

## Brain Power: How time for reflection and thinking boost leaders' effectiveness and fulfillment

In our previous [article](#) we highlighted the [simplicity practices of effective leaders](#). In a series of follow-up articles we will explore each practice in more detail and share first-hand experience and wisdom from leaders who we admire.

There is a wonderful saying, "if you don't know where you are going any path will get you there". Leaders need to create space for reflection and planning to ensure a clear path and direction for themselves and for their teams. This space affords leaders the opportunity to gain clarity about what is truly important for successful business performance and personal fulfillment. When a leader takes time to reflect and plan, the people around them are able to be more proactive and more successful.

Taking time to reflect on the day, week, or even month that has just past is critical to ensuring that you are aligned with your business objectives and values. Intentional time for reflection, thinking and planning is a rich incubator for creative ideas and problem solving. Think for a minute about a time when you were on autopilot, zooming from one meeting to another, careening through your to do list, as if you had no time to breathe, much less really think about what you were doing. How did that feel? How were people on your team reacting and behaving? Now, think about a time when you were intentional about building thinking and planning time into your days and compare the mental pictures. The challenge is often not the understanding of the power of reflection space but establishing it as a regular practice in the face of life's demands.

The leaders that we interviewed for the article had a lot of energy for this topic and shared the following:

### Tap your natural style and strengths

Some of us are all about structure, some all about flow and some in between. Shape your reflection and planning practice based on what you know about yourself. Scheduling and protecting specific think time on a regular basis is likely to work best for those who thrive on structure. Mary Tribble blocks her calendar until 11 several mornings a week so that she can think and plan before coming into the office. As a result Mary says that her days have fewer lows and that she is calmer and less likely to overreact to bumps in the road.

For those who prefer spontaneity over structure, a more organic approach to reflection time may be the best route. Bill Whitley incorporates think time throughout his day by using large white boards mounted on the walls of his office to capture and elaborate on ideas. As a result, he is able to pay attention to the seemingly unrelated eureka thoughts that pop up during his day and capture them on his white boards.

Developing awareness of how and when your brain does its best work will result in you working smarter vs harder. Pay attention to when in the day thinking comes effortlessly and, whenever possible, manage your schedule to take advantage of those optimum times.

### Get away from it all

Travel can be very conducive to creative thinking and planning. Shannon McFayden, says that sensorially shaking things up helps her do her best thinking. She is intentional about using travel time, whether it is a few quiet minutes in her hotel room or a walk down an unfamiliar street, to dream, sort through a challenge or map out a new project. Bob Henderson schedules time away each quarter. He travels alone to a quiet spot with his laptop and for three days reads, writes, and thinks.

### Move to think

Every leader interviewed for this article cited the relationship between exercise and quality thinking time. In some cases, as with Joan Zimmerman's yoga practice, exercise provides a chance to clean the mental slate and prepare it for productive thinking. Yoga, mountain biking, golf and other activities require one to push other thoughts aside and focus solely on the activity. Conversely, other activities, like swimming, a long walk or run or cycling, the exercise time itself becomes reflection time. Dean Jones cherishes his 30 minute swims-no can get to him while he is under water!

### Establish Your Reflection Practice

We suggest a simple process to help you cultivate a more consistent reflection practice. Schedule ten minutes at the beginning and end of each day. It is most important to choose times that work for you vs. trying to stick to an ideal. One word of advice regarding morning think time is to do it "before a screen goes on", meaning, before you fire up your Blackberry, laptop or TV news. Once you have that stimulus you are following someone else's compass instead of your own.

#### Morning Reflection: Prepare for the Day

- What are the two most important things for me to accomplish today?
- Given what is going on with my company, my team, my family, what impact do I want to have on them today?
- What authentic choices can I make about how I show up today?

#### Evening Reflection: Clear the Decks

- When today did I feel in sync and in the flow with my vision and values?
- Is there anything on my mind that I need to free up?
- Where did I show up as my authentic self?

We would love to hear your established or newly adopted reflection and planning practice. Email us at [carson@workingsimply.com](mailto:carson@workingsimply.com) or [kimdspivey@gmail.com](mailto:kimdspivey@gmail.com).

### Leaders who contributed to this article:

- Bob Henderson, Senior Minister, Covenant Presbyterian Church
- Dean Jones, Senior Vice President of Financial Development, YMCA Charlotte
- Shannon McFayden, Community Leader
- Mary Tribble, President, Tribble Creative Group
- Bill Whitley, Speaker, Author, Consultant
- Joan Zimmerman, Chief Executive, Southern Shows

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### This Month's Newsletter

[Brain Power](#)

### Upcoming Trainings

[Simplicity Lab](#)

Wednesday, May 12, 2010 12:30-4:30 PM

Bring your laptop or Blackberry to a hands-on lab that will show you how to streamline your email, calendar, work day and your life. Improve productivity and have more time for the things you love. Please click here for the detailed course description and registration.



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