

## 14.6: Reflections - Documenting the Journey

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Examine the value of journaling and reflection
- Experiment with reflection as a daily habit



Figure 14.6.1: Taking the time to record your thoughts and activities provides new learning opportunities. (credit: “Journaling” by Vic/Flickr, CC B 2.0)

Consider the journey of learning about entrepreneurship and of becoming an entrepreneur. What new knowledge have you gained about the world of entrepreneurship? What have you learned about your own interests in becoming an entrepreneur? Discovering your interest in specific areas helps to inform the possible entrepreneurial opportunities you might want to pursue and informs you of specific processes and actions where you might excel within an entrepreneurial endeavor. Consider how you can add value to an entrepreneurial team as a team member, or in the capacity of a mentor, consultant, or champion, as you reflect on your own interests, goals, passions, and desires.

### The Power of Journaling

Reflection supports personal growth through identifying actions that worked well and actions that didn’t work out as well as hoped. A formal reflection journal for capturing daily thoughts, experiences, lessons learned, and other material, can lead to insights and identify patterns in thinking and in behaviors that may be helpful to recognize—both for personal growth and for growth as an entrepreneur.

In daily life, people seldom have the time or training to be mindful of their actions—to be aware of how they interact with others, or how they act in the variety of situations that fill their days. A daily practice of reflection can improve your ability to be mindful throughout the day and to grow through your documented reflections. Being mindful is the action of being in the moment, being aware of surroundings and fully engaged in awareness of the people around us, hearing their communications and understanding the complexity of their messages. Mindfulness moves us out of our *reaction* to situations from our own personal perspective into a more *objective awareness*—a bit like viewing your life as though you were watching it as a spectator on the sidelines. This change in perspective moves us away from reacting to situations and toward a clearer, unbiased, and focused understanding of the situation with awareness of the situation’s nuances. As we develop the practice of mindfulness, we become skilled at being aware of our own emotions and patterns, which can make us aware of more options about how we want to respond: Rather than acting in a habitual or reactive manner, we can consider responses before we react. Reflection is the first step in developing this skill.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your life up to this point. Can you identify milestones, significant decision points, and understand why you made these decisions? Forming a daily habit of writing down your thoughts about the day, challenges you faced and how you responded to each, tracking what went well and what didn’t go well is the process of reflection. Over time, you will begin to see patterns in your behaviors. Identifying these patterns or habits provides key insights into how you think, process information,

make decisions, and react to decisions. Once you notice these patterns, you have the power to analyze them and decide which are helpful and which are not. The patterns that are not helpful should be removed and replaced with better patterns. You can write down the new patterns that you want to develop as a goal in your daily reflection journal. You can then identify if you're moving closer to following the new pattern and achieving this goal.

This type of journaling activity might seem like busy work, or you might think that you don't have time for reflection. If this is how you feel, try following this advice for a couple of weeks and then reconsider, or conduct your own research to find articles that discredit reflection. There is a vast body of research that supports reflection as an important part of self-growth and self-realization. Some documented benefits in these studies include learning from mistakes, discovering new insights and ideas, and increases in reported happiness and satisfaction with life and relationships, increased mindfulness, and increased self-understanding resulting in feeling more power to choose how one interacts with the world—feeling empowered rather than the victim of a situation.<sup>13,14,15</sup>

## The Impact of Reflection

Gino and Staats noted four categories that hinder success; “biases cause people to focus too much on success, take action too quickly, try too hard to fit in, and depend too much on experts.”<sup>16</sup> Their point is that the focus on action and success can get in the way of being successful, or of even knowing what success looks like. Gino and Staats' research identified challenges related to the category of the focus on success. The first three challenges related to the bias toward success include the fear of failure, a fixed mindset, and overreliance on past performance, topics discussed earlier as impediments to the entrepreneurial team's success and ability to recognize the need for adaptability<sup>17</sup>. Under the concept of a bias toward action, Gino and Staats identified two challenges: exhaustion and lack of reflection. Exhaustion prevents entrepreneurs from contributing at top—or even normal—levels, while a lack of reflection reduced performance by 20 percent, according to their findings.<sup>18</sup> Lack of reflection not only decreased performance but also decreased individual, team, and organizational learning. The U.S. Army uses a system of after-action reviews to reflect on actions, successes, and opportunities for improvement. Another common name for this type of reflection in the business world is post-mortem or lessons learned: the action of reflecting on projects or decisions to identify best practices and areas for improvement. Consider the medical community: What would happen if after every surgery or medical diagnosis, no one analyzed the consequences of the surgery or diagnosis? Might we still be using mercury to kill germs or leeches for bloodletting?

The last two biases identified by Gino and Staats are a bias toward fitting in and a bias toward experts, with two sub-challenges within each area. Under bias toward fitting in, the first challenge is believing you need to conform, and the second challenge is failure to use your strengths.<sup>19</sup> The pressure to conform is present throughout our lives. We are taught to form a line to enter the kindergarten class, the movie theater, or the cafeteria. We are taught to raise our hand to ask or answer a question. This training to conform makes perfect sense in some situations, but we also need to feel comfortable following a different path or approach to living our lives. Again, reflection can help entrepreneurs recognize when they feel pressured to conform through a closer awareness of inner thoughts and feelings. Increased awareness of our thoughts and feelings often leads to more confidence in expressing our thoughts. Following this process also contributes to recognizing your strengths.

In the findings about bias toward experts, the two challenges identified are an overly narrow view of expertise and inadequate frontline involvement. The dependence on experts can create a situation where entrepreneurs assign responsibility for the information and/or decision-making to someone who might have an area of expertise, without realizing that an expert would not be aware of the complexities present within the venture. The expert likely has a pattern or system that has been success for other companies and in other situations, but this advice might not represent the best information or advice for your venture. Involving the frontline team, as well as other sectors of your venture, in discussions and decision-making presents multiple perspectives well worth accessing.

As you build the habit of reflection in your life, and even within your venture, consider how the challenges discussed frame your reflections. Have you made decisions because you wanted to fit in? Do you and your team have a narrow definition of expertise? Did someone give you a key insight that you disregarded because this person did not fit your picture of an expert or informed person? Are you involving the right people in discussions?

## Documenting Your Journey

As part of your reflection activity, another benefit is to document your journey. If you have identified an opportunity or have started to build your venture, now is the perfect time to keep a journal and document your journey. Each day you face new challenges and exciting ideas that stretch your own learning and growth. Tracking the daily events provides you with a roadmap to use for your next venture, or as a guide to build your knowledge base in moving into a mentor or consultant role. Have you ever asked yourself, why didn't I write that down? We assume that important and insightful ideas will stick in our minds and that we will readily

remember them. But in reality, we often forget these key insights and ideas. Through journaling, we can record and reflect on our daily activities and key insights.

#### LINK TO LEARNING

This [TED Talk on creatives by Adam Grant](#) presents some of the concepts of this chapter, framed around Dr. Grant's research as a professor at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, on creatives. His book, *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*, shares more of his findings.

Are there biases and habits that hold you back from being a creative, as defined in this chapter and by Dr. Grant? If so, what methods can you use to break through these biases and habits?

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