

The Most Influential Leaders are Those Who Make it a Practice to Pause, Reflect and Synthesize Their Knowledge and Experience.

Journal writing has emerged as a powerful tool in the field of leadership development. By writing for as little as 15 minutes a day, the practice helps clarify decisions, break ineffective habits and thought patterns, and uncover valuable insights.

But without process or structure, some people experience a sense of writing in “inky circles” — where we keep writing about the same thoughts or themes over and over again without making any meaningful progress. While this type of writing can be helpful in managing strong emotions and reducing levels of stress, it’s not enough to turn our ruminations into lessons learned or actions to be taken.

In our book, [*Brave Leaders: Finding the Guts to Make Meaningful & Lasting Change*](#), (Advantage 2020) we describe a productive three-step process for tapping into our innermost wisdom and subconscious thoughts and ideas. By following a reflection process like this, our writing leads to specific outcomes and, often, measurable results.

WRITING FOR INSIGHT & WISDOM: PREPARATION & PROCESS

Before You Begin...

- Honor yourself and your writing by setting aside quite time for the experience.
- Date each entry for future reference, and keep all your entries together in a notebook, journal or electronic folder.
- When you are able, write by hand rather than on your digital device — although any writing is better than not writing at all. Many independent studies demonstrate critically important mind-body connections that result from the act of handwriting.
- Always write as quickly as you can, and keep writing even if you are stuck or your mind goes blank. You may write the word stuck over and over again until new thoughts emerge. This is the best way to outpace your internal critic.
- Keep your writing private. This writing is just for you and your personal process of development. No judgement, shame or blame. No need to spell correctly or even use complete sentences!

The Writing Process...

1. BREATHE. Take three deep cleansing breaths to center yourself and slow your thinking.

2. WRITE. Set a timer and start writing as fast as you can for as much time as you can spare; usually 5-15 minutes will produce useful insights. Use a sentence [prompt](#) to get yourself started, or follow some of the techniques in *Brave Leaders: Finding the Guts to Make Meaningful & Lasting Change*. You may wish to work with a [certified journal facilitator](#).

3. REFLECT. When the timer goes off, finish your sentence then stop writing. Take three deep cleansing breaths to clear your mind, then reread what you've just written. As you read, circle, underline, or highlight words and phrases that jump out at you or give you pause. In the margins, note any insights, inspirations or ideas that come to mind.

4. CAPTURE INSIGHTS. Synthesize your thoughts using a sentence starter such as "As I read this, I am aware..." or "I am surprised by..." Write for another 3-5 minutes. Make notes of any action steps as a result of the process.

Please contact us to learn more about leadership journaling and our coaching for courage services, including keynote presentations and hands-on workshops. www.braveleadersproject.com/services.

Read More About It!

[This is how journaling can make you a more effective leader.](#) Fast Company, 10/29/19

[Want to be an outstanding leader? Keep a journal.](#) HBR, 1/13/16

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