



Here's why you should go for a walk and just think.

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If you attended this year's TML Annual Conference and Exhibition, you experienced many opportunities to gain insights from city and state officials, legal experts, and business leaders from around Texas.

To truly learn from those experiences, it's important to take time to think about – or reflect on – all the information you gathered.

In this sense, *reflect* means that you intentionally synthesize, abstract, and articulate the ideas you gain in a learning experience.

Reflecting on what you learn makes experience more productive.

Experience – or practice – is an essential part of the learning process. And reflection improves the results you get from practice.

Reflection builds your confidence in your ability to achieve a goal, and that creates a better understanding of the experience and more comprehensive learning.

Cognitive psychology researchers who study the ways we learn suggest that once a person has accumulated a certain amount of experience with a task, the benefits of gaining additional experience are less than the benefits of reflecting on that experience.

In a study conducted by faculty at Harvard Business School, the University of North Carolina, and HEC Paris,

researchers gave two groups of participants the same task to perform.

They then gave Group A time to reflect their experience with the task, and Group B the same amount of time to gain additional experience with the task.

Group A significantly outperformed Group B when they both repeated the task.

Our brains are designed for this kind of reflection.

Neurobiologists at the Association for Psychological Science describe how reflection actually enhances learning.

They found that neural networks responsible for maintaining and focusing our attention work in unison with a brain function that is spontaneously induced during rest, daydreaming, and reflection.

The neuroscientists refer to this as *constructive internal reflection* and encourage a balance between external attention and internal reflection.

Reflection is also valuable for school children.

If you have kids, you know how easily they find ways to keep distracted.

Computer games, phone apps, and online entertainment are all at their fingertips.

But educators know the importance of constructive quiet time to help children learn and retain more from their classroom experiences.

This reflection has a positive effect on children's behavior too. In fact, school systems around the country are adding time for quiet reflection to their daily curriculum.

A recent news story described how the Robert W. Coleman elementary school in Baltimore, Maryland is using meditation instead of detention. Since they began the practice about a year ago, school suspensions have dropped to zero, and test scores have risen significantly.

Combine thinking and walking for even greater benefits.

Now that cooler weather is here, it's the perfect time to enjoy the great outdoors in your community. And it's not just the fresh breeze and clear skies that are good for you.

Walking changes our brain chemistry. When we go for a walk, our heart pumps faster, circulating more blood and oxygen to our muscles and our brain.

Walking at even a moderate pace helps people perform better on tests of memory and attention. Walking creates a connection between the rhythm of your body and these mental processes.

Walking promotes new connections between brain cells; slows down weakening of brain tissue that comes with aging; increases the volume of the brain area important for memory; and elevates levels of molecules that stimulate growth of neurons and how they transmit messages.

It's a unique synergy that you don't experience when you're jogging, biking, or other activities.

So, if you want to gain the most benefit from the TML Annual Conference and other learning experiences, take a walk, reflect on the ideas you heard, and think about how you will put those ideas into practice in your community.