Workshop: Self-Directed Learning

Diagnose, Plan, Prove It, Stick With It

Bonus material for uniquestoremarket.com's “Self-Directed Learning” guide. A facilitator script that walks a client or small group through the guide's five-step method (Knowles: diagnose, formulate goals, identify resources, choose & implement a strategy, evaluate) live, in one session.

Session objective

By the end of this session, each participant leaves with: (1) one specific, honestly-rated gap inside their chosen topic, (2) a short milestone plan to close it, and (3) a scheduled first session plus one accountability step to keep it from stalling in week two.

Format and length

60–90 minutes. Works 1-on-1 or with a small group (up to 6–8 keeps discussion workable). Needs: paper/notebook or a shared doc, and a way for each participant to see a calendar.

Agenda

1. Opening — “same six hours, different result” (10 min)

Tell the guide's own example: two people spend six hours learning Excel. One watches tutorials in whatever order YouTube suggests and afterwards can describe several features but can't build a working spreadsheet. The other spends twenty minutes testing themselves first, finds the one real gap (a lookup formula they'd never used), and spends the rest of the time only on that — and finishes able to build the thing they needed. Ask: “Which of those two is closer to how you usually try to learn something new?”

2. Teach the five steps (15 min)

Write where everyone can see it: Diagnose → Formulate goals → Identify resources → Choose & implement a strategy → Evaluate. Make the point explicit: all five are done by the learner — a teacher or a course can support any step, but the moment someone else is diagnosing and evaluating for you, it's ordinary instruction with extra freedom of pace, not self-directed learning.

3. Guided exercise — diagnose before you study (20–25 min)

Individually (or in pairs), have each participant name one topic they want to learn, list 3–5 sub-skills inside it, and rate themselves honestly, 0–2, on each — before any studying or research. Facilitator note: the rule is “no studying before rating.” The discomfort of a low score is the point — it's the diagnosis working. The lowest-scoring sub-skill is the real, specific gap, not the topic as a whole.

4. Turn the gap into a plan (15–20 min)

Have each participant turn their gap into 5–9 milestones, ordered simplest to most applied, each with its own one-line outcome and a rough time estimate. The gap from step 3 should land as one or two of these milestones, not the entire plan.

5. Touch on proving it and staying on track (10 min)

Briefly introduce the two ideas that keep the plan from being just good intentions. Proving it: re-reading notes feels like knowing something because it's familiar — not because you could produce it from nothing. Restating from memory, a “spot the wrong statement” self-test, or naming one edge case all catch what re-reading misses. Staying on track: self-directed learning rarely fails in week one. It fails in week two or three — no deadline, no visible progress, no one to notice if it stops. The fix: a real calendar entry, a visible checklist, and

telling one other person what you're doing.

6. Share-out and close (5–10 min)

Each person says their gap, their first milestone, and their scheduled session time out loud. Close with: “The plan only works if the first session survives contact with your actual calendar this week.”

Facilitator notes

- The most common failure is participants rating themselves on the whole topic instead of specific sub-skills. Don't move to step 4 until each gap is narrow enough to attempt in one sitting.
- If someone scores themselves well on everything, push back — ask what they'd score if someone else tested them, not if they tested themselves.
- Pairs well as a live companion to the full guide at uniquestoremarket.com/self-directed-learning — the guide spreads this over five days; this session compresses the same five steps into one sitting, with someone else keeping the pace honest.