JOURNALING

Now we’ll build on Self-Awareness through a second exercise that helps us explore our emotional patterns and tendencies: Journaling.

Usually, when we write, we're trying to communicate a thought with another person. This exercise is different. You're not trying to communicate with somebody else. Instead, the purpose of this exercise is to help your mind invite and encourage your thoughts to flow, by letting thoughts flow onto paper. You're just opening up a channel and seeing what comes up.

You're writing to yourself, for yourself, you will never have to show this to another person unless you want to. Hence, you can do this with full honesty. Afterwards you will have a chance to share with a partner some of the insights that arose, but it will be your choice – you will have other options.

Let whatever arises into your awareness, find it’s way onto the page.

You'll be given a prompt. You may write about the prompt, or you may write about anything that comes to mind. Try not to think about what you're going to write, just write. It doesn't matter how closely you follow the prompt, or not. What's important is to let all your thoughts flow onto the paper. When the bell rings, put your pens to the paper, and don't stop writing until time is up. If you have nothing to write, and all you can think of is "I have nothing to write", then just keep writing, "I have nothing to write...". You may or may not come up with something to write after that.

“I will give you the first prompt, and ring the bell to stop. The first prompt is… (read slide)”

After the time is up, ring the bell. “Please stop where you are. The next prompt is…”

Four prompts (2 min per prompt = 8 min)

• Things that annoy me are...

• My challenges are...

• Things that bring me alive are...

• When I’m at my best, I...

Read individually (1 min)

Take a minute to read what you wrote to yourself.

JOURNALING BENEFITS & APPLICATIONS

Journaling applications:

Journaling gives us perspective on our thoughts and emotions–helping us to clarify them, and respond to them more resiliently and skillfully.

Journaling can be done just as a general dedicated practice to help us process thoughts, reflect, and plan. It can also be done about a specific issue you’re wrestling with. If you find yourself thinking the same thoughts over and over again, it may be helpful to try a new way to find a resolution to the problem–journaling.

Suggested applications:

Journaling at the start of the day to collect your thoughts, set an intention or goals for the day

Journaling at the end of a day to do a brain-dump, help to get things off your mind

Journaling regularly about a challenge or growth area you’re working with

Having members of a team all do journaling to reflect on team values or on challenges the team is going through

**Research**

Journaling improves resilience and ability to manage emotionally challenging situations

Study: Buhrfeind & Pennebaker, 1994. Expressive Writing and Coping with Job Loss.

Key Claim: Mindfulness leads to better task performance.

Study’s Role in Program: Evidence for the benefits of journaling.

Summary

Type: Experimental

Participants: 20 experimental, 21 “writing controls”, and 22 “non-writing controls”.

Treatment: Both groups were asked to journal for 20 minutes on five consecutive days. While the experimental group was given instructions to write about “their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding the layoff and how their lives, both personal and professional, had been affected,” the writing control group was instructed to only write about their recent plans and activities. The non-writing control group did not receive any treatment.

Measurement: Rehire rate, psychological wellbeing.

Results: After 8 months, 27% of the non-writing controls had been rehired, versus 48% of writing controls and 68% of the experimental group who wrote about their deepest feelings.

Conclusion: Journaling about deep feelings leads to higher ability to cope with resilience, although the researchers in this study say they cannot fully explain why this result occurred.

Link http://siy.li/BuhrfeindPennebaker1994

Journaling improves mood & wellbeing–even after only brief periods

Study: University of Missouri, 2009.

Key Claim: Mindfulness leads to better task performance.

Study’s Role in Program: Evidence for the benefits of journaling.

Summary

Type: Experimental

Participants: 49 (all experimental, no control group).

Treatment: To write for two minutes on two consecutive days about an emotionally significant event.

Measurements: Reported as standard measurements of mood and physiological wellbeing (specific measures unknown).

Results: Participants registered immediate improvements in mood and performed better on standardized measures of physiological well-being.

Conclusion: Even brief exercises in journaling can improve physical and psychological wellbeing.

Link

Article talking about study: http://siy.li/Missouri2009

Additional resource

For a review paper that summarizes the health and wellbeing benefits of journaling found across multiple studies, see Smyth1998, http://siy.li/Smyth1998