B2 Business English Speaking Class

Effort, Resilience, and the First Right Action

Based on: James Clear, “3-2-1: On following your dreams, making the first right choice, and how to handle a storm”
Date: November 12, 2026
Source: James Clear’s 3-2-1 Newsletter 1
Duration: 45 minutes
Level: B2
Primary skills: Speaking, critical thinking, professional vocabulary, goal-setting, giving advice

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- discuss the relationship between talent, effort, and career development;
- use ten high-value business-English words and phrases in context;
- explain the difference between exploring broadly and focusing narrowly;
- discuss resilience and decision-making during difficult periods;
- create a practical first-action plan for a professional goal.

Newsletter Overview

The newsletter presents five connected ideas:

1. **Talent is a gift, but effort is a choice.** The statement contrasts natural ability with the deliberate work required to develop it.
2. **Physical habits affect mental performance.** Clear suggests that sleep and regular exercise can influence mindset and the way people interpret problems.
3. **Learning requires both breadth and focus.** People may benefit from exploring widely at first and then concentrating narrowly when they want to master a skill.
4. **Difficulty can build capability.** Louisa May Alcott’s quotation compares challenges to storms and learning to sail.
5. **Progress begins with the next right action.** The question “What is the first right thing I can do?” encourages people to focus on a practical next step rather than becoming overwhelmed by the whole problem.

These ideas transfer naturally to business topics such as professional development, leadership under pressure, sustainable performance, innovation, specialisation, and execution.

Top 10 B2 Business-English Words and Phrases

Word or phrase	Meaning	Business-English example
1. Endeavour	To make a serious effort to do or achieve something	“The company is endeavouring to reduce its environmental impact.”
2. Resilience	The ability to recover and continue after difficulty or failure	“Resilience is essential when a new product does not perform as expected.”
3. Mindset	A person’s usual way of thinking about a situation or problem	“A growth mindset can help employees respond constructively to feedback.”
4. Discipline	The ability to control your behaviour and consistently do what is necessary	“Successful implementation requires discipline as well as creativity.”
5. Capability	The ability or capacity to do something effectively	“The training programme aims to strengthen the team’s digital capabilities.”
6. Explore	To investigate or try different ideas, areas, or possibilities	“The innovation team should explore several solutions before choosing one.”
7. Master	To learn or develop a skill to a very high level	“It takes time to master complex negotiation skills.”
8. Prioritise	To decide what is most important and should be done first	“When resources are limited, managers must prioritise the actions with the greatest impact.”
9. Endeavour	A serious attempt or organised effort to achieve a goal	“Launching the new service was a major organisational endeavour.”
10. Setback	A problem or failure that delays progress but does not necessarily end a project	“The funding cut was a setback, but the team revised its plan.”

> ***Teaching note:*** *Endeavour appears twice because it is useful as both a verb (“to endeavour to improve”) and a noun (“a major endeavour”). If you prefer ten different lexical items, replace the second entry with* ***execution****: the process of putting a plan into action.*

Useful Collocations

- **show resilience**

- **adopt a growth mindset**
- **develop professional capabilities**
- **maintain discipline**
- **explore new possibilities**
- **master a specialised skill**
- **prioritise the next action**
- **overcome a setback**
- **turn a challenge into an opportunity**
- **move from strategy to execution**

Related Expressions from the Newsletter

- **the first right thing to do** — the most useful immediate action in a difficult situation;
- **follow your dreams** — pursue an important personal or professional ambition;
- **weather a storm** — survive a difficult period without giving up;
- **learn how to sail your ship** — develop the skills needed to manage challenges independently;
- **explore widely** — investigate many areas before choosing a direction;
- **focus narrowly** — concentrate deeply on one objective or skill;
- **when your body isn't right, your mind starts lying to you** — physical wellbeing can affect judgement and emotional interpretation.

45-Minute Lesson Structure

Time	Stage	Procedure
5 min	Warm-up	Ask: "In business, what matters more: talent, effort, or opportunity?" Students choose one and justify their opinion.
10 min	Vocabulary focus	Teach the ten target words. Students select five and create examples related to work, study, leadership, or career development.
8 min	Newsletter connection	Review the five ideas. Students identify which idea is most practical in a workplace and explain why.

Time	Stage	Procedure
17 min	Speaking discussion	Students answer the ten questions below in pairs or small groups. Require examples and follow-up questions.
5 min	Action plan	Students choose a professional challenge and identify the first right action they can take within 24 hours.

Ten B2 Speaking Questions

6. **Is effort more important than talent in professional success, or does the answer depend on the type of work?**
7. **Can discipline compensate for a lack of natural ability? Give an example from business, education, sport, or your own experience.**
8. **How do sleep, exercise, and physical wellbeing affect decision-making and performance at work? Should employers be concerned about this?**
9. **What does a growth mindset look like in a professional environment? How does it change the way someone responds to criticism or failure?**
10. **When should a learner explore widely, and when should they focus narrowly on one skill or area of expertise?**
11. **What capabilities should professionals develop now to remain valuable in a changing job market?**
12. **How can a leader help a team remain resilient during a difficult period such as a failed launch, budget cut, or loss of a major client?**
13. **What is the difference between a useful challenge and an unnecessary source of stress? How can managers tell the difference?**
14. **When you face a complex problem, how do you identify the first right action instead of becoming overwhelmed by the entire situation?**
15. **What professional dream or long-term goal would you like to pursue, and what small action could you take this week to move towards it?**

Follow-Up Prompts for Longer B2 Answers

Use these prompts to encourage more developed responses:

- **Can you give a specific example?**
- **What would be the risk of doing nothing?**
- **Would this work for every employee?**
- **How could a manager support this?**
- **What would success look like?**
- **How would you measure progress?**
- **Could this strategy create a new problem?**
- **What would you do if the first attempt failed?**

Functional Language for Goals and Resilience

Discussing priorities

- "The first action I would prioritise is ___."
- "Rather than trying to solve everything at once, I would ___."
- "The most urgent issue is ___, while the long-term issue is ___."
- "This action would create momentum because ___."

Talking about setbacks

- "The project experienced a setback when ___."
- "Although the result was disappointing, the team learned ___."
- "We need to distinguish between a temporary setback and a fundamental failure."
- "The best way to recover would be to revise the plan and ___."

Giving advice

- "I would recommend focusing on one capability at a time."
- "It might help to explore several options before committing to one."
- "The manager should create conditions in which people can learn from mistakes."
- "A realistic first step would be ___."

Discussing wellbeing and performance

- "Physical wellbeing can influence the quality of professional judgement."
- "The company should support healthy routines without becoming intrusive."
- "Rest is not necessarily a lack of ambition; it can protect long-term performance."
- "Sustainable performance requires both effort and recovery."

Mini Case Study: The First Right Action

Situation

A small company has lost an important client. The team is worried about revenue, morale, and job security. Several employees want to redesign the entire business immediately, while others are waiting for senior management to give them instructions. The CEO asks the team: “What is the first right thing we can do?”

Student Task

In groups, decide:

16 What should the company do in the next 24 hours?
17 What information should it collect before making major decisions?
18 Which capabilities should it strengthen?
19 Should it explore several new markets or focus narrowly on one opportunity?
20 How can the leadership team build resilience without creating unrealistic pressure?

Success Criteria

Students should:

- use at least five target vocabulary items;
- identify one immediate action and one long-term strategy;
- distinguish exploration from commitment;
- acknowledge the setback without becoming overly negative;
- explain how the team would measure progress.

Final Action Plan

Ask students to complete the following sentences:

> ***My current professional challenge is _____.***
> ***The first right action I can take is _____.***
> ***The capability I need to strengthen is _____.***

> ***One setback I can learn from is _____.***
> ***I will take the first action by _____.***

Example

> *“My current professional challenge is improving my presentation skills. The first right action I can take is to record a five-minute practice presentation. The capability I need to strengthen is concise explanation. One setback I can learn from is a presentation where I included too much information. I will take the first action by Friday evening.”*

Teacher Notes

- Treat the newsletter’s statements as reflective ideas rather than scientific claims or universal rules.
- Encourage students to distinguish **effort** from simply working longer. Effective effort includes practice, feedback, rest, and adjustment.
- The discussion of sleep and exercise should remain general and non-medical. Students do not need to disclose personal health information.
- Emphasise that “following your dreams” does not mean ignoring financial realities or refusing to revise a plan.
- If the class is highly proficient, ask students to debate whether broad exploration and narrow mastery are stages that should always happen in that order.

Reference