

THE POWER OF REFLECTION: HOW IT CAN SUPERCHARGE YOUR LEADERSHIP

by Glenn Williams



Did you know that reflection has the power to supercharge your leadership?

We live and lead in a culture that often devalues reflection. We've been taught to applaud those who "shoot from the hip", making snap judgments and decisions without fear or favour. And sometimes this is necessary.

While this style of leadership can appear authoritative, the lack of consideration for the thoughts, ideas, and contributions of others has, at times, been detrimental to organizations. More recently, common sense and a measure of self-awareness have emerged. The value of reflective thinking is rising among top business minds and social researchers.

Think about it for a minute. How often do you come out of meetings frustrated at the repeating dynamics between team members? But why would we expect different results when we do the same thing over and over? It's the literal definition of insanity. Reflection is a critical circuit breaker in these moments.

Why reflecting is important

Reflection means engaging with a level of self-awareness that has not always been encouraged in management or executive leadership.

Daniel Forrester addresses this tension for individuals and organizations in his book, *Consider: Harnessing the Power of Reflective Thinking in Your Organization*. He states that we all have a "human need for think time," and goes on to say that "there is a tempo that envelops us driven by technology, connectedness, and our bias for action and immediate response. It's a pulsating and often unforgiving pace that swirls when we are awake and even as we sleep."¹

Dr Adam Fraser, the author of *The Third Space: Using Life's Little Transitions to Find Balance and Happiness*², talks about the benefits of pausing the habitual movement from one thing to the next. The "third space" allows you to gain clarity on your strengths, values, purpose, and goals. This empowers better decision-making and leads to greater resilience and adaptability in the face of change.

A few years back I attended a leadership intensive with participants from Africa, Asia, and the U.S. I noticed how challenging it was for all of us to invest time reflecting as we were encouraged to consider what has contributed to and continues to shape how we make decisions, set goals, and mobilize others.

If we don't take the time to stop and reflect we often overlook the significance of key connections and their significant contribution to our ongoing success. Some of the participants described the significance of this reflective experience.

"Perhaps for the first time in thirty years, I stopped long enough to understand how my strengths as a leader impact those I lead – positively and negatively".

"I began to see a significant disconnect between what motivated me and what motivated other members of my team".

"I obviously need to refocus on how I manage my relationships. I have tended to take my interpersonal skills for granted, but realise I need to be more intentional in building stronger connections with those I work with".

The art of reflection

The deliberate practice of reflection helps ensure your priorities align with who you are and what you want to achieve. It is not navel gazing, and it's not self-indulgent. It's other focussed. **The art of reflection needs to find its way back into core leadership values.** We can't expect to evolve or improve as leaders if we don't take the time to evaluate all aspects of our leadership style. We need to be both teachable and unoffendable.

How open are you to reflecting on how you lead, your communication style, and your coping mechanisms or strategies when things don't go your way? Can you take constructive criticism? Reflecting on how others receive our communication, and how we receive theirs, in turn, is vital in creating a genuinely collaborative solution-focussed work environment.

Reflection is vital in times of transition

Transitions are inevitable, be they of our making or thrust upon us. The ability to handle voluntary and enforced transition in a healthy way is largely down to our ability to reflect.

Leadership is not a static position. If we believe we've made it because we've reached the C-Suite level, we risk irrelevancy in the medium to long term. As best-selling author Dr Marshall Goldsmith says in the title of one of his books, *What Got You Here Will Not Get You There*. What made you a successful leader and helped you get to where you are this season is not enough for what you need to succeed in your next season.

What's the bottom line?

Reflection as a core value leads to better decision-making, greater resilience in the face of change, and, ultimately, better leadership. The evidence is in. We need to make **reflection** a core practice of leadership.



As leaders, we must take time to reflect on our leadership and invite others into the process. If we don't, we'll find ourselves far from where we ultimately want to be. It's far better to ask trusted voices to reflect back openly and honestly about your leadership strengths and struggles rather than to preside over a toxic culture where people resent you and your leadership.

Reflection is not a roadblock to your success, it's the key to long-term sustainable success in all areas of your life.

Here are some helpful questions to ask yourself in your own reflective time.

- How do my life and work experiences affect the way I lead others?

- Where have my experiences positively or negatively impacted me and my leadership of others?
- When am I at my best?
- When is my team at their best?
- As I consider perceived frustration or failure, what could I have done differently to achieve the desired result?
- What important lessons can I learn from getting it wrong?

Further reflections

For more on the art and power of reflection, grab a copy of my book [When Leaders Are Lost: Moving Beyond Disappointment, Failure, and Hurt to Redefine Success](#)

References

¹ Forrester, Daniel P. Consider: Harnessing the Power of Reflective Thinking in Your Organization. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. p. 10.

² Fraser., A. (2012). The Third Space: Using Life's Little Transitions to Find Balance and Happiness, Random House