

A Journal is the Chronicle of the Paths Your Thoughts Take

By: Tania Baildon

Looking at the two words Journal and Journey, it occurs to me that a journal is the chronicle of the paths your thoughts take. Since the path our lives take is greatly affected by our thoughts, it can be extremely useful to take a look at what those thoughts are and where they are going.

I have come up with a method of what I call directed journaling that I have been using for some time now, and it has helped me a great deal in defining and reaching my goals, as well as being a great tool for self discovery and making lasting life changes.

Directed Journaling

I have been writing journals off and on since childhood, and found different things to be useful at different times, depending on what I set out to accomplish. Non-directed journaling is fine if you don't have a specific goal in mind. It can be very useful for self-exploration. In Julia Cameron's, "The Artist's Way" she talks about doing "the morning pages," three hand written pages, done first thing in the morning. (More on that next issue.) That got me started journaling again a few years ago.

Then I read "Simple Abundance" by Sarah Ban Breathnach, and she has a wonderful thing called a gratitude journal, where you write down three things you are grateful for every evening before you go to bed. We live in the richest country in the world, yet we tend to spend so much of our time complaining and wanting what we don't have. It is incredible what thinking about what we have to be grateful for will do for your outlook on life. I believe this was my first real foray into directed journaling, and I have incorporated that idea into my own version.

From there I have experimented with several ideas from different places. Goal setting exercises often tell you to review your goals daily, so that was incorporated. To do lists are always useful, so that went into the pot as well. Over time I have come up with a set of daily exercises I have found to be very useful, so here they are.

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| Gratitudes | Minimum 5 |
| Goals and Dreams | 3-5 |
| Challenges and obstacles | 3-5 |
| Steps towards Goals | 3-5 |
| Accomplishments and Achievements | Minimum 5 |
| One thing learned and one good idea | Minimum 1 ea. |
| Source for inspiration for the day | Minimum 1 for 10-15 minimum |

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| Gratitudes | Minimum 5 |
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Gratitudes are all of the things we are grateful for on our lives. Often we get so involved in all of the things we don't have that we don't remember to look around us to see the great things already within our reach. In writing down at least five things I am grateful for every day, I remind myself what a wonderful life this really is. These are the things that help me get through my day, the reasons I work hard, the things and people that I love. Writing down my gratitudes gives me a sense of well-being and purpose. It has changed my life for the better.

Goals and Dreams

3-5

Goals and Dreams are the places we want to be and the changes we want to make in our lives. I will have a more complete goal setting exercise in another issue. For now think of 5 things you want to change or bring into your life. They can be small things or great changes. Anything from performing at an open mike at the local pub to achieving financial freedom. Make them something you really want to do or be, and something you are willing to work for. Now choose one or more of these to do something about this week and use it or them for the next part.

Challenges and obstacles

3-5

Challenges and obstacles are anything that stands between you and your goals. Sometimes the greatest part of a challenge is actually defining what the challenge really is. Often we worry about things that have little or no chance of occurring. Sometimes the challenge is simply acknowledging our feelings and moving through them anyway. Other times the first challenge is just figuring out where to start. If you have a goal of learning a new skill, a challenge might be not knowing where to learn it.

Steps Towards Goals

3-5

Now find three to five steps to move you towards one or more of our goals to do today. That's right, today! (Or tomorrow if you choose to do your journaling at night.) These could be as small as finding out where and when the open mikes happen in your area to getting your resume up to date if you have decided to change jobs. If your goal was to learn a new skill then maybe you could go online or stop by your local community college or university and find out if they have classes that relate to what you would like to learn. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Large or small, start taking those steps in your own journey towards the things you really want to be doing in your life.

Accomplishments and Achievements

Minimum 5

One of the things we often forget is to acknowledge the things we have done. So many times we work hard for something, then set our sites on a new goal without really spending the time to appreciate the goal we have just achieved. This can make us depressed and make motivating ourselves difficult. After all, what good is working hard to reach a goal if all it means is more work towards another goal further out? So celebrate your accomplishments, large and small. Did you make that call yesterday to find out about those classes you wanted to take? Good for you! Give yourself a pat on the back. Got that promotion you have been working so hard for? That requires a real

celebration! So take the time to reflect every day on your progress. Sometimes we have no idea how far we have come until we look back at the path we have walked, one step at a time.

If you are just starting these exercises or can't think of five things you did yesterday (or today), think about some of your accomplishments of the past. Relive a time when you felt great about yourself or reached a goal you really had to work for. These can help motivate you towards the goals you set today.

One Thing Learned

Minimum 1

Write down one thing you learned today, from a book, at work, from listening to tapes in your car, from a loved one at home. Everyone should learn at least one thing worth writing down every day. I think most of us do, but then we forget them again. Take one thing from your day that you don't want to lose and write it down. If you can't think of something from today or yesterday, write down one thing you remember being a bit "Ah ha!" when you did learn it.

One Good Idea

Minimum 1

This can be something you got from someone else or a great idea of your own. If the idea is someone else's, write why it is important and what it means to you. If it is your own idea, spend a little time to play with it. Can you think of a way to use this idea today? Is it something that could make your work a little easier or your home life a little better? Is it something you can do right now, or is it an idea that changes how you see things? Is there someone you think might also benefit from this idea?

Source for inspiration for the day

Minimum 1 for 10-15 minimum

Write down one book you will read or tape you will listen to that you feel will be a source of inspiration for your day, something to lift you above the daily grind for a few minutes and take you to a place where you feel you can be anything you wish to be. Try to carry that feeling all day long. 10-15 minutes of inspiration each morning can change your life. Try it.

I have heard several personal development gurus say that in five years you will be exactly who and what you are today except for two things: The books you read and the people you associate with. (Books on tape count, too) Think about a book or a person who changed your life. Sometimes it was the whole book or a long association, sometimes it was just one conversation or idea that made some kind of light go off in your own head and heart that changed everything. Make a point to spend at least a few minutes every day reading a good book, something really inspirational. Try a biography of someone you admire, or something on personal development. Go explore your local library.

Another great idea is what Zig Ziglar calls Automobile University. Listening to tapes in the car to and from work is a great way to improve your education and get inspiration and motivation without using time that is already earmarked for other things. Again, your local library will likely have some tapes available, and as you

discover presenters you really like you can start to create and expand your own library. So take some time to expand your horizons today, and record a little of what you find in your journal.

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