

## THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE

How could knowledge be a curse? Don't we talk at length about the value of continuing education?

Unfortunately, knowledge can be both a blessing and a curse. In fact, too much knowledge can sometimes actually make you a bad teacher. How many times have you taken a class or heard a lecture by an expert in a field and left confused? The speaker has The Curse of Knowledge.

In the book [Made to Stick](#), the authors describe a very simple study done at Stanford in 1996 by Elizabeth Newton which serves as a perfect illustration for The Curse of Knowledge.

Newton divided the study participants into two groups: tappers and listeners. The tappers were given a song to "tap out" on the top of the desk. These were simple songs like Happy Birthday and The Star Spangled Banner. The listener's job was to try to recognize the song. The tapper tapped out the song on the desk top while the listeners listened. Pretty simple, except for the fact that the tappers had The Curse of Knowledge. They knew the song and could hear it in their heads. The listeners had no such knowledge. The interesting thing about the study was that tappers thought that listeners would get the song right fifty percent of the time, but in actuality, listeners only got the title of the song two percent of the time. The tappers (think teachers) were frustrated because they knew the answer to the "test". They also couldn't understand how the listener (student) could not "get it".

Now just substitute teacher for tapper and student for listener, or coach and player, or boss and employee. Look at the numbers. Fifty percent expected but two percent results. These stats make how we run practice, how we teach or, how we run our staff training seem really important. This study explained so much to me. It explained why I say KISS so much. Keep It Simple S \_ \_ \_ \_ . What I really am saying is remember the listeners. Don't strive to show how smart you are, instead, strive to show what a great teacher you are. I now believe the key to KISS is to strive to MISS ( Make It Simple S \_ \_ \_ \_ ). We need to keep it simple for our staff, students, or team by making it simple. We need to make sure that the Curse of Knowledge does not frustrate us and our students, players, or employees.

I always tell my coaches that if it appears that the group is not grasping a concept, back up and say "let me explain that again. I must have done a bad job explaining it the first time". This puts the onus on the teacher, coach or boss. Sven Nater, one of John Wooden's prize pupils, wrote a book entitled You Haven't Taught Me Until I've Learned. It is an excellent title. We must realize that we have not taught until someone has learned and that our knowledge can often be a detriment not a benefit. Understanding The Curse of Knowledge is the key to great instruction in any field.