

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

Developing our leadership capacities involves taking the time to reflect about our practice and honestly evaluate it. Different models and instruments for reflection suit different people, so you may wish to explore those that fit your preferences and style. One of the most effective tools that coaches recommend in service of learning and development is a reflective journal. Journaling and reflective writing are different from professional reporting or formal writing. It is a form of expressive writing that can deepen the reflection of learners and leaders and enhance their effectiveness.

MAIN IDEAS

What is a leadership journal?

A leadership journal (also referred to as diary, log, notebook...) is a reflective document that intends to capture a leader's self-reflection and his own assessment of experiences and interactions that may have occurred during a given period of time. It is an outlet to collect personal thoughts, impressions, emotions and actions (both past actions and future goals). Leaders can keep a journal for a wide variety of purposes:

- Going back to specific events and considering their reactions and feelings as well as how they could have behaved differently
- Exploring various options and clarifying decision making
- Capturing concerns or questions they would like to address
- Rehearsing upcoming difficult conversations
- Recording daily accomplishments (positive reinforcement) as a way to boost one's self confidence when times are difficult
- Capturing quotes, titles of relevant articles, insights from readings or courses...
- Tracking their intuitive hunches
- Brainstorming creative ideas and noting down innovative projects
- ...

The benefits of writing

While the journal is a place to record daily happenings, it also entails conscious reflection and commentary. "Like the diary, the journal is a place to 'let it all out'. But the journal is also a place for making sense of what is out... The journal is a working document." (Mary Louise Holly, 1989)

Journaling help leaders think about their experiences in both their personal and working lives:

- It allows them to explore, question and evaluate their own performance and development.
- This practice fosters "deep learning" as insights come about through one's own self-analysis and reflection rather than through discourses, memorization or books.

- Research suggests that people writing about life goals and ideals scored significantly higher in measures of psychological well-being (including happiness and satisfaction)
- Keeping a journal also evokes mindfulness and focuses the leader's attention on what matters. It moves the individual from passivity to an active state of engagement with his practice and experience.
- This thoughtful introspection has also been linked to higher levels of emotional intelligence and self-awareness. As a matter of fact, translating leadership experiences into language allows leaders to better grasp the various situations, see themselves at work, process the emotions involved and release some of the stress and anxiety that are inherent to their work.

By recording reflections on paper, learners can take a distance from both their experiences and their reflections on experience and thus have a new opportunity to recreate awareness and reconstruct their understanding (this includes challenging their own beliefs and values, gaining clarity over an issue that bothered them, deal with it and move on). This process also provides evidence to others of learning and development and can be used as a tool to monitor progress and ensure accountability.

Developing the skill of reflective writing

It is important to keep in mind that reflection can vary in depth and that there is more potential for learning from deeper reflection rather than from a superficial one. (Jenny Moon). A journal entry could be a simple descriptive story, with very little reflection, where ideas are linked by the sequence of the story rather than by meaning and insights (in this descriptive writing, there may be references to emotional reactions but they are not explored or related to behaviors). A more reflective journal entry, on the other hand, often focuses on issues and learning opportunities in the incident in question, recognizing multiple perspectives, showing a willingness to be self-questioning and standing back from the event to gauge its overall effect.

Leaders' ability to recognize the frame of reference with which an event is viewed and analyzed adds richness and depth to their journal entry and deepens their learning. When leaders take the time to go back to their recorded entries and reflectively read them, they will have a chance to notice how their experience progressively changed through their various accounts.

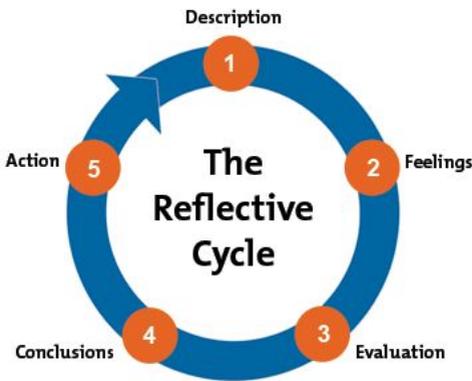
Tips for Writing Your Reflective Journal

Writing reflectively is a skill developed over time and therefore needs practice and perseverance. For many learners using a structure or framework to guide their reflective writing can be of considerable assistance. We are summarizing below a set of helpful guidelines and questions/frameworks that could help you start this practice and incorporate it in your leadership work.

- Buy a journal/notebook. Make it your own and keep it accessible.
- Make journaling a ritual, an appointment with yourself. For that end, choose the right time and place.
- Be honest, have enough courage to face yourself as you really are.
- Give yourself permission to write without judging or censoring yourself.
- Just write. Let words flow, uncensored and in whatever order they come.

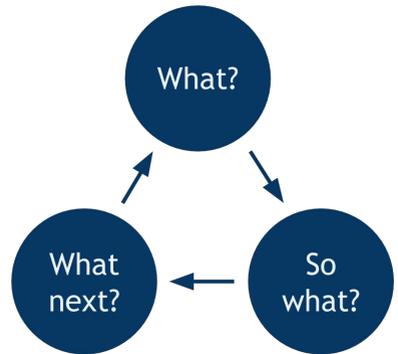
- Use your own words, keep a simple language that helps you understand what you meant when you go back to review your journal.
- Record things as soon as you can.
- Notice both affective and rational processes. Be mindful of the intensity of your feelings and the repetitions of thoughts. Notice what you feel and write it down. Notice if your feelings make you feel guilty, record that as well and deepen in it.
- Revise. Look back on old entries. Look for patterns and ways to improve.
- Dig deeper so that you can understand more. Feel free to reach out your colleagues or other people to seek help.
- Use a small set of focused questions to get started (we are suggesting a long list, choose the ones that seem more relevant to you)
- Be flexible. Stay open to methods that fits your personal talents and needs. Consider incorporating artwork to your reflection and journaling time (drawings, symbols, graphics...)
- Many reflective models (Borton's (1970) and Gibb's (1988) are two examples) are available to guide your journaling process if needed. A basic approach follows four basic elements (Description of the experience at the time, additional information that come to our attention after the event, reflection and evaluation, taking action). However, don't get trapped in too much structure (which might limit creativity and motivation).

Helpful frameworks:



Gibb's Reflective Cycle

- Description: What happened
- Feelings: What were you thinking/feeling?
- Evaluation: What was good/bad about the experience?
- Analysis: What sense can you make of the situation?
- Conclusions: What else could you have done?
- Action Plan: If it arose again what would you do?



Borton's Cue Questions

- Description - What?
(The experience, my role, my actions, the response of others, the consequences, the feelings,...)
- Reflection - So what?
(What does this imply, mean about me and others, what was going through my mind as I acted?...
- Action - Now what?
(What do I need to do in order to make things better, what needs to be considered for the future?)

Suggested questions for reflective journaling

The following questions might be helpful as you engage in reflective journaling. You don't have to answer them all, but rather use them as an inspiration or a guide for your journaling process.

Following an important meeting/conversation	After a leadership session or learning activity	During the review of my day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>From what I heard in the meeting today, what resonated the most with me?</i> ● <i>Where did I feel most connected?</i> ● <i>What caught my attention the most?</i> ● <i>What were my deeper feelings during this encounter? How did they evolve?</i> ● <i>What stays within me since this conversation?</i> ● <i>What desires did this encounter stir within me?</i> ● <i>What were life-giving patterns in this encounter that I can still remember?</i> ● <i>Is there an action that I feel I am called to take?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>From the session/reading today, what were 3 key insights that I still carry with me?</i> ● <i>Where was I most engaged? What emotions did these parts create within me?</i> ● <i>What were strong feelings I experienced? What gave rise to them?</i> ● <i>Have I received the insights I was looking for? Did new insights arise since the session/reading?</i> ● <i>Based on what I learned/read, what action do I wish to take?</i> ● <i>What was the quality of my participation? What did I contribute?</i> ● <i>What did the other members of the group contribute?</i> ● <i>Who are the people I interacted the most with? Who are the people that I (consciously or unconsciously) avoided? How do I explain this?</i> ● <i>What is my assessment of how the group is functioning thus far?</i> 	<p><i>(adapted from Ron Klug (2002:54))</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>As I look back on the day, what were the most significant events?</i> ● <i>In what ways was this day unique, different from other days?</i> ● <i>Did I have any particularly meaningful conversations?</i> ● <i>Did I do any reading? What were my reactions to it?</i> ● <i>How did I feel during the day? What were the emotional highs and lows? Why did I feel as I did?</i> ● <i>Did I find myself worrying about anything today? What was weighing on me?</i> ● <i>What has gone well? What were the joys of the day? What did I accomplish?</i> ● <i>What challenges did I struggle with? Did I fail at anything? What can I learn from this?</i> ● <i>What requires my highest attention tomorrow? (in my leadership, in my life, in the world...)</i> ● <i>What did I learn today? When did I feel most alive?</i>

IGNATIAN NOTE

As aforementioned, leaders keep journals for a wide variety of purposes. Ignatian leaders are invited to reflect on their experience in a spirit of discernment, being attentive to the signs and call of God in their leadership practice, noticing inner movements that brings them to, or pulls them away from, life in its fullness (consolations and desolations). *Refer to the resources section for a set of questions for spiritual journaling (Kevin O'Brien SJ, [link](#))*

Ignatius had time to write a spiritual diary in one of the most agitated times of his life. J. Munitiz shares that “...they [pages of the Spiritual Diary] were written by the man who had recently founded the Society of Jesus, at a time when he was extraordinarily active, both with personal apostolic work in Rome and with the taxing occupation of governing the young Society.” Ignatius realized the importance of reflection after prayer and kept a spiritual diary that helped him discern the various spiritual movements he experienced during his day (in his moments of prayer, following a spiritual conversation, after an Examen,...).

“With no worry at all, I persevered in my reading and my good resolutions; and all my time of conversation with members of the household I spent on the things of God; thus I benefited their souls. As I very much liked those books, the idea came to me to note down briefly some of the more essential things from the life of Christ and the saints, so I set myself very diligently to write a book...part of the time I spent in writing and part in prayer.” [Autobiography 11]

“After finishing the exercise I will either sit down or walk around for a quarter of an hour while I see how things have gone for me during the contemplation or meditation” [Spiritual Exercises 77]

“Everyday I used to write down what passed through my soul, and so could now find these things in writing” [Autobiography 99]

For Ignatius, spiritual journaling was also in service of helping others (sharing insights with them): “He said to me that as for the Exercises he had not produced them all at one time, rather that some things which he used to observe in his soul and find useful for himself it seemed to him could also be useful for others, and so he used to put them in writing.” Luís Gonçalves da Câmara

Keeping a spiritual journal also provides a helping tool that one can return to in times of challenges. Returning to what was written serves as an encouraging reminder of the insights and graces received and also allows a new reading of past experiences. “Spiritual journals are the keepers of consolations and truth. They are source springs for gratitude” Michael Hansen, S.J

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Understanding the importance of journaling in deepening learning and fostering self-awareness
2. Providing helpful guidelines and questions to support reflective writing
3. Engaging in a reflective process to foster leadership development