

## Why self-reflection turbocharges our performance and growth

In leadership programmes, management away-days, strategic brainstormings and other developmental and process work, **reflection sessions** are often a key component. This is very important, as we need more than good keynote speaker inputs, presentations, data overviews and progress updates if we are to grow. We can't just watch the game, we need to play it too, becoming actively involved and experiencing ourselves and others differently than just by watching.

To harvest the benefit of those inputs and presentations, we need to have a way to apply this learning to ourselves, to put the learning into practice, see what differences we notice as we challenge ourselves to go beyond where we feel comfortable, e.g. in participating in an emotionally demanding role-play situation. That is where reflection comes in. Learning and development is about far more than consuming data, pouring information into people and hoping it sticks. Processing learning experiences systematically, applying them and sowing seeds for long term growth requires experiential learning. Learning by doing.

When we are not in a leadership course, group learning programme, meeting or common learning environment with others, **self-reflection** provides a powerful tool that we can use to keep ourselves on track, and continue to build what we learned in the group programme. Self-reflection is a way to fuel healthy new habit formation and to continue to move forward with the new insights we have gained and want to strengthen.

### So, what is self-reflection, why is it impactful, what is needed for it to be effective? And what's the difference between reflection and over-thinking?

In my coaching session with clients, reflection processes are one of the most profound ways we use to shift what someone sees currently about their situation so they can get a new perspective and see something different. And having self-reflection processes they can do by themselves afterwards are a critical component to build on what comes out of the sessions (more on this below).

These are systematic processes, not just a well-meaning monologue. Structure and focus on what we are experiencing and can be responsible for are key elements within self-reflection. Keeping our focus on those, rather than shifting our focus to everyone and everything outside us, their motives. Seeing what is within our scope of influence and control will strengthen us.

Reflection is an invitation to consider our response to carefully chosen questions depending on our goals and starting point. If someone is upset about something, then it is important to look at why they are upset, what judgements they are making about themselves and others, what they feel and how intensely, rather than going straight to try to resolve the "something" that has left them feeling upset.

This will reveal where their current focus is and raise their awareness of what else is in the bigger picture that they may be missing.

The goal here is to help someone move from being self-critical towards accepting their feelings, so they are free to move into a less critical and more self-appreciative space. It starts with getting clear what happened, the bare bones and facts, which is quite different from all the thoughts and meaning we have brought to the situation.

Outside of a coaching session, it is important for clients to have processes and tools to use to strengthen their self-reflection ability by themselves. Again, this builds on the insights gained during sessions with the coach, to sharpen the client's ability to raise their awareness and go down less familiar paths to open up new perspectives on their challenges.

An effective self-reflection process brings:

- Inner clarity
- Calm
- An acceptance of what is, even if we don't like it
- A slower pace for us to think and become present, even though the clock ticks at the same speed as before

What is a systematic self-reflection process and its characteristics?

- A set of questions that help people focus on identifying their successes and key strengths
- A regular pace and frequency, e.g. keeping a diary daily of responses to the questions
- An invitation to be generous to yourself, to identify what you've achieved, the shifts you've noticed in yourself, insights into how you did something which you would normally have done differently

Picking up on that last point, central to a strong self-reflection process is a focus on calling you to stretch yourself beyond where you are now. To show up regularly and write your reflective diary entries, including when you least feel like it. Making that shift from saying to yourself: "I'll do it when I feel like it" to "When I do it, I feel the difference, so I'll do it now".

And a strong self-reflection process invites you to dig into what emotions you notice. Emotional intelligence is a must-have for our growth and development. You can't have experiential learning without it. To start with, this might look like challenging yourself to see what emotions you can name beyond the few that you currently use, e.g. happy/sad, joy/disappointment. Explore and discover the emotional labels you don't typically use.

This experience is like swimming out a little further from the comfort of the shore where you can't put your feet on the ground. Can you face scratching the surface of something that looks like fear? If your intuition takes you there – give it your attention and see what shows up when you let in the fear rather than avoiding it.

And if your intuition doesn't take you there, you don't have to force it. When your awareness is curious and ready is the right time to explore.

### **Intuition will guide you**

So, in all self-reflection, there is no specific place for you to get to in a certain time. You are invited to go at the speed, pace and depth that intuitively feels supportive to you at the time. Your intuition really is your inner compass and best guide, not some external marker of what success looks like. Comparison with others has no place in self-reflection. It is about you and for you, nobody else.

### **Gratitude is key to self-appreciation**

Feeling gratitude privately and expressing it are both critical ways to deepen your appreciation of your life right now. As you contemplate a question like "what am I grateful for?" think of it as embracing anything you can be grateful for. Whatever speaks to you at the moment. It can vary. One day you might find something that looks small, like a fun catch-up with a colleague over coffee after the holidays. Another time you reflect, you might discover something more profoundly moving, e.g. something deeper from your soul, like a treasured memory of a special moment, a shared experience when you felt seen, you belonged, everything that you needed was present in that moment.

### **No KPIs but a new opening for action**

What are you likely to notice after a self-reflection process:

- Your circumstances are still the same
- Your external surroundings are unchanged
- Yet, what you see is different. You have taken a look inside yourself and noticed how you are seeing your life. Your vantage point is different.
- Transformation is being able to see the same things differently. Not to change them. Yet, as we start to see the same things differently, we are fuelling our ability to look differently at our lives, so different things show up compared to before.

That ability to look differently at things, to take ourselves through a self-reflection process, pays dividends when challenging situations occur e.g. a conflict with a colleague. No longer are we facing just one set of options as to how to move forward. We can process the upset we feel in a systematic way, gaining a new sense of ourselves before we jump into action and communicate with our colleagues.



That prepares us for seeing what may be the most effective action to take, at a deeper level, than logical thinking alone can do.

If you want to improve your self-reflection and enhance it in your team to turbocharge performance, reach out for a conversation [here](#).