

"Watch how I do it" is not enough to convey a skill

Frédéric Le Pennec · 11 March 2026



Watching an experienced Business Manager is not enough to build a true skill. To pass on in a lasting way, it is necessary to explain the reasoning, have practice, and debrief.

In many IT service companies and consulting firms, knowledge transfer still relies on a quick method: observing an experienced colleague, then replicating their approach. This method conveys visible actions. It often leaves out the reasoning that allows adapting those actions.

THE STARTING POINT

Showing allows replicating a known scene. Transmitting allows acting accurately when the situation is not exactly the same.

Watching a professional only provides access to a part of their work

When an experienced Business Manager conducts a call or a meeting, much of their activity remains invisible. They choose what they want to achieve, prioritize information, detect subtle signals and adjust their approach based on the interlocutor's reactions.

Junior employees mainly see the observable result: a question asked, an objection rephrased, a pause, a proposal for the next step. They may memorize these actions without understanding the criteria that triggered them.

Consider a prospect meeting scenario. The manager interrupts their presentation to explore an issue quickly mentioned by the prospect. The junior notes that one should address expressed problems. They might not necessarily know that the manager identified a key issue, verified that it concerned multiple teams, and assessed that it could open a discussion on specific support.

In their next meeting, the junior replicates the rephrasing whenever an irritant arises. The action resembles that of their manager, but it occurs too early or on a minor topic. The imitation is faithful; the decision is not.

A skill is not a sequence of actions to copy

A skill combines knowledge, decision criteria, professional actions, and adaptability. Removing the reasoning means transmitting only the visible part of the trade.

Phone prospecting illustrates this well. An effective call involves selecting an account, understanding a context, choosing an angle, listening to the response, handling an objection, and deciding if a meeting is truly necessary. Yet, after several informal transmissions, the method often boils down to: call, deliver the pitch, and secure a meeting.

This simplification works as long as the interlocutor reacts as expected. As soon as they say they already work with referenced partners, are not interested in a generic presentation, or are undergoing reorganization, the employee has no reference. They have a script, not the skill to deviate from it.

THE DIFFERENCE

Copying involves replicating a response. Learning involves understanding under what conditions this response is relevant, and then knowing how to construct another when the context changes.

With each informal transmission, knowledge loses some of its substance

A practice transmitted solely through observation experiences a kind of erosion. The first person acts based on rich experience but does not clarify everything they draw upon. The second person records what they have seen and transmits it in a simplified form. A few transmissions later, the nuances have disappeared.

This phenomenon can be found in needs qualification. Originally, the Business Manager seeks to understand the project, the team, the mission, and the decision process. After several iterations, the qualification becomes a list of mandatory questions: start date, skills, duration, rate. Information is gathered, but the context that gives it meaning is no longer explored.

The new Business Manager can then fill the CRM correctly while being unable to explain why the client is hiring, what threatens the project, or what will really make the difference between two consultants. The process appears respected. The understanding of the need has deteriorated.

Sometimes the company ends up considering this degraded version as the official method. Managers then correct the effects of a transmission they thought they had completed.

Showing is useful, as long as it doesn't stop there

Observation retains its value. It allows seeing a skill in a real situation, hearing the vocabulary used, and perceiving the rhythm of an exchange. The problem arises when observation becomes the entirety of the learning path.

To make an observation educational, the manager can prepare the employee before the situation. Before a meeting, they explain what they are looking to verify, the signals they plan to observe, and the choices they might have to make. The junior no longer just sees what happens: they know what to pay attention to.

During the meeting, they can note the moment the manager deviates from their plan, rephrases, or chooses not to push an offer. After the meeting, they compare their interpretations. The junior explains what they understood; the manager reveals their reasoning and corrects hastily drawn interpretations.

The same meeting thus becomes a learning support. Without this preparation and debrief, it remains mainly a demonstration.

THE PROPER USE OF EXEMPLARITY

The example shows that the action is possible. The explanation allows understanding the choice. Practice teaches how to execute it. The debrief transforms the experience into reusable references.

Practicing changes the nature of transmission

Understanding an explanation doesn't guarantee knowing how to act. The employee must try, hesitate, make mistakes, and start over under conditions safe enough for mistakes to be useful.

A manager might, for instance, role-play as a busy prospect agreeing to a ten-minute exchange. The junior Business Manager must start the meeting, establish a shared objective, and choose the two topics they definitely want to explore. The simulation immediately reveals whether they can prioritize or if they're merely delivering their presentation.

In a second attempt, the fictitious prospect might raise a different objection. The junior should no longer recite the correction from the first exercise; they must apply the criteria understood during the debrief. Variation ensures they are learning to decide, not just to replicate.

In real work, the responsibility can then progress in stages. The junior prepares the meeting, leads its opening, handles part of the discovery, then conducts the entire exchange. At each stage, the manager observes specific elements and gradually reduces their intervention.

Debriefing isn't about saying what you would have done instead

A useful debrief begins by having the employee explain their intent. What did they understand about the situation? What result were they seeking? What did they observe? On what did they base their decision? These questions focus on reasoning rather than merely correcting the final formulation.

Imagine a Business Manager sends a proposal too quickly after a meeting. Telling them they should have waited results in an additional rule. Asking what made them consider the need sufficiently qualified reveals the missing information and builds a decision criterion.

The manager can then relate the feedback to facts: the decision-maker was not identified, the budget was not explored, or the next step was unclear. The employee leaves with references they can use on another deal, even if it presents differently.

A DEBRIEF THAT MOVES FORWARD

Feedback should not only indicate what was good or bad. It should help the employee understand what they perceived, what they missed, and how they will decide next time.

Serious transmission requires time and managerial skill

Showing a task takes a few minutes. Clarifying reasoning, designing a practice situation, observing, correcting, and repeating takes more energy. This difference explains why so many organizations choose a quick transmission, especially when commercial objectives already exert significant pressure.

But knowing how to do and knowing how to teach are two distinct skills. An excellent Business Manager can naturally conduct a negotiation without successfully explaining how they analyze the client's interests. When coaching a junior, they risk reclaiming control as soon as the conversation becomes complicated, then concluding: "Did you see how I did it?" They secure the meeting but deprive their employee of part of the learning process.

The manager must therefore learn to make their expertise visible, to break down a skill, to create practice opportunities, and to formulate actionable feedback. Without this capacity, transmission relies on individual pedagogical talent and varies greatly from one team to another.

The time saved at the start reappears as dependency

Quick transmission initially seems efficient. The employee starts earlier, attends a few meetings, and quickly takes charge of subjects. The cost appears later, in a diffuse manner.

The same mistakes are repeated, files surface too late, and the manager must verify emails, revise proposals, or intervene in difficult meetings. The employee seeks their manager's input for every new situation, as they know the usual responses without mastering the criteria for choosing.

For instance, a junior may know how to present a consultant when the profile exactly matches the need. As soon as a skill is missing or the rate exceeds the client's expectation, they ask their manager to take over the exchange. Without having worked on qualification, argumentation, and arbitration, their autonomy remains limited to straightforward cases.

The company saved a few hours of training. It then pays for this saving in oversight, revisions, commercial errors, and managerial exhaustion.

THE DEFERRED COST

The time not invested in learning doesn't disappear. It returns later as corrections, dependency, fragile decisions, and practices deteriorating from one generation to the next.

Organize transmission around three actions

A solid transfer relies on three simple actions: clarify, practice, and debrief. Their simplicity should not obscure their demands.

Clarifying involves naming the objective, useful information, choice criteria, and common mistakes. For a prospecting meeting, the manager doesn't just provide a framework; they explain how to decide to extend a topic, redirect the exchange, or forgo presenting their offer.

Practicing involves placing the employee in varied and progressively more complex situations. They can start by preparing an approach, continue with a full simulation, then conduct a real meeting under observation.

Finally, debriefing turns action into learning. The employee analyzes their choices, the manager provides facts, and they define a precise point to test in the next opportunity. For example, they might decide that the next three meetings will end with an explicit rephrasing of the next step and its responsible party.

This loop must repeat. A professional skill does not stabilize with a single explanation or after one success.

Training isn't about organizing copying

Companies are right to want to accelerate skill development. But going fast doesn't mean shortening the learning process until only observation remains.

An organization that effectively transmits knowledge accepts investing time initially to gain it later. It builds employees capable of understanding a situation, deciding with discernment, and adapting their practice without systematically waiting for the manager's answer.

"Watch how I do it" may open the learning process, but it cannot conclude it. Without explanation, practice, and debriefing, the company doesn't transmit a profession: it spreads a diminished copy and shifts the cost to autonomy, decision quality, and managerial workload.