

# Review Your Thoughts, Actions, and Impact.

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## How often do you pause to learn?

If you're like most people, you probably think about what happened during the day—maybe on your ride home, maybe at home with your spouse or your friends, maybe in the middle of the night when you are trying to sleep but can't seem to turn your brain off.

However, just thinking about what happened during the day, and probably beating yourself up about it, is not learning. That takes an additional step: reflection.

Athletes, actors, and musicians record their performances and watch the tape. They look at their performance and make notes about what they can do to improve. Some organizations and military groups use an after-action report as a way to debrief what happened, what they learned, and how they want to apply those lessons in the future.

This act of reflection—a pause before moving on to the next thing—gives us a chance to grow from our experiences. This is especially important for leaders, because it's one of the best tools available to us if we want to learn from our successes, learn from our mistakes, and learn from the example of others.

Ultimately, to get the most out of the lessons that life teaches us, you must reflect. You must review your thoughts, actions, and impact. How do you do that? By asking yourself four key questions.

### REASONS FOR SELF-REVIEW

Why is it important to review our thoughts, actions, and impact? First of all, our actions impact others, whether we recognize it or not. Our actions can lift others up, leaving them inspired and standing a bit taller, or we can knock them down, leaving them feeling hurt or more diminished than we found them.

We don't have to end up in the principal's office to be reminded that our actions have consequences. The question is not just what



impact do we want to have on other people, but what impact are we actually having?

Not only do our actions have an impact, but our thoughts do as well. Our thoughts and emotional responses to an event influence the choices we make, which influence the actions we take, which result in an impact. Our thoughts and resulting actions have an impact in the moment and over time.

To realize our potential, we must pause a little more. That gives us space to make a few more conscious choices that align with the impact we want to have on others. Make those choices over a lifetime, and imagine the impact you could have.

### YOUR THOUGHTS MATTER

Our thoughts can be a source of emotional well-being. When my thinking grows negative and I think everything is terrible and everyone is evil and the universe has it in for me, that is a good sign that I'm burned out or tired or hungry. In these situations, my negative thoughts can spiral out of control.

When we review our thoughts, actions, and impact, we want to reflect on what is going on for us. In a mindfulness practice such as



meditation, we might notice our thoughts and nonjudgmentally allow them to pass.

In other cases, we may mentally discipline ourselves to stop our negative thinking. According to Dr. Jacques Dallaire, our conscious minds have a great deal of influence over our unconscious minds. Rather than focusing on all the things we can't control, he recommends that in the moment, we focus on what is under our control, including our thoughts. When you have a negative thought, Dallaire recommends redirecting it to something you can impact.

When we focus too much on the things we can't control and we begin to feel stress, our view narrows. We begin to miss things in the wide view that may be incredibly important. If we are not reviewing our thoughts, actions, and impact, we might not realize we are too narrow or too wide at the wrong times.

#### **ASK YOURSELF FOUR QUESTIONS**

There are many ways to review our thoughts, actions, and impact. Some people like to reflect on their drive home. Some like to reflect while they are doing an activity that does not need a lot of mental horsepower, like folding laundry or mowing the lawn. However and whenever you choose to reflect, you can ask yourself several questions

to help guide and frame your reflection:

- 1. What did you do? Did your actions align with your values? With your purpose*
- 2. What did you think and feel? (Remember, strong emotions reflect our deepest held values and give us insight into, well, us.)*
- 3. What impact did you have? Did the impact align with what you want to achieve in the moment and over time?*
- 4. How might you act more aligned with what you have identified as your purpose in life and your core values?*

Some people love to journal as they consider these questions. Sit down with a piece of paper, or a computer, or a fancy spiral notebook and take notes on what happened. What did you do? How did you respond to others?

Another technique is simply to notice your thoughts, feelings, and actions throughout the day and describe them in your journal. Once you have amassed a few weeks of data, go through it to look for trends. It's a great way to build your skill of mindfulness, to notice what you are thinking and feeling at any given moment. By noticing our habits of mind, we can consciously choose our thoughts versus unconsciously allowing those thoughts to run roughshod over us.





## OTHER WAYS TO REFLECT

Of course, there are other ways to reflect. Some people keep a pad beside their bed so when they wake up in the middle of the night with a thought or a fear or a to-do, they can jot it down and go back to dreamland.

I am not one of those people. If I start writing, I won't stop until daylight when I get up and go to work. I have a more extroverted method of reflecting: talking to other people and reflecting out loud. My brain works better when I engage with others who can help me sort through my thoughts and emotions and nonjudgmentally help me recognize my own thinking.

Coaches are a great resource for this, as are people who nonjudgmentally listen and reflect what they hear. So often when we engage others, we try to solve their problems or tell them what they should do, or we tsk and harrumph and judge, but when we have really good listeners, they help us reflect.

## FIND A TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS FOR YOU

To review your thoughts, actions, and impact, find a technique that works for you. If having a pretty journal filled with inspirational quotes

is your thing, do it. If you'd rather start a blog, do so. If you'd rather talk to other people and take a few notes, great.

My wife is a graphic recorder and facilitator, so she draws pictures as a way of reflecting on her thoughts, actions, and impact. That works, because it gives her a chance to reflect. Long story short, be ruthlessly pragmatic in your reflection: Do what works for you.

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