

FOREWORDS BY JON KABAT-ZINN AND DANIEL GOLEMAN

# Search Inside Yourself

THE UNEXPECTED PATH TO ACHIEVING  
SUCCESS, HAPPINESS (AND WORLD PEACE)



CHADE-MENG TAN

"This book and the course it's based on represent one of the greatest aspects of Google's culture—that one individual with a great idea can really change the world."



## Journaling

Journaling is the practice of self-discovery by writing to yourself. It is an important exercise to help you discover what is in your mind that is not in a clear, conscious view. Usually, when we write, we are trying to communicate a thought with another person. This exercise is different. You're not trying to communicate with somebody else. Instead, you are trying to let your thoughts flow onto paper so you can see what comes up.

The exercise itself is very simple. You give yourself a certain amount





of time, say, three minutes, and you are given (or you give yourself) a prompt, which for our purposes is an open-ended sentence such as "What I am feeling now is . . ." For those three minutes, write down whatever comes to mind. You may write about the prompt, or you may write about anything else that comes to mind. Try not to think about what you're going to write—just write. It does not matter how closely you follow the prompt; just let all your thoughts flow onto the paper. There is only one rule: do not stop writing until your time is up. If you run out of things to write, just write, *I ran out of things to write. I have nothing to write. I still have nothing to write. . . .* until you have something to write about again. Remember, you are writing to yourself, for yourself, and you will never have to show this to another person unless you want to. Hence, you can do this with full honesty.

You can think of journaling as mindfulness of thoughts and emotions; paying moment-to-moment, non-judging attention to thoughts and emotions as they arise; and facilitating their flow by putting them on paper. There are a couple other ways of looking at it. My engineer's way of looking at it is an unfiltered brain dump—dumping your mind-stream onto paper. A more poetic way of looking at it is seeing your thoughts as a gently flowing stream and trying to capture that flow on paper.

This practice is so simple, you may wonder if it does anything useful at all. I wondered the same thing the first time Norman Fischer explained it to me, but the research blew my mind. A study by Stefanie Spera, Eric Buhrfeind, and James Pennebaker had a group of laid-off professionals write to themselves about their feelings for five consecutive days for twenty minutes each day.<sup>10</sup> These people found new jobs at a much higher rate than the people in the non-writing control group. After eight months, 68.4 percent of them found jobs, versus 27.3 percent from the control group. Those numbers just blew my mind. Usually, if an intervention can make a difference of a few percentage points, you can publish a paper. But here, we are not talking about 3 percentage points. We are talking about more than 40 percentage points! And all it took was one hundred minutes of intervention. Oh, wow.



How much journaling do you have to do before you experience a measurable change? Quoting an article that appeared on March 2, 2009, on the *Very Short List (VSL)*: Science website:<sup>11</sup>

*Twenty years ago, University of Texas psychologist James Pennebaker concluded that students who wrote about their most meaningful personal experiences for 15 minutes a day several days in a row felt better, had healthier blood work, and got higher grades in school. But a new study from the University of Missouri shows that a few minutes of writing will also suffice.*

*Researchers asked 49 college students to take two minutes on two consecutive days and write about something they found to be emotionally significant. The participants registered immediate improvements in mood and performed better on standardized measures of physiological well-being. An extended inward look isn't necessary, the study concludes; merely "broaching the topic on one day and briefly exploring it the next" is enough to put things in perspective.*

Four minutes can make a measurable difference. That exploding sound is the sound of my mind being blown.

One fun way of having a daily journaling practice is to write a different prompt on each piece of paper, put them all in a fishbowl (a dry one, I recommend), then pick out one or two at random each day. Here are some suggested prompts:

- What I am feeling now is . . .
- I am aware that . . .
- What motivates me is . . .
- I am inspired by . . .
- Today, I aspire to . . .
- What hurts me is . . .
- I wish . . .
- Others are . . .
- I made a happy mistake . . .
- Love is . . .





Here are instructions for the accurate self-assessment exercise. Notice that in addition to the usual journaling, we also added a primer to open your mind into a frame conducive to this exercise.

## JOURNALING FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

### Prime

Before we begin journaling, let's prime the mind.  
Let's spend 2 minutes thinking about one or more instances in which you responded positively to a challenging situation and the outcome was



very satisfying to you. You felt you did great. If you are considering more than one instance, think about whether any connections or patterns are emerging.

Now, let's take a moment to relax mentally.

(30-second pause)

### **Journal**

Prompts (2 minutes per prompt):

- Things that give me pleasure are . . .
- My strengths are . . .

### **Prime**

Now let's spend 2 minutes thinking about one or more instances in which you responded negatively to a challenging situation and the outcome was very unsatisfying to you. You felt that you performed badly, and you wish there were something you could change. If you are considering more than one instance, think about whether any connections or patterns are emerging.

Now, let's take a moment to relax mentally.

(30-second pause)

### **Journal**

Prompts (2 minutes per prompt):

- Things that annoy me are . . .
- My weaknesses are . . .

Take a few minutes to read what you wrote to yourself.