

Journaling is an Excellent Tool for Insights

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2008, published July 14, 2008, in the Savannah *Business Report and Journal*

Journaling takes time. However, it is often very insightful, and thus offers unexpected benefits!

Many of my clients have no history of journaling, so I offer some education and describe its benefits. They agree to “play around” with it a little bit. They report that sometimes it’s comfortable and fun to journal, but sometimes they can’t think of what to write, or their thoughts are too painful to record, or it just takes too much effort. After giving it serious consideration and a little practice, almost everyone concedes that journaling is indeed beneficial. But not everyone adopts journaling as a lifelong practice.

Why? Because journaling requires discipline. It’s like any habit. If your parents hadn’t insisted that you brush your teeth after breakfast, you’d never have adopted that routine behavior. Same with journaling.

No one can journal casually. You must obtain a pen and whatever blank book you’ve allocated for that purpose. You have to move to a table where you can write or find a comfortable chair for curling up.

Why is journaling so helpful? In our lives, we develop systems to make things easier to accomplish. Throughout any given day, we typically execute the activities that we’ve decided will make our lives work. Some of those procedures we’ve created. Some existed already in our families or organizations, so we just adopted them. This daily routine is called “working **in** our systems.”

But to make significant improvement, we have to step outside our systems and look at how well they function. Do they serve us by accomplishing what we want to create in and with our lives? Usually, when we stop to look around, we decide to make some improvements. Considering what to adjust to make our lives function better is called “working **on** our systems.”

Journaling allows you to hit the “pause” button of your life and consider what’s supremely important to you. It allows you to mentally evaluate what you are physically doing with your time and your life. (Remember that everything is created twice—first mentally, then physically.) Journaling allows you the opportunity to consider other options and to use your God-given imagination to evaluate what might occur if you were to choose different actions.

Your journal is always available. Your journal allows you to express ANYTHING. You’re not out to impress anyone when you journal--there is no audience. Your journal won’t share your secrets, and it compassionately accepts you, flaws and all! Your journal won’t argue with you or point out your limitations.

Further, your journal has a perfect memory! If you want to recall what you were feeling and thinking several years ago, your journal from way back then gives you exactly those emotions and perceptions. You won’t have to struggle with some vague recollection, twisted by the pressures of your intervening decisions and emotions.

Some people find journaling helpful as they consider how to best use their gifts and talents to serve others. Unfortunately, none of us arrived here on earth with an owner’s manual that tells what our unique purpose is and how we should use our limited time. Pausing to reflect through prayerful journaling allows our conscience and God to speak to us. Recording those thoughts gives life to them, and we can choose to share selectively with others who are important to us.

Journaling is merely expressing your thoughts, feelings, and perceived needs in written form. You might consider this a very powerful and non-threatening method for working on your systems to bring about improvement in your life.

Dennis Hooper is an executive coach, helping leaders build organizations of excellence. His website is www.buildingfutureleaders.com. Contact him at (770)-286-2250 or dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com.