

The Remembrance of Reflection

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The Well Workout's mission is to ignite a wellbeing revolution based on one simple belief: *that doing well – at work and in life – starts with being well.*

Using practices that are easy, effective and enjoyable, our one-of-a-kind wellbeing experiences are designed to increase energy, balance, connection, and joy – all in minutes a day and without breaking a sweat.

Four Themes

The Well Workout's philosophy is rooted in two evidence-based premises:

- First, that the *stressors of modern work and life have thrown our collective wellbeing out of balance – physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially*
- Second, that *wellbeing is a skill* that can be learned and practiced just like playing an instrument or a sport.

The Well Workout helps people rebalance holistically and, when done with others, helps foster cultures of wellbeing.

Participants achieve measurable results by engaging in interval-style workouts that leverage four practice pillars:

- **Play** – to rebalance from a focus on work as the core driver of identity and self-worth
- **Rest** – to rebalance from a life of perpetual *motion* and a culture that rewards busyness as a badge of honor
- **Reflection** – to rebalance from an addiction to action and the cycle of deciding and doing
- **Connection** – to rebalance from the heroes' journey of individual achievement

In this brief, we'll examine the value of **reflection** (the third practice pillar) as a way to rebalance from time spent in action – both deciding what to do next and then doing it.

A Bridge to Learning

The practice of self-reflection is defined by The Cambridge Dictionary as *'the activity of thinking about your own feelings and behavior and the reasons that may lie behind them.'* Our ability to engage in a process of reflection - about ourselves and our experience in the world - is fundamental to what it means to be human.

Fun fact: It has been shown that other intelligent animals such as apes, whales and dolphins are also capable of using self-reflection to learn and change their behavior.

In ancient times, the commitment to regular introspection was elevated to a noble pursuit by some of the world's great philosophers – from Socrates' famous utterance that *"an unexamined life is not worth living"* to Descartes' assertion *"I think therefore I am."*

Numerous present-day scholars have reaffirmed the importance of reflective practice for both high performing individuals and teams. Among them is organizational learning expert Peter Senge who observed that the mental models we use to make sense of ourselves and our environment are dependent on *"turning the mirror inward, learning to unearth our internal pictures, bring them to the surface, and hold them rigorously to scrutiny."*

Reflection then, it seems, acts as a mental bridge between *having* a new experience and *learning* from it. Therefore, if we want to keep learning, we need to invest time on a regular basis reflecting on our experiences in order to evolve our patterns of thinking and behavior. in order to evolve our patterns of thinking and behavior.

Doing vs. Being

In her provocative new book *Do Nothing: How to Break Away from Overworking, Overdoing and Underliving*, journalist and author Celeste Headlee asserts that humans enjoyed a balance of action (doing) and reflection (being) for nearly 300,000 years until the Industrial Revolution gave rise to a 'cult of efficiency.'

This shift, Headlee argues, was ignited (quite literally) by the invention of the steam engine and its subsequent applications. Almost overnight, work norms evolved from completing discrete, time-bound tasks like harvesting a crop to doing repetitive, round-the-clock assembly line jobs at a factory. In response to this technology-fueled change, Headlee laments that, *"speed and efficiency are, by their nature, antithetical to introspection and intimacy."*

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Over two centuries later, the engine of efficiency is still firing on all cylinders in our fast-based hyper-connected world, as evidenced by the following statistics about how 21st century Americans spend their time:

When working:

- The average American spends over 51% of his/her time answering irrelevant emails (23%), attending unproductive meetings (16%) and commuting (13%) according to this 2018 study reported by Inc.com.
- Another similar survey of senior managers reported by HBR indicated that 64% of respondents felt that attending meetings got in the way of deep thinking.

And as for leisure time:

- In the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015 Time Use Survey, 'relaxing and thinking' ranked in a distance 6th place behind watching TV, playing video games, exercising, socializing, and reading. This same category was not called out as a statistically significant element of the same 2018 Survey.

These numbers shed light on an ironic truth: That we are alive during a period of history that has been dubbed 'The Information Age' – in which over 1 Billion people worldwide are classified as 'knowledge workers' – and yet many of us don't seem to be spending much time 'thinking about our thinking'. Let's turn now to some possible solutions.

Practicing Reflection

Establishing a regular reflection practice can take many forms. For some, waking up early to think, pray, meditate, or write in a journal works well. For others, taking a solitary walk in nature in the late afternoon or doing a mental review of the day just before bed is effective.

The Well Workout offers yet another option – to engage in *short, reflection exercises in community*. This approach builds the muscle of individual introspection while also removing the potential barrier of isolation and loneliness. By practicing reflection in the company of others, Well Workout participants experience a powerful, reinforcing loop in which they both *see and are seen*.

There are three steps to The Well Workout's Reflect practice:

1. First, relax your body and mind (our Play and Rest practices help with this step). You may also find it useful to visualize a clear sky or vast ocean to invite a quality of openness.

2. Now, focus your introspection on one juicy question – our reflection prompts can be remembered with the acronym **PAUSE**:

Purpose – what matters most to me?

Attitudes – what experiences have most shaped me?

Understanding – what do I know and not know about a person or issue?

Strengths – what activities give me energy or are effortless?

Emotions – what words best describe how I feel right now?

3. Finally, decide how you will apply your insights going forward. What would you tell another person about what you've gained from 'thinking about your thinking'?

What Scientists Say

The list of benefits that can be felt from even a few minutes of regular reflection is long and includes:

- Improved self-awareness and self-regulation – two key components of emotional intelligence
- Enhanced perspective and the ability to respond, not react – both of which have been shown to enhance decision-making
- Improved confidence – which can lead to greater levels of motivation and goal achievement

Furthermore, research in call centers demonstrated that employees who spent time at the end of each day reflecting about lessons learned performed 23% better after just 10 days than those who did not reflect.

Another study of working adults found a similar result when those who were prompted to use their (passive) commute to think about and plan for their day were happier, more productive, and less burned out than people who didn't. Finally, some neuroscience. Through fMRI scans, we have learned that the act of self-reflection activates the Default Mode Network (DMN), an area of our brain that is involved in nearly all significant cognitive and emotional activities.

At the risk of sounding glib, this seems like a pretty darn good ROI for a few minutes of proverbial navel-gazing, doesn't it?

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What Our Clients Say

The Well Workout offers an easy, effective, and enjoyable framework to help individuals and organizations remember to reflect on a regular basis. Here is what some of our participants have said about their experience:

"Regardless of how I felt at the start of the workout, I consistently walked away with a greater sense of calmness, balance, and resilience to take on whatever lies ahead."

"I now have the tools that not only help me understand why it's important but how to practice putting play, rest, reflection and connection back into my life."

References

The Fifth Discipline—The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization by Peter Senge, Doubleday, 1990

Doing Nothing—How to Break Away from Overworking, Overdoing, and Underliving by Celeste Headlee, Penguin Random House, 2020

In closing

Like so many other aspects of our wellbeing, the practice of reflection is a choice which requires both intention and attention.

Our fast-paced, tech-enabled modern lifestyles have created barriers to reflection which can – and must – be overcome if we are to continue to learn and evolve as individuals, organizations, and a global society.

The Well Workout offers a novel and scalable approach to developing a personal reflection practice while also promoting culture of learning. Let's be well so we can do well ... together.

If you are ready join the wellbeing revolution to remember reflection, please reach out and connect at hello@thewellworkout.com.

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