

The three stages of learning.

Designers come in all shapes, sizes and different stages of their career. Understanding where your team is in their learning career can help avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication.

There are three stages of learning.

The first stage (as a graduate) is confident incompetence.

This stage can be seen in a designer straight out of university and who thinks they know it all. They are supremely confident in everything they do, will often not listen to the brief closely, probably will not write anything down and will forge ahead confidently.

Unfortunately they don't have the skills to be very good at this stage – hence the incompetence.

Knowing this is where a junior designer sits in their career path makes dealing with their overflowing confidence easier.

Unconfident competence.

As we mature in our career – and generally that happens in our early 30s – many come to realise that they don't actually know as much as they thought we did. It's a huge blow to a designer's confidence.

That's when people move to the second stage of learning – unconfident competence.

Truth be told most are actually quite good at their job but instead of seeing a strong foundation of skills, they focus on the bits that aren't going well. That's when

they get disillusioned and change careers thinking they are never going to excel at their first choice of career, so best they choose another.

For some people this stage can repeat over and over as they continually change careers.

Understanding and helping deal with the crisis in confidence in mid-weight designers can reduce the staff turnover in the studio.

The third stage of learning is confident competence.

Designers in this stage of their career understand that they don't know everything and that's OK.

They have confidence in their skill level and a maturity to feel comfortable asking if they don't know an answer.

This stage of learning is valuable in a studio member. It means you can market your studio – and your brand – on experience and how that is of value to clients. It is especially treasured in a design manager because it means they are not intimidated to ask for a brief to be explained again, in a different way.

It also means they are comfortable to act as the lowest common denominator for some clients – the more they understand a difficult financial concept, the better the studio will design information that can be communicated quickly and efficiently.

Understanding where you are in your career and where other studio members are in theirs, makes it easier to run, and market a studio better.