

Reflective Journal

Leadership requires self-awareness and knowledge of our own behaviors. Our behaviors occur through repetition and are often taught and learnt from a very young age. As we grow, we lock into certain patterns of behavior that can be difficult to change. A reflective journal is a technique designed to increase self-awareness and understanding by recording personal events and by reflecting or thinking about aspects of these events in terms of one's emotional reactions, and one's behaviors. A reflective journal can help us better understand how we cope with events.

A reflective journal process that is recommended has four elements to it as a means of recording reactions and progress. This reflective journal process is based on recording the incident, your reaction, your reflection, and your realization.

INCIDENT: You may record a discussion and identify some particular aspect that you discussed that caused you some concern or discomfort

My boss raised the issue of how I respond to certain staff and suggested that...

REACTION: You write down how you reacted to the incident and it is important here that you are completely honest with yourself. This is often an emotional statement.

I felt confronted by my boss' observation. I became angry and defensive.

REFLECTION: Why did you react that way? What caused you to have that reaction? Why was it so negative/positive?

Later, I analysed my reaction and realised that I don't like facing up to some of growth points. By my boss raising this issue I have to face something that I don't often think about.

REALIZATION: What can you learn from this incident? How can you improve in this situation? What behavior was identified here?

On reflection I realise that I often respond to staff in such a way and that it is not conducive to better relationships. I need to become aware of this response and to learn to respond differently.

The reflective journal process outlined here requires commitment and time to gain the maximum benefit from the process. However, it opens up excellent learning opportunities. A person might find it particularly useful after a session where some aspect does not go as well as expected and they may want to reflect on how they could better manage that situation next time.

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