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Learning Investments

Introduction

The more a Spooner learns, the greater their chances of achieving and sustaining excellence in their position, which is key to the company's success. In addition, it's fulfilling for a Spooner to feel that they're evolving and improving, delivering impact at an increasing rate. And the company aims to help each Spooner be fulfilled in their work. Therefore, **Spooner learning must always be a high priority for all involved.**

A lot of learning occurs naturally in the course of business as a Spooner faces novel challenges and collaborates with skilled colleagues. Still, by making investments specifically aimed at learning, the Spooner can develop even more rapidly. As such, **Bending Spoons is delighted to help propel Spooner growth by backing a variety of learning investments.** This backing may come in the form of time, capital, or both.

Each Spooner can make their learning investment decisions autonomously. No approvals are needed, though the Spooner should be mindful about using the company's resources efficiently. We also ask their colleagues (particularly their function leads) to enthusiastically support them as they invest in learning.

What learning investments do we back?

There are precious few limitations when it comes to the types of learning investments we back. Suitable options include books, courses, workshops, and lessons. Options also include taking time off other work activities to explore a technology or practice a skill. However, we don't back full university degrees: Regardless of how relevant the degree is, the time and capital investment is simply too high relative to the probable benefits for the company.

Before pulling the trigger on a learning investment, we ask the Spooner to consider whether it's an efficient use of the company's resources. It's not necessary to perform a complex multifactorial regression analysis. Simply, **the Spooner should ask themselves if, on the whole, the investment is likely to enhance their impact here by more than it costs (considering both time and capital).** If they feel the answer is *yes,* then it probably benefits both the Spooner and Bending Spoons and they should go ahead with it.

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For example, it can be an efficient use of the company's resources for a product designer to attend an expensive online course on mobile UX best practices led by established experts in the field. The learnings will be directly applicable to the Spooner's work, positively impacting the company while progressing the Spooner's development. In short, the course has a high probability of yielding a healthy return on investment over time.

A learning investment can still be an efficient use of resources even when it does *not* enhance the Spooner's skills in ways that appear directly useful to Bending Spoons. Take the case of a software engineer who wants to spend three work days exploring a new software architecture paradigm. Even if Bending Spoons has no plans to leverage this paradigm, it's probably still an efficient investment if the Spooner honestly believes the exploration will fire up their curiosity and creativity, and reaffirm their motivation to achieve and sustain excellence in their position. Such an outcome benefits both the Spooner and Bending Spoons in the long run. (By contrast, it's not credible that taking piano lessons would nourish this Spooner's passion for software engineering—they'll need to learn the piano on their own time and dime.)

Ultimately, **we leave the responsibility for determining whether the learning investment is an efficient use of the company's resources up to the Spooner,** trusting them to be reasonable and act in good faith. If a Spooner would like a second opinion on a potential learning investment, they're welcome to talk to their direct function lead, who can escalate the matter if useful. It's wise for the Spooner to ask their lead if the investment involved is unusually expensive in terms of either time or capital.

What's the approval process for a learning investment?

There's no approval process. We encourage each Spooner to make their learning investment decisions autonomously.

We periodically audit a sample of learning investments with regard to time and capital. In the process, we might ask a Spooner for clarification as to why they pursued a particular investment. If a learning investment appears to be wasteful, we'll give the Spooner constructive feedback about their use of the company's resources. Barring cases of fraudulent behavior, that's the end of the matter.

When a Spooner makes a learning investment that turns out to be particularly amazing or awful, we encourage them to inform the relevant colleagues (including People Operations and the Spooner's tier-2 function lead). This helps maximize the value that Spooners and Bending Spoons get out of the experience: If the investment was amazing, then it's our priority to repeat it in the future for as many

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relevant Spooners as possible. If it was awful, we'd like to prevent others from making the same investment. For help in identifying the best Slack channel to spread the word about a noteworthy learning investment, the Spooner is welcome to ask their direct function lead.

No Spooner will be penalized or made to feel guilty if a learning investment they make in good faith ends up being an inefficient use of time or capital.

What's the financing process for a learning investment?

For accounting reasons, it's best if Bending Spoons pays for a learning investment directly. The Spooner should open a ticket with a link to the good or service they're requesting be bought for them. If the product is available on Amazon, such as a physical book, the Spooner should use their Bending Spoons Amazon account and make the purchase themselves. There are some products that Bending Spoons may not be able to pay for directly. In these cases, the Spooner should pay for the product up front, then request a reimbursement. A typical example is an audiobook: The Spooner might prefer that it gets added to their personal library via their existing Apple Books or Audible account (or via a similar service). As such, it may be better for them to use the same account to make the purchase.

How should a Spooner approach investing time in learning given their busy schedule?

It might seem sensible for the company to implement rules concerning how much time a Spooner can invest in dedicated learning activities, and when they're allowed to do so. However, on reflection, such decisions are best left up to the individual Spooner. **Giving Spooners maximum flexibility is appropriate in light of their talent and integrity, the differences in their positions, needs, and preferences, and the unpredictable nature of their workload.** This approach is also consistent with our company culture of freedom and responsibility.

Still, a Spooner might be hesitant about carving out time to invest in their learning. After all, their position is demanding, and their colleagues are relying on them to deliver promptly. But when a Spooner is thoughtful and efficient in making a learning investment, the benefits should also spread to their team and Bending Spoons at large. **That's why we ask every Spooner not only to prioritize their own learning, but to support their colleagues as they invest in *their* learning too.** This is true even if it causes the occasional, painful delay on a deliverable. In any case, the Spooner in question should be sure to coordinate with the relevant colleagues to minimize disruption.

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Function leads have a key role in fostering learning. It starts with encouraging Spooners to make abundant learning investments—particularly the Spooners who seem hesitant about doing so. They should also drive the roll-out to all relevant Spooners of any learning investment that proves fantastic. Lastly, where suitable, they should drive the production and roll-out to relevant Spooners of scalable teaching materials, such as documents, presentations, exercises, and courses.

Conclusion

An eagerness to learn is central to what makes a great Spooner. **At Bending Spoons, we applaud this desire and we go above and beyond to back it with company time and capital.** Doing so benefits both the Spooner and Bending Spoons in the long run: When an individual improves their skills or nourishes their passion for their role, it's likely to positively impact the company while progressing the individual's development. Furthermore, evolving and improving promote Spooner fulfillment, which is a priority for Bending Spoons as a company.

We invite Spooners to be in the driver's seat, autonomously choosing how to use the company's resources to propel their learning. In keeping with our commitment to freedom and responsibility, we apply only the bare minimum of checks and controls, placing our trust in Spooners to make wise decisions. All Spooners (and especially function leads) should encourage and support their colleagues as they invest in learning.