

How to be successful in life: Reflection is the way

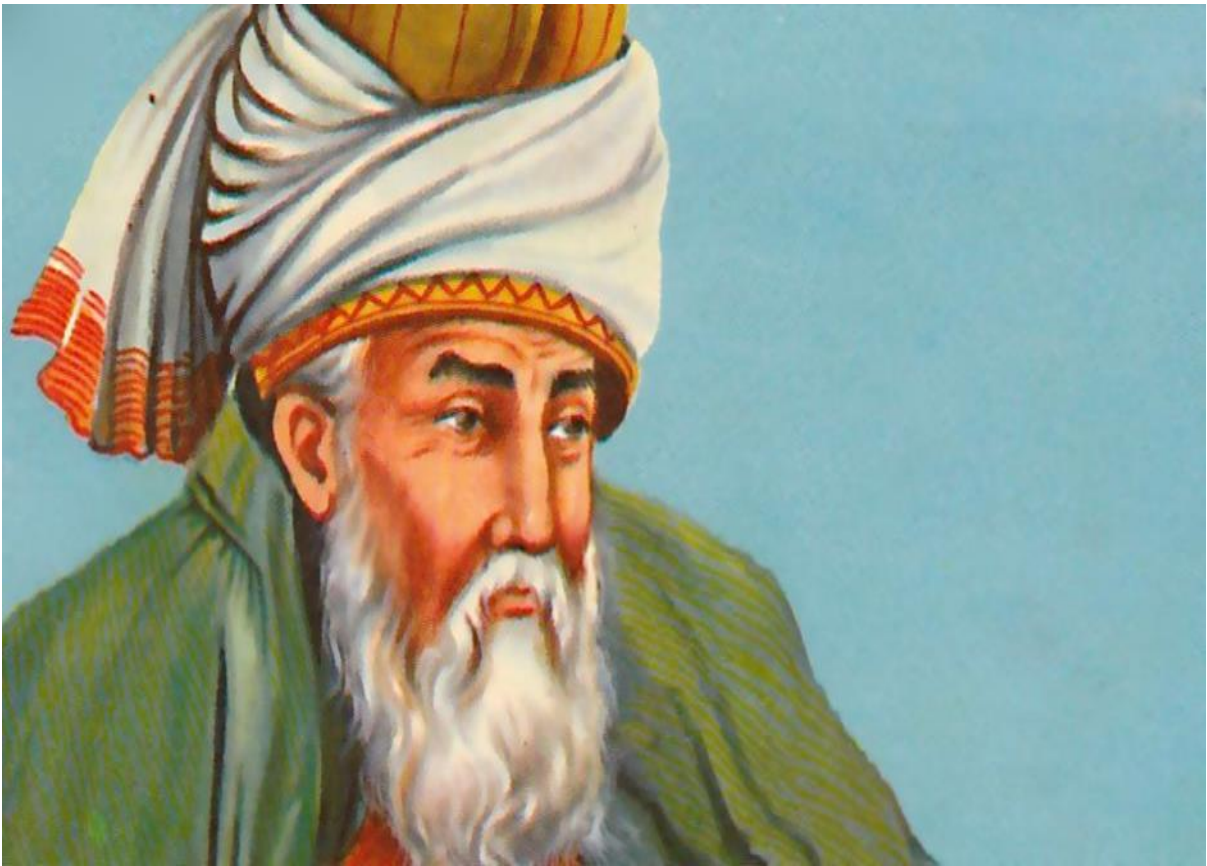


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Edgehill University**

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Do you pay regular visits to yourself? Start now.

Rumi

Background

Confucius (supposedly) said: “*By three methods we learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is the noblest; second, by imitation, which is the easiest and; third, by experience, which is the bitterest*”, and Socrates followed it up with his “*The unexamined life is not worth living*”. Reflection then is the secret to a successful life, but how does one become a reflective practitioner? While there is a lot of science and theory behind reflection, the practice is rather easy actually; do not get bogged down in the technicalities. Basically, it is asking yourself:

- What am I doing?
- Why am I doing it?
- How well am I doing it?
- Can I do it better?

As you get going, the practice will become easier and more meaningful with the why (should I do this?) coming before the what to do (doing the right thing based on evidence and learning from reflection). You will get better at making sure that your time is well spent and only on activities that are part of your life goal. You will move from reflection-on-action (the retrospective look) to the real-time reflection-in-action and start living in the moment.

There is no one right way, no checklist, no one watching; do whatever works, try writing in prose or verse and do it alone or with a mentor.

In essence, reflection is about being wise. Piet Hein puts this much better in his ‘groot’: The road to wisdom

*The road to wisdom? - Well, it's plain
and simple to express:*

*Err
and err
and err again
but less
and less
and less.*

But this only works if you learn from mistakes and for that you need to record, analyse and change- in other words, reflect!

This is where this journal comes in, as a personal record of your learning and journey to a successful life through professional and personal growth. For further details of reflective practice you can watch this video - [Introduction to reflection - YouTube](#) and also see www.ramareflections.com

You will need to start by being clear about why you want to become a reflective practitioner; do not just learn some definitions from a book but really get to its true meaning. Is it the means to becoming successful, rich, famous, etc? Then define

what these terms mean: what is success, what does being rich or famous mean. Whatever you write will be right, for you; no one is judging you, and after all it is your life. But do note that whatever you choose as your reason will determine what you need to do to achieve it.

Whether you like it or not all the work will have to be done by you; you can get help from mentors and coaches, take some courses – including on how to appraise critically and how to become resilient, and read books, but all these will only get you so far without that most essential ingredient – and which is reflective practice! As the writer Khalil Gibran said in his famous book “The Prophet”: *For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man.* I can tell you about it but that will not have any effect without work from you. It is Action not Words that will make the difference – so practise reflection!

How to use this journal

This is your journal. Use it as you see fit, personalise it, throw it away, whatever. Take care of this journal, and over time it will be a source of great joy as you review your life!

Remember two rules: be honest with yourself (nobody else needs to see this journal, without your permission), and only use it if it helps you and you enjoy writing it. There is no requirement to do anything, it is entirely your choice.

However, if you want you can share the key points of your reflections with your mentor/coach, to help with your discussions with them. In any case, you should prepare well before you 'meet' your mentor or go on another course/conference, and this is where the journal will be a useful reminder and prompt.

So, get started with a few exercises, as follows.

Exercise One:

Start by writing about yourself: who are you, what drives you, what are your values, what are you good at, what you hope to achieve in life etc?

Exercise Two:

Why did you come to the conference, what preparation did you make in advance, what did you hope to achieve on the day, did you get what you hoped for and if not then why not?

Exercise Three:

What did you already know about reflection? How do you practise it currently?

Exercise Four:

What did you learn from the Conference? What will you do as a result – be very specific.

Exercise Five:

This will stretch you a bit: Think about yourself towards the end of your career (retirement), imagine yourself looking back on your life and reflecting on: Did you achieve what you wanted? Are you at peace with yourself? And then use this visualisation to set out your life goals.

Additional Notes

Review this journal periodically and keep adding pages, noting what you have done since the last time, and by reference to what you had written earlier reflect on whether you are still 'on course' or do you need to change anything. Stay true to your values and life goals and overall have a clear aim, your North Star so to speak.

You can also add pages on specific topics of interest to you. I have shared an example on Leadership in the next section as a template; depending on your interest you may want to start additional pages to reflect on research, management, teaching etc, or whether and why you need a mentor or coach and hence how will you go about finding one and making best use of them?

Overall, try and have some sort of a structure to your practice, including making time every three or six months for visiting this journal, and every time deciding some SMART objectives for the next visit!

An example: Leadership

Leadership is all the rage these days- everyone is being encouraged to become a leader. There is a plethora of courses, books, videos etc on the subject. Have you however tried stepping back for a minute and reflecting on this and asking what exactly does it mean to be a leader?

Not sure what you will come up with, but to me leadership boils down to a few basics, as follows:

1. Knowing yourself – everything will always come down to knowing your (and inculcating good) values, strengths, weaknesses and most importantly having insight; do not ever fool yourself.
2. Following your passion – being very clear what you believe in, my life mantra has been Do good, Have fun and Make (decent) money; and being flexible in terms of methods to use to stay true to your passion.
3. Doing your best at whatever stage of life you are at, with whatever you have – student, practitioner, child, parent, friend, whichever role you are in at that time and doing it well with available resources, living in the moment.
4. Stepping up if there is a problem and doing the best you can – not waiting for permission when things are going wrong, getting involved, and taking the lead if necessary or deferring to someone who is leading ‘better’, nothing like being a good follower.
5. Checking if you are being kind to others – not complaining and always respecting others, apart from a few truly evil people, most are trying their best.
6. Constantly learning – reading widely, remaining curious, meeting different people, travelling, and all with an open mind and not just to reinforce existing views.
7. Looking after yourself – most important, if you do not self-care you are doomed, both physically and mentally; do not take things too seriously, have a life, laugh daily and often, and overall become resilient.

There is nothing else (*sic*) in books or courses; in different ways they will come down to these basics! Success and fame come from following passion, practising good values and hard work. In my view, to be a good leader you need to go inside yourself first and find out about who you are. You should also read widely and especially ‘good’ biographies – there is a saying that all leaders are readers but not all readers are leaders! If you do these things then you can make better use of any formal courses and mentors/coaches also.

Finally, in case you are wondering about my qualifications for speaking about Leadership- how did I learn, then here are some things I have done during my career:

- Have had periodic psychometric assessments of various types either as part of personal/team developments or job interviews

- Been on some formal courses including the Judge Institute (Cambridge) International Health Leadership Programme, Kings Fund Leadership course and Greater Manchester Common Purpose Programme
- Held jobs as a director of public health and medical director in the NHS and other roles in academic, private and voluntary sectors
- First member of the UK Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management (not current)
- Former Director of Clinical Leaders Network

But the most essential thing for me was reflective practice- the golden thread that ran through all these and which helped me to make sense of what I was being taught and to apply it to my life plans.

Why do not you make some notes on this topic now?

Your notes

What do you agree with in the above section?

What do you disagree with and why?

What will you do now – be specific?

Date:

Further note/s (keep adding notes as you learn and reflect)

Date/s:

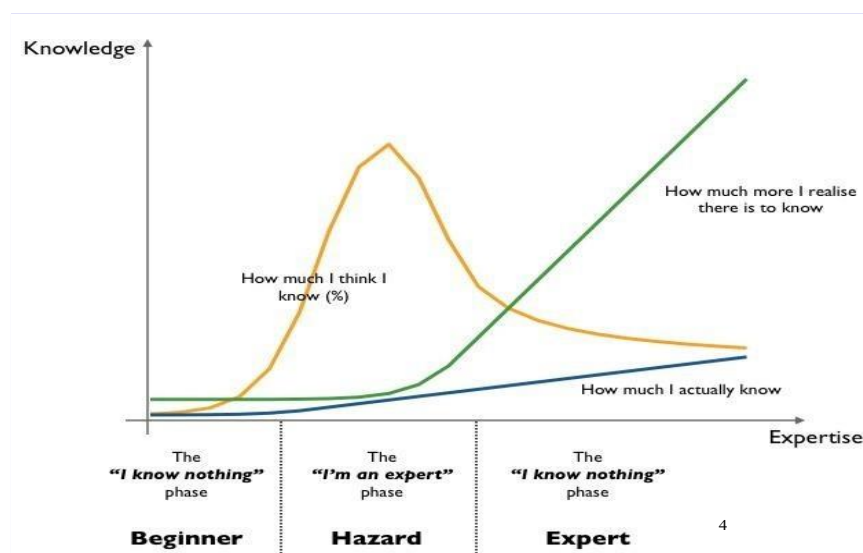
Concluding remarks

Let me finish with this quote, attributed to Aldous Huxley, who makes a distinction between Knowledge and Understanding, with the former passed between persons, but the latter being intimate and subjective, and which cannot be so transmitted:

Understanding is not conceptual, and therefore cannot be passed on. It is an immediate experience, and immediate experience can only be talked about (very inadequately), never shared. Nobody can actually feel another's pain or grief, another's love or joy or hunger. And similarly, nobody can experience another's understanding of a given event or situation... We must always remember that knowledge of understanding is not the same thing as the understanding, which is the raw material of that knowledge. It is as different from understanding as the doctor's prescription for penicillin is different from penicillin.

Understanding is not inherited, nor can it be laboriously acquired. It is something which, when circumstances are favourable, comes to us, so to say, of its own accord. All of us are knowers, all the time; it is only occasionally and in spite of ourselves that we understand the mystery of given reality.

So what you need to work on, and develop, is the understanding; and hopefully as you become a reflective practitioner you will increase your understanding of self and your context and which is essential for a successful life. Remember, knowledge itself is unlimited as the more you know, the less you actually know- see diagram below; try and be the Expert!



Reflection should not be a one-off activity but needs to become routine whereby you automatically review and renew yourself as you progress in life. See it as your Critical Friend – your own internal critic, but also the correcting mechanism.

Hopefully this journal will help and set you up for this life long journey of discovery and personal development – since that is what it is, a journey. In embarking on it, you need to know yourself, where you want to be and how you will manage your time.

Over to you

As you use this Journal and talk to others, ask questions and listen, observe with an open mind, add more topics, document your learning from courses/projects/meetings, write in prose or verse, draw or doodle. Most importantly, act on what you learn, slowly and steadily, all as part of your journey of improvement.

Look after the Journal and it will look after you!

You can do it.

All the best.

NOTE: The pictures are from the internet; I am thankful for their creators and apologise if I have broken any copyright rules and will make amends if you let me know. Contact: madhokrajan@gmail.com

Lament

*When it was time for them to learn
you were not ready
now when you want to teach them
they are too busy
to talk to you about
love, life, loss, peace and joy*

*You missed the chance, they say
but how could I have taught them
without knowing myself first
now they must make own mistakes
find the hard way, it's all avoidable
and the cycle goes on*



**With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as tackled the thing
That couldn't be done and he did it.**

—Edgar Guest

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