be purchased in the terminal?”

“I don’t like your journey analogy, besides I can take general studies, can’t I?”

“Yes, that is like going on a world tour by flying into every great airport but never visiting a city or country. Wouldn’t it be more fun and enjoyable if you got out of the airport?”

“Of course but didn’t I say I didn’t like the journey thing?”

“You did, but how else can I help you see the need to decide today? Isn’t it time to really crystallize your thinking about why you are here at BYU Idaho?”

“I suppose, but that doesn’t make the decision easier.”

“Why doesn’t it? Every time we place restrictions on our choices it simplifies our lives and allows us to accomplish much more. When no restrictions are placed, postponing decisions for example, life really becomes more complicated. You have placed no restrictions on your decisions for your future, has that simplified your present life?”

“No it hasn’t.”

“Decide to know where you are going right now and your life will be simplified. Maybe you’ll change your mind as you gather more information about yourself but that is all right.

“Now, earlier I asked if graduation was the only reason you were here, is it?”

“I don’t know, ask Act?”

“No, I want you to think about this yourself. I’ll help by reminding you of Pres. Clark’s three levels of learning: the first level was facts, the second problem solving, the third was character building.”

“I guess I do want more than merely to graduate. I would like to learn how to solve the problems I will face and it is true that I want to understand and develop greater faith, integrity, patience, etc.”

Act now reflected, “while you were talking I glanced at our teacher’s Positive Action Statement, it reads: ‘I, like my Savior, am merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in mercy, I am unchanging, always constant, a man of truth who cannot lie, I am no respecter of persons, I love all people unconditionally. I seek faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence; as I acquire these qualities - I ask and receive, I knock and it is opened unto me. I look for strengths and share them, I look for ways to improve and honor others, I seek understanding.’ His statement reflects character traits he wants to possess and the statement is written as though he already possesses those traits.”

“That is right, Act.” Exclaimed Repeat, “remember, the assignment your teacher gave was to answer ‘why you are here at BYU Idaho’ and write your answer as a positive action statement. Write it as though you possess the qualities you want, like he did.”

“I guess I need to exercise faith for this task too, don’t I?”, replied React

“Definitely”, said Repeat, “then you must personalize that faith giving you hope and the time is now.”

Pete confirms what React needs to do and then asks, “Act, what was the next thing your teacher assigned?”

“To obtain a perfect set of the teacher’s Lectures from the internet, from Blackboard, that’s easy; then to write up each of his examples with the process clearly explained plus one more example from our text each time he gives an example; we are then to prepare a rough draft for our first lesson plan; and then do homework from the text, five problems of our choice each day. That seems like a lot to do before our next class period.”

“Only because these are different actions, remember I said, I sacrificed my doubts to obtain faith and hope through action. These assignments will give you the actions you need to sacrifice your doubts. Correct action replaces doubt with faith and hope. Activating that faith and hope results in charity (teaching others). Do these assignments completely, what is there to lose, except your doubts.

“I had your same teacher years ago. I did not follow the assignments he gave and I did not find a better way at that time. It took me three more years to realize that I could have found my better way when I took his class. Be wise. What is there to lose, except your doubts?”

“Pete is right”, said Repeat. “However, there are better ways to do the correct actions than you may have yet employed, and you will be helped as you understand the reason for each assignment.

“For instance, Act, why is it important to write up your Instructor’s examples and the processes used to solve them, as well as an extra example for each?”

“That is a question I have asked myself. I really don’t have a good answer, it seems like busy work at first glance.”

“That’s why I asked the question. Remember how React was a bit confused by the teacher’s use of the words: Capture, Expand, Teach and Evaluate?”

“Capture is the process of obtaining all the teacher has to give. Do you have in your mind at this moment all your teacher gave in class today?”

“I have a lot of it, I took very good notes. That has always been one of my strengths.”

“That’s good, the notes are important, but Pete found a better way to Capture. Would you explain Pete.”

“Certainly, I used to try to write down everything the teacher said and if I missed any detail I would panic. I was writing furiously during every lecture, but when I reviewed my notes later there were always gaps. One day the insight came to quit taking notes and really concentrate on what the teacher was saying. You could almost call it ‘power listening’. As each lecture progressed I would write down words or phrases the teacher emphasized so I could look them up in the text after class, but during class I was very focused, very attentive.

“This approach had a powerful plus. As soon as possible after each class I would open the text and look up each of the words or phrases I had written. I would high-light them along with any definition or explanation or diagram and an example. I called that my first read of the text. Later I would go through the text a second time just reading my high-lighted words, if I could remember the definition and example I would go on to the next high-lighted word, otherwise I would study the definition and example again. Before each exam I would read the text a third time just by stopping at each high-lighted word, thinking of the definition and example and going on. This approach saved me hours of reading and anchored the important concepts in my mind. I knew I knew them.

“Between the first and second read I would get with other students and force myself to teach (exercising charity). I would be the first one to speak, this was not comfortable for me but I knew if I was the first to teach an example, they would think I was smart and I would then think I was smart.”

“That sounds great”, remarked React, “but how does that apply to our assignment?”

Repeat jumped in, “your teacher has made the process much easier. He gives you his notes, so you can follow his lecture and high-light words he emphasizes. After class he asks you to find extra examples from your text with definitions and explanations. As you do the assignment you will ‘capture’ all he has deemed important, but he doesn’t stop there. He expects you to ‘expand’ what he gives you by writing another example and maybe even a ‘lesson plan’. Expand means to take ownership, to make the concepts yours. Furthermore, he expects you to then ‘teach’ each ‘lesson plan’ at least twice to other students (exercise charity toward them). Teaching is the process of seeing if you do know, it also reveals what you don’t understand, and as you teach you answer your own questions.”

“Are you telling me to stop taking notes”, questioned Act

“Not necessarily, but I am suggesting that concentrated listening is much more powerful than you may have realized. Coming up with extra examples after class allows you to confirm and validate your understanding and to begin to make the concepts yours.”

“But I like my way of learning, I’m not comfortable doing it this new way.”

“But what if it made us better learners”, responded React. “If I could ‘know that I know’ by completing the assignments we have been given; wow, what a difference that would be for me.”

“You really can”, replied Pete, “and, Act, you don’t have to give up your way of learning, you merely have to tweak it. Add ‘power listening’ and refocus your note taking skill into writing creative lesson plans.”

“What do you mean, writing creative lesson plans?” asked Act

“This is the ‘expand’ activity. It is the process of taking ownership of your learning experience. By creatively packaging the concept or concepts assigned with color, emphasis, size or story, you begin to gain confidence with the concepts and the examples you have chosen to teach. The more creative, the easier it will be to recall and teach.”

“We’ve given you a lot to think about”, observed Repeat. “The ideas though are powerful and possible. Maybe a review of the important ideas would help.”

“Faith and doubt cannot exist in the same person at the same time.”

“Faith personalized is Hope.”

“Faith activated is Charity.”

“Capture the first time you see it, with examples.”

“The power to stay (to keep it) is enabled by the Holy Ghost.”

“Focused Listening gives Power.”

“Concentration focuses the mind like a lens focuses the Sun.”

“Expectation and excitement facilitate Capture.”

“Expand, take ownership, you are the Boss.”

“Write a creative lesson plan.”

“Teach it, teach it again.”

“Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all . . .” D&C 88:122

“Evaluate, ‘Inspect what you expect’, examine and reflect continually.”

Note taking Idea: Another option in place of traditional note taking is what I call ‘mental notes’: This is done by imagining yourself in a room with blank walls. As the teacher or presenter makes an important point you imagine painting a picture on the first wall (the picture may be a moving picture with sounds, odors, feelings, etc.), as the presentation continues you add objects, words, sounds etc. to help you remember the ideas presented. You may even find yourself painting more than one picture and using more than one wall. Sometimes the same room can be used for more than one presentation and more than one presenter. I use the process for each Priesthood Session of General Conference, I can get all the speakers in one room and remember great detail.

Chapter Two: The Lesson Plan

Act and React have arrived at the library early for their appointment with their mentors, Pete and Repeat. They are discussing the assignment to write Lesson Plans:

“I have really been bothered by Pete’s comment to tweak my note taking skill into writing lesson plans”, says Act. “In fact, it bothered me enough that I sought out our teacher and asked him why the lesson plans are required, he shared this story:

‘Several years ago one of my students came to my office and told me she did not know any of the concepts we had covered and needed to drop. I asked her if she had written any of the lesson plans that were assigned. She hadn’t. I asked if she would be willing to try an experiment. She said she would. I asked if she would give me 3 hours that day, prepare one lesson plan on her most difficult concept, come back tomorrow and teach it to me, again she said she would. The next day she returned at the appointed hour but said she had several questions. I asked her to begin her teaching and we would answer her questions as she came to them. She began teaching me and another student from her class who happened to be in my office at the time. Her teaching was very good (the other student even liked it better than my class presentation), furthermore she had not asked any questions herself, so when she finished I asked what her questions were. ‘I don’t have any’, she said, ‘I answered them all as I taught.’ That is why I assign lesson plans and ask you to teach them without notes.’”

“That is a neat story”, responded React, “I would like to experience the same thing.”

“But how do you write a lesson plan?”, asked Act

Just then Pete and Repeat arrived and after sharing the teacher’s story with them Act again asked his question: “How do you write a Lesson Plan?”

“At first it may seem like a strange assignment”, reflected Repeat, “but I have been doing it from the time I was a teenager trying to learn Russian. What do you think the first step should be?”

“I guess the first step would have to be ‘get a topic or title’”, reflected Act. “Our teacher has given us the topic for each lesson plan in the syllabus.”

“Good, half of writing a lesson plan is getting started. Has your teacher given you ideas for the content as well?”

“Yes, in his lecture he discusses each of the topics and gives some examples too. Do you think he just wants us to copy his lecture and give the same examples he gives?”

“I doubt it, writing a lesson plan is your opportunity to expand the information he gives you. He expects you to take ownership, to make the concepts your own. Whatever you write in a lesson plan should be cemented in your mind and easy to recall.”

“Is that why he wants our lesson plans to be creative?” asked React

“Yes, when you use color, size, emphasis, or a story, it is easy to recall what you have prepared. What else does he ask you to do Act?”

“He wants three very good examples and he wants us to be able to teach them without notes.”

“Why do you suppose he wants three good examples?”

“I guess he wants us to realize that there are subtle changes that can occur in examples for the same concept. Changes that make a problem seem to even belong to a different concept, when it really doesn't.”

“Very good, but that is not the entire reason. When you have three good examples and can work them quickly using the same steps every time, you are getting the processes down very well. What is the value of knowing the processes well when you are tested later?”

“The answer to that is obvious”, answered React, “we will get test problems correct.”

“Right on, now why do you suppose he wants you to be able to teach your examples without notes?”

“I know”, responds React, “so I will ‘know that I know’.”

“Again you are right on, it is vital to ‘know you know’ specific examples. Think of the confidence that will give you, think how it will remove your doubts and strengthen your faith and hope. How might that help you as you take an exam?”

“I have always been a poor test taker. In fact, I've wondered if I might have a learning disability when it comes to taking tests. Maybe I have allowed my doubts to have too much power in my life. Rather than build faith I have nourished my doubts and lost hope. Knowing I know important concepts and examples could really empower me in more than one area of my learning.”

“Excellent, now as you complete a lesson plan teach it to another student and teach it without notes. That process focuses your attention away from you and on the student you are teaching, this is charity. Remember, teaching diligently qualifies you for the Lord's help, because you are exercising charity. Let's review again what we have discussed thus far:

“Faith and doubt cannot exist in the same person at the same time.”

“Faith personalized is Hope.”

“Faith activated is Charity.”

“Capture the first time you see it, with examples.”

“The power to stay (to keep it) is enabled by the Holy Ghost.”

“Focused Listening gives Power.”

“Concentration focuses the mind like a lens focuses the Sun.”

“Expectation and excitement facilitate Capture.”

“Expand, take ownership, you are the Boss.”

“Write a creative lesson plan with a title, clear processes, three examples.”

“Confidence replaces doubt, increasing faith and hope.”

“Teach it, teach it again, exercising charity.”

“Teach your examples without notes.”

“Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all . . .” D&C 88:122

“Evaluate, examine and reflect continually.”

“Inspect what you expect.”

Chapter Three: Teaching

Act and React have arrived at the room in the library they reserved for group study, the other students they invited to join them have not yet arrived. They are discussing the assignment to teach:

“React, I’m a little uncomfortable with this assignment to teach my lesson plan and to teach it without notes.”

“According to Pete’s sharing of his approach, it’s alright to be uncomfortable, remember he told us he always forced himself to get a group together and then he forced himself to be the first one to talk even though it was not comfortable for him. Do you remember why he forced himself to be the first one to talk, to be the first one to share an example, to teach?”

“Yeh, he said by being the first one to talk, the other students thought he was the smart one and if they thought that of him, it tricked him into thinking he was smart.”

“But he knew he really was not the ‘smart one’, didn’t he?” questioned React

“Learning is a mental game”, reflected Act, “and what you perceive others thinking about you definitely effects how you think of yourself. Nevertheless, we can’t all be the first one to talk, so how do I go about tricking my mind into thinking ‘I’m the smart one’?”

“As you teach us your examples with no hesitation, showing each of the steps and never refer to your notes, you’ll be the ‘smart one’ in my eyes. The neat part is that as I do the same thing, I’ll be the ‘smart one’ in my eyes too.”

“So what you are saying is that with this method we can all be the ‘smart one’, each in his own turn. Something like the scripture: **‘Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all . . .’ D&C 88:122**”

“Yes, certainly and that is better than having only one ‘smart one’ in our group.”

Post Note:

It is important for you to understand our two mentors: Pete and Repeat. Both of these young men are college graduates and are currently working in their chosen careers. Both distinguished themselves in their ability to learn and recall what they learned.

Pete is the older of the two. He began his college career as a detail learner: He believed that he must know every detail presented in the classroom or in the textbook before he could be successful as a student. In fact, he often believed that he should know the details before he came to class (which he found impossible). He therefore concluded that he really was not college material; that he did not have the necessary intelligence to succeed at the university. He did however, continue his studies first majoring in Pre-dentistry and finally graduating in Business Management. In science classes he was overwhelmed with the details presented and soon found it necessary to obtain a tutor. He was lucky, his tutor required him to teach other classmates. At first he resisted, feeling that he had come to be tutored not to tutor. Eventually he came to value that tutor as one who helped him to see a better way. Another experience found him in a required class from a teacher who prided herself in flunking students. The class began with 120 students but within a couple of weeks there were only 20; Pete was still in the class but looking to bail out when a student lab instructor took an interest in him. With her help directing his learning, he ended with a B+, but more, he realized he could learn. The techniques he learned were shared in his mentoring in chapter one. Needless to say he finished his last two years of school spending a third of the time he had spent studying as a freshmen and always getting A’s, but what is more important he knew he could recall the material he learned. He has learned since that **everything he learned with his new**

approach has stayed with him, it is easy to recall even several years later, but the courses he took before learning how to learn are not easy to recall.

Repeat, though younger, began learning his techniques while still a teenager. His family moved to Russia. He found himself attending school with native children and he didn't know the language. He developed a method that helped him learn the Russian language quickly, he learned to write lesson plans. Since his techniques could be applied to other subjects, he realized he could learn anything quickly and more, he could recall what he learned. After he graduated from college he decided he wanted to work on Wall Street. He took a trip to New York City and after identifying the leading banks on Wall Street he went to see the Personnel Manager for the largest bank. After introducing himself, he said he would like to work for the bank. The personnel manager asked where he had graduated, he said 'BYU Idaho'. Where is that? 'Rexburg, Idaho'. The personnel manager said they didn't hire anyone who had not graduated from an Ivy League School. He asked the personnel manager why they hired those graduates, after the explanation he asked if they would hire him if he could convince them that he had the same qualifications. After 5 hours in the bank, Repeat was in the office of the CEO and was offered a job. He said he would consider it but wanted the CEO to know that he was going to interview with the bank's competitors the next day.

Eventually he took the job with the first bank. They gave him 10 weeks of training, each three days training was equivalent to a three credit hour class in college. Repeat would not work on Sunday (all the other new hires did), nevertheless, he scored at the top of the new hires at the end of the training.

One of the powerful products of successful learning is confidence. Both Pete and Repeat have a quiet confidence. They do not fear new situations, even though sometimes they wonder how what they do works and why everyone is not doing what they do. They do not consider themselves smarter than their peers, but they have tricked their own minds into believing they are capable and able to handle what comes their way.

As they mentored Act and React, Pete and Repeat shared what they learned about learning. Their sharing is teaching. Learning and teaching are partners; you can't really have one without the other.

Now we will introduce our two students. They are 'Act', and 'React'. Act is successful already in what he does. He always has a process he employees for new situations and challenges. He moves forward without hesitation, he acts, but often he acts without asking if there is a better way. React on the other hand does not have a plan of action already in mind, he reacts to the pressures around him, he hardly ever asks if there is a better way. In learning situations you and I are like Act or React, you may see yourself in each of them as you continue to learn and as you begin to discover your Perfect Brain. Finding your perfect brain is the greatest adventure, it will last your entire life.