

The Power of Reflection

At **Engine Room Business Innovation**, we believe that **'reflection'** can be a very empowering process towards the learning and growing within a business.

With our combined 40 years of coaching and facilitating we have found that the hardest people to coach are those who won't reflect — particularly those who won't **reflect on *themselves***.

As business leaders we want to succeed, so creating a self-reflective environment can lead to the creativity, energy and motivation that we need for that success. The more people know themselves and others, the more the business can achieve through increased individual productivity and enhanced collaboration.

This is **why reflection** is a key ingredient to all our programs.

Reflective thinking takes practice. It requires us to slow down, to pause and to reduce information input.

People can then be better versions of themselves, more focused and more productive. The key is to reduce the **'doing'** from a habit of busyness, and start **'thinking'** more.

Reflection gives the brain an opportunity to pause **amidst the chaos**, untangle and sort through observations and experiences, then consider multiple possible interpretations, to create meaning. This **meaning becomes learning**, which can then **inform future mindsets and actions**. For leaders, this **"meaning making"** is crucial to their ongoing growth and development.

It takes a lot of discipline to stop and think, and this is why it is a key part of the learning in all our programs. Participants in the **Manager Acceleration Program** – take time, to write their thoughts on their Reflection Form after the workshop. The form **asks the following important questions**.

1. Key Takeaways – what were your three key learnings from the workshop?
2. Changes – what is one key change that you would like to make?
3. Business Improvement Project (BIP) – what specifically from the workshop impacts the BIP?

When we sit down to think, our thoughts can sometimes be elusive.

So, writing down our thoughts powerfully supports the reflection process. As when we write thoughts down, we 'objectify' them. Our thoughts become more specific, more in focus, when we place them upon the page. And having them written down, also allows us to refine them and refer to them later.

After completing these questions, the participants of the program meet up with the business owner (sponsor) to share and discuss their learnings.

This is where the magic begins - the reflection session with the business owner increases participant's confidence and performance. The reason for this is -

- It 'opens the door', so to speak, to have a conversation with the business owner about what they have learnt (that otherwise may not have happened). This deepens and consolidates the learning – because at Engine Room we know from experience - "to teach is to learn".
- They are able to then share new concepts and ideas that they have recently learnt that could benefit the business.
- It allows them to discuss their own self-reflection – how the learnings have changed their mindset and what epiphanies or 'ah-ha' moments they experienced.
- This then leads to deeper discussions about the barriers or bottlenecks that will prevent them from progressing with their Business Improvement Project.

The Power of Reflection

- It shifts the dynamic – places the participant in the ‘teacher’ role and the business owner in the ‘curious student’ role. This shift in dynamic can be hugely validating and empowering for the participant...to know that the business owner can learn from them...the result is a growing of confidence in the participant.

In order to stop doing busywork and start doing our best work, we have to make a point of scheduling in regular time for reflection.

So, participants schedule their reflection time with the business owner and then commit to keep it. And if they find themselves trying to skip it or avoid it, they need to reflect on that!

And as stated previously ‘to teach is to learn’ – by sharing your experiences, you are still learning along the way. Many of the business owners have mentioned the reflections sessions are of absolute value to them, as they are learning along the way as well. A Win-Win outcome for the business owner and the participant.

As the participant continues through the program, they start to create a habit to reflect more on their work and personal life, and important questions are pondered – such as:

- What am I avoiding?
- How do I help my team achieve their goals?
- How am I *not* helping or even hindering my teams progress?
- How might I be contributing to my least enjoyable relationship at work?
- How could I have been more effective in a recent meeting?
- Why am I stuck in the ‘busyness’ – what needs to change?
- What have I learnt about myself?
- How can I use my potential best?
- Where is my biggest area for improvement?

Reflection requires people to do a number of things they typically don’t like to do: slow down, adopt a mindset of not knowing and curiosity, and take personal responsibility. The process can lead to valuable insights and even breakthroughs — and it can also lead to feelings of discomfort, such as:

- being out of their comfort zone of activity – like staying in the centre of the soccer goal and missing the action on the pitch.
- Feeling vulnerable – not knowing the answers or sharing how they feel in certain situations.

Despite the challenges to reflection, the impact is clear. As Peter Drucker said: *“Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection, will come even more effective action.”*

So, to be still and think allows you to consider multiple perspectives. Look at the opposite of what you initially believe. Brainstorm. You don’t have to like or agree with all of your thoughts — just think and examine your thinking.

From early roles, leaders were taught to invest where they can generate a positive Return On Investment (ROI) — results that indicate the contribution of time, talent or money paid off. Sometimes it’s hard to see an immediate ROI on reflection — particularly when compared with other uses of a leader’s time.

Think of Albert Einstein’s saying, *“If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.”* By reflecting on past experiences and performance, we refine our knowledge of exactly *how* we achieved what we did—deepening our understanding of the causal relationship between our actions and the outcomes.

The Power of Reflection

Participants on the Manager Acceleration Program get to reflect quite a lot and hence why this becomes a great habit that they develop during the program.

As they don't only reflect, after each workshop - and with the sponsor.

They also share their reflections via other means:

During, and at the end of workshops – sharing their reflections is a generous act – as they help to validate and teach other participants.

The Engine Room Online Learning platform - after reading articles, videos and material written by Engine Room, they then reflect by writing in the comments section - on what they learnt from the resource material they have just viewed.

The Coaching Sessions – with other participants and the facilitator/coaches of the program. Reflection is undertaken during these sessions to more forensically examine and discuss observations and experiences, that can provide insights and learning, that will benefit both personal growth and business improvement.

Then at the **end of the program** participants present their self-reflection's to their fellow MAP participants, sponsors and other team members from the business – these reflections include:

- What were their key/main learnings from the program overall?
- What workshops provided the 'ah-ha' moments for them?
- What new skills and concepts they have developed now?
- What have they changed (personally and professionally)?
- How did they progress with their Business Improvement Project?

So, after the program we get participants to reflect by 'doing a post-mortem' on their **Business Improvement Project**. Analyse what was successful and what was not successful about the way the BIP played out. We encourage them not to assign excuses (that is to reflect with an 'above the line' mindset), as all progress starts with being honest – with yourself. So, this is all part of the learning. The objective is to learn so they can avoid repeating the same mistakes, and instead focus on extrapolating best practices and identifying new approaches for future projects.

(I also love doing "pre-mortems" on projects, where you try to identify everything that could possibly go wrong, and then plan to avoid those 'traps'.)

Now for a final element on the topic of reflection.

We also encourage participants in all our programs to **conduct a productivity audit**. For one week, set aside 15 minutes at the end of each day to jot down a few thoughts about what helped them move the needle on their most important projects, as well as what were their biggest distractions and interruptions. Review their notes at the end of the week and see if they can identify some patterns. What were their biggest productivity drags, and what strategies could they use to minimise them in the future?

There's a notable distinction between being busy and being productive. Being busy doesn't always necessarily mean you're being productive. Despite what some might believe, being productive is less about time management and more about managing your energy and focus. It's the business of life. It's learning how to spend the least amount of energy to get the most benefits.

The Power of Reflection

In Summary, Reflection can be a very empowering process. It can help you to make sense of your day, to come to decisions, to set a course of action, to step away from your habitual way of doing and thinking to discover new freedoms and opportunities.