Praise for

Lean Learning

"Better is possible. But it requires focused curiosity and persistence. Flynn's book offers us a useful foundation for growth."

—Seth Godin, author of *This is Strategy*

"Genius! *Lean Learning* streamlines your ability to achieve anything you want and more. Overlearning has stopped you your whole life from doing what you want to do. I've personally watched Pat Flynn's innovative lean learning approach transform his life and business. Pat's principles have changed my life and the lives of countless others who've followed his example. Read *Lean Learning* and watch your life go from info-overload stagnation to action-packed productivity and joy."

—Richie Norton, bestselling author
of *Anti-Time Management*

"*Lean Learning* is the ultimate guide to moving from inspiration to action. Pat Flynn's refreshingly simple strategies teach a new way of consuming information—one that leads to real creation and progress. If you're ready to stop overthinking and start making meaningful moves toward your biggest goals, this book is your roadmap."

—Jenna Kutcher, *New York Times*
bestselling author of *How Are You, Really?*

"Over the years I've watched in awe as Pat dominates practically every endeavor he takes on, from online business, to podcasting to YouTube and much more. Finally in *Lean Learning*, he peels back the curtain and hands you his blueprint for going from inspiration to implementation."

—Allan Dib, author of
The 1-Page Marketing Plan and *Lean Marketing*

"In *Lean Learning*, Pat Flynn reveals a powerful truth: more knowledge isn't the answer—taking action is. Through eye-opening stories, including a preschool class that solved a real-world problem in a single day, Pat introduces a game-changing approach to learning. Instead of getting stuck in overthinking and information overload, he teaches us how to focus on what matters, take action faster, and make real progress—without the overwhelm. If you're ready to stop consuming and start doing, this book will show you how."

—Chris Ducker, bestselling author of
Rise of the Youpreneur and *Virtual Freedom*

"*Lean Learning* isn't just another productivity book—it's a paradigm shift in how we approach personal growth and skill acquisition. I've known Pat Flynn for 12 years and he has created an actionable blueprint for turning inspiration into reality, without getting lost in endless preparation. A must-read for entrepreneurs, professionals, and lifelong learners who are ready to IGNITE!"

—John Lee Dumas, host of *Entrepreneurs on Fire*

"I'm SO TIRED of getting overwhelmed and bogged down by information. How to learn smart, act fast, and succeed turns out to be Pat's real genius. This book is a total gem."

—Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *The Coaching Habit*

"This book is a lifeline. It's the exact blueprint to cut through the noise, trust yourself, and start building the business and life you desire."

—Amy Porterfield, *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Two Weeks Notice*

"Whether you're an entrepreneur, career professional, or someone pursuing a passion project, *Lean Learning* provides the tools to turn your goals into reality. Pat Flynn's authentic approach and real-world examples make this book both inspiring and immediately applicable."

—Lewis Howes, *New York Times* bestselling author
and show host of *The School of Greatness*

"In today's fast-paced world, knowledge is power—but only if it's acquired efficiently and applied effectively. Pat Flynn's *Lean Learning* offers a game-changing approach to cutting through the noise and focusing on high-value learning. As a business and life coach, I've dedicated my career to helping others optimize their performance, and I can say with confidence that this book belongs on the shelf of anyone looking to learn smarter, not harder."

—Michael Hyatt, *New York Times*
bestselling author and business coach

"*Lean Learning* is the real deal. Instead of shortcuts, it gives you a powerful system to master what you NEED to know."

—Chris Guillebeau, author of
The $100 Startup and *Time Anxiety*

Get Free Access to My
Lean Learning Companion Course!

Don't just read about *Lean Learning*—experience it.

As you embark on this *Lean Learning* journey, I've created a free companion course designed to amplify your results at every step.

The companion course seamlessly integrates with each chapter, providing:

- Guided explanations that bring key concepts to life
- Implementation strategies for your specific challenges
- A behind-the-scenes look at key principles of *Lean Learning* in action

Also, each chapter references specific resources available in the course—exactly when you need them—so you can immediately apply what you're learning without getting overwhelmed.

Think of it as having me right beside you as you progress through the book—clarifying concepts, answering questions, and helping you adapt these methods to your unique situation.

Visit leanlearningbook.com/course to get immediate access.

Let's do this!

Lean Learning

How to Achieve More by Learning Less

Pat Flynn

Simon Acumen

New York   Amsterdam/Antwerp   London

Toronto   Sydney/Melbourne   New Delhi

To my children, as you stand on the threshold of adulthood,
may the lessons in these pages guide you to learn with purpose,
live with passion, and lead with integrity.

Contents

Introduction

You Know Too Much

"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

—Mark Twain

Jennifer took a deep breath as she looked at the whiteboard covered in square sticky notes, each inscribed with a word or two. In the room, sixteen junior design engineers sat brainstorming solutions to an emergency that had just derailed their day.

For the next hour, she facilitated an intense discussion with the group, navigating an ocean of ideas on the board. The goal was simple: narrow the vision to a single solution, create a prototype, then iterate until the problem was solved.

With such a large and inexperienced group, the task wasn't easy. But this was the kind of challenge Jennifer had been trained for. She was ready to guide these young engineers through a process of thinking that would hopefully lead to a productive outcome.

I wasn't in the room that day, but I saw the final product and it was incredible. The result was beyond anyone's expectation, and the team was extremely proud of their work.

For myself, and the other outsiders who witnessed the result, we had seen firsthand the power of innovation at work and what a small group of individuals working together can accomplish in a short period of time.

But by far, the most impressive part of the project was that no one on the engineering team was older than five.

Relearning Learning

Jennifer Vasilis (aka Ms. Jenny) was my son's preschool teacher. One day after a massive ant infestation forced the students to eat outside in the hot California sun, Ms. Jenny paused the afternoon's activities to teach her class an important lesson.

Together, they brainstormed about what to do. As the kids shouted out their ideas, Ms. Jenny wrote them down on sticky notes and placed them on the whiteboard. Some ideas were impractical, like eating at Chick-fil-A every day, and others were more bizarre, like just eating the ants for lunch. All ideas were welcome with no filters or fears of judgment, which is a sense of freedom we tend to lose as we grow older. After a bit of time, Ms. Jenny steered the discussion toward a consensus: constructing a sun shade.

I was made aware of this plan in an email Ms. Jenny sent the parents that evening calling for donations of old blankets, PVC piping, and other materials, and during drop-off the next morning, a giant pile of goods was accumulating just outside the preschool door. I wasn't sure what to expect, but when I arrived

for pickup later that day, my wife and I, along with several other parents, were in awe of what was standing before us.

On the edge of the concrete courtyard, right next to a small playground, stood two eight-foot-tall banners made of blankets that spanned about six to eight feet wide. The framing was made of PVC pipe that was put together with duct tape, and the feet were weighed down by bags of sand. During lunch that day, the shades were moved next to the tiny lunch tables to block the sun and allow the kids to eat more comfortably outside, and the coolest thing about all this (pun intended) is that the kids built the entire thing themselves.

As the parents were taking pictures, I noticed that the sun shades kind of resembled those "step and repeat" backdrops you see at events where celebrities pose for photographers, except today the celebrities weren't movie stars or musicians, they were these little builders.

How did a group of children build that—in a *day*? They didn't do it by falling into the common traps many adults face when tackling challenges. I don't know about you, but I've seen my fair share of folks felled by overthinking and overanalyzing, spending more time searching for the perfect solution than taking action. At one point or another, we all do it. We create committees and bring in experts to debate the best approach.

Or, more commonly: we find ourselves endlessly consuming more content—downloading the latest podcasts, watching the newest videos, reading the most recent articles—all in the hope that one of these will provide the elusive answer we are seeking. While these resources can be valuable, they more often than not lead to information overload and overthinking, causing us

to delay making the simple decisions that would help move us forward.

In contrast, my son's preschool class began their process with a clear problem, then carved out dedicated time in their schedule to address it, and they dove right in and got to work. The children weren't paralyzed by their need for absolute certainty—they were willing to experiment and learn as they went. They didn't feel the need to know everything about sun shades or construction before beginning—they only needed to know enough to get started. They, like the rest of us, could figure out the rest along the way.

This is a valuable lesson for all of us, regardless of age. We all can begin solving our most pressing problems now. We can take those first steps toward something we're inspired to do right away. Today. You don't have to wait. It won't be perfect, but it will be progress.

As a parent watching what was unfolding that day in my kid's classroom, I couldn't help but marvel at the impact this experience must have had on my son and his classmates. To collaboratively brainstorm solutions to a real-life problem, then bring one of those ideas to life in such a short time span, is an incredibly powerful lesson for young minds, one that is sure to shape their approach to future challenges throughout the rest of their lives. This reminded me of my own learning experiences. Like most people, I grew up believing that information by itself was valuable. In fact, my entire high school and college experience was predicated on the idea that the more you knew about more things, the more successful you would become.

Confessions of an Over-Learner

Before we get too far, let me give you a little background on myself. Hi, I'm Pat, and I am an over-learner.

Everyone else: Hi Pat.

My whole life, I have strived to gather as much information as possible so that I could use it somewhere else later. While other people collected Pokémon cards (that would come later), I collected information, and for a long time, this worked well . . . until it didn't.

Working hard and overachieving has always been something that came naturally to me. I worked tirelessly to earn a 4.2 GPA in high school and then graduate magna cum laude from UC Berkeley. But in 2008, just a few years after graduating architecture school, I was laid off from my dream job as an architect during the Great Recession, and none of those things mattered anymore. Nobody was hiring so I couldn't get a job, so I moved back home to San Diego to live with my parents, which was not exactly on my vision board. I knew a lot about architecture, but there I was, twenty-five years old staring at the ceiling of my childhood bedroom, crying out of frustration.

Information had failed me.

On my bedroom wall, next to the Blink-182 and Padres stickers I placed there years ago, were all of my awards and achievements that my parents had framed and displayed. At that moment, I realized all the knowledge I had accumulated, while valuable, had not prepared me for the challenges I now faced.

It was a humbling moment, one that forced me to confront the limitations of my education and the need for a different approach to learning and problem-solving. Little did I know that this painful experience would become the catalyst for a transformative journey of self-discovery and growth, one that would lead me to question the very foundations of what it meant to learn and succeed in an ever-changing world.

On my mission to figure out what to do next to get back on my feet, I quickly fell back into old habits, hoarding information as if it were a drug. I found myself compulsively collecting every scrap of knowledge, addicted to the rush it provided, yet without any clear plan for its application. Every magazine, every book, every blog post and forum I subscribed to made me feel like I was getting somewhere thinking that the more I learned, the better equipped I would be. But in the end, I found myself right back where I started, lying on my bed, overwhelmed, and confused.

It took some time to realize that the problem wasn't a lack of knowledge, but rather the way I had been conditioned to learn. Like many of us, I had been trained to read textbooks, take tests, and regurgitate answers instead of truly understanding what was required to acquire a new skill.

As adults, we tend to repeat this process, getting excited about learning something new, finding resources, applying some effort, then "failing" when we don't see immediate results. This leads to self-doubt and giving up when things get too difficult.

As we navigate through an era marked by swift changes and endless choices, the ability to adapt quickly has never been more crucial. The rise of artificial intelligence and the relentless ex-

pansion of digital information have transformed how we all live and work, requiring a shift in how we acquire and apply knowledge.

This moment in time demands more than just traditional learning methods. It demands a strategy that is as fluid and proactive as the rapidly evolving world around us. We don't need more information or another textbook. What we need is a disciplined process to learn the right information at the right time so that we can solve the right problems.

This is what I call "Lean Learning."

Lean Learning is about going back to basics and learning as children do. To solve most problems, you don't need to know everything about a given topic. You don't need to explore every outcome. All you need is the minimum knowledge needed to solve that problem, a willingness to put the information into action, and the resilience to keep going when things get tough. And if a group of five-year-olds can do it, then we can, too.

Embracing Lean Learning has transformed my life in ways I never thought possible. In 2008, I launched my first business, helping architects pass an exam. Since then, I've created several more businesses, invented physical products, started software companies, authored best-selling books, and now serve on the board of several companies and start-ups in the creator economy. I've also cofounded a community of thousands of entrepreneurs who are helping each other on their unique entrepreneurial journey.

But my success is not unique. The principles of Lean Learning have the power to transform anyone's life, regardless of their background or circumstances.

In this book, I'll share with you the strategies and mindset shifts that have helped me and countless others learn faster, solve problems more effectively, and create the lives we desire. It's time to question the way we've been taught to learn and embrace a new approach, one that empowers us to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing world.

In our quest for personal growth and success, however, we inevitably face an unexpected and ironic challenge: the sheer abundance of information available to us.

The End of the Know-it-all

Growing up a latchkey kid, I used to come home every day after school, let myself in, and camp out in my parents' bedroom until they got home from work. They had the better TV.

After dropping a Pop-Tart into the toaster, I'd switch on the square television set, munch on my less-than-healthy snack, and settle in for a nice afternoon of *Saved by the Bell*. When my dad came home from work a few hours later, we'd switch to watching his favorite program: *Jeopardy!*

He'd be lying in bed, tired after a long day of work, and I'd be sitting on the floor looking up at the TV. I remember feeling jealous that the contestants knew most of the answers. I didn't understand a lot of the categories, but on the off chance I'd get a question right, I'd jump for joy. Even back then, I remember how gratifying it felt to know that I knew something random.

Learning things and knowing things can be fun. Attend a

trivia night at any local bar, and you'll find a group of individuals who love to compete on who knows the most about as many topics as possible. Knowing random bits of knowledge can be fun and interesting, but is it all that useful as we try to navigate the complexities of modern life, advance in our careers, or solve real-world problems?

Before the internet, knowledge was a precious commodity. Those who possessed it held a certain power—there was real value in knowing things that others did not. You were more useful and more admired.

For example, if you happened to own an A-to-Z collection of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in your home, you were likely upper-class. And if you owned two sets (one for downstairs and one for upstairs), then you probably had royalty in your bloodline. Or at least, that's what it seemed like to the rest of us.

Today, however, information is no longer scarce. It's everywhere, all of the time, accessible to everyone with a device. It's like an endless all-you-can-eat buffet of knowledge, available 24/7, and we're all consuming way too much without realizing it. In many cases, it's being forced down our throats.

This is a problem. How we consume content affects everything we do from how we treat our neighbors to how well we perform at our jobs to what kind of parent or spouse we ultimately become. Information really can change your life when you use it, but we can waste a lot of time when you just keep consuming.

Of course, there's no shortage of studies illustrating how technology use and a person's mental health are related. We all understand that too much technology is not good for us, par-

ticularly when it comes to the excesses of screen time, the pervasive influence of social media, and the subtle intrusions of AI into our daily lives. Each of these aspects can isolate us, diminish our real-world interactions, and it leaves us distracted and less present in our own lives. What you *won't* find is a piece of research that says unrestricted access to the internet, screens, and social media is good for you. We know how bad it is. We just don't do anything about it. And that needs to change.[1]

Here's the big question, though. If information were the key to success and happiness, then why do some people struggle to achieve their goals despite having access to a wealth of knowledge?

The truth is that it's not just about having the answers or the information; it's about what we do with it. The implementation. **Action without information is chaos, but information without action is a waste.** The key to unlocking our full potential lies in finding the perfect balance between the two.

When we're driven to start something new, the answers are out there, but it can be overwhelming to know where to begin and when to stop. How much information is enough to make a decision? Who can we trust? What about conflicting or outdated information?

And let's not forget about the algorithms that are constantly shaping and curating the information we see, pushing it our way even when we didn't necessarily ask for it. These algorithms are designed to keep us engaged on their platforms longer, prioritizing content that confirms our existing beliefs rather than providing the most accurate or novel information. It's actually harder for us to find truly useful and varied information, and

it's a complex and evolving landscape that requires a new set of skills and strategies to navigate effectively.

Lean Learning is the key to building a life of your dreams, one where nearly anything is possible. I know that's a big promise, but it's true in my experience. And if you could become better at more things, more often, what could that make possible?

That's the question I want to answer with this book.

How Lean Learning Works

Lean Learning goes beyond traditional learning—it's about applying what we learn in real time and constantly adapting to enhance our growth. Tailored for a world that constantly disrupts our focus, the essence of Lean Learning is captured in its simplicity and its efficacy.

It is structured around four essential steps:

1. **Identify** what you want to accomplish next.
2. **Learn** only what you need to move forward.
3. **Implement** what you've learned.
4. **Review and repeat** to refine the process to deepen understanding and skill.

At first glance, this may appear deceptively simple, perhaps even insufficient for substantial learning. If you're wondering "What else do I need to do?" that is a normal reflex, and you've also proven my point.

We've been conditioned to equate complexity with value, which drives us straight into the trap of overcomplicating learning. But in Lean Learning, we focus on efficiency—doing just enough to move forward effectively, without getting bogged down by unnecessary details. Trust the process, take it one step at a time, and you'll discover that real power lies in simplicity and action. Here's how each chapter of the book maps to crucial phases of the process:

In Chapter 1, we address the common problem of **inspiration overload** and explore, instead, the art of **selective curiosity.** When we understand how to filter through the noise of endless information and focus on what ignites our curiosity and passion, we truly begin our Lean Learning journeys.

In Chapter 2, we talk about the importance of choosing **action over information.** This is easy to say, harder to do. It's a process that takes time and practice but is totally worth it. When we shift from passive consumption to active application, real learning begins.

In Chapter 3, I share my secret weapon for success. In this chapter, we'll identify the key **champions** every learner needs to make their learning journey a success. Surrounding yourself with mentors, coaches, and a community of supporters marks the critical difference between you reaching your goals and fizzling out too quickly.

In Chapter 4, I will reveal how to **protect your progress.** In this chapter, you'll discover strategies to shield your learning journey from distractions and setbacks, ensuring continuous progress. We all get sidetracked on occasion, and this part of the

process will help you know what to do when that happens so that you can keep going.

In Chapter 5, we explore what I call **Voluntary Force Functions**. This is where you implement challenges by choice, using structured pressure to catalyze growth and accelerate skill acquisition. In layman's terms, you put yourself in a position that forces you to do a thing you don't want to do but will ultimately benefit you. It's not *always* fun, but the more you do it, the better you get. And the results will speak for themselves.

In Chapter 6, we address the age-old question in any challenging endeavor: When do you keep going, and when do you change course? **Persist or pivot?** Through regular assessment and honest reflection, we gain a deeper understanding of our progress, or lack thereof, and then make the necessary adjustments to get the most out of our time and effort. The last thing we want to do is keep pushing on a pull door, because we all know how that ends up looking.

In Chapter 7, we tackle the confusing topic of mastery and why it's not always what most people tend to think. In this chapter on **Micro Mastery**, we will focus on making small, consistent gains that add up over time, while also being open to significant leaps—what I call **Quantum Leaps**—that can take place through bolder moves. This is the chapter where you figure out where to focus your efforts and how to go deep even in Lean Learning—which is never about staying in the shallows, just about getting the most return for your investment of effort.

In Chapter 8, we take everything you've learned thus far and make the **transition from learning to leading.** Many think of teaching as something you do after you learn a skill, but I want