

Finding Your Inside Time

— by David Allen

Exploring the high country of who you really are while expressing what you're really about is the promise of a journal. But somewhere along the way, those same creative urges likely got you involved in an overwhelming amount of things to do, potentially distracting you from your own energy source. You've created relationships, a career, a family, a home each of which brings an endless stream of projects, challenges and "woulds," "coulds," and "shoulds." Your visions created your life, but now your life is blinding your vision. Your creative urges got you into the park on your bicycle, but now your pants leg is caught in the bicycle chain, and you find yourself cursing the whole endeavor. Is there a way to play this game, to keep it all in balance? Can you stay connected to the source of your creativity, continue to expand its expression, and not let the results trip up the whole process?

Yes. But it's not free, and you don't get there by denying the world and your engagement with it, at any level. You must capture and appropriately manage the attachments and agreements with yourself that create dissonance, at every level. You must consistently offload and objectify what has your attention. You can do things to assist in detaching yourself from the details of life so you can get to the more rewarding experience of your journal. And also the act of journaling itself provides a key to that freedom.

Your business is not your busyness

Are you too busy to get to your journal? Careful, because being busy is not the same thing as tending to business. Many people use their attachment to nervous activity as a way to avoid what they need to be about. And many times that more important work is best accessed and managed from the perspectives and shifts in consciousness that the journaling process fosters.

Our work exists at multiple levels. From lowest to the loftiest, we have our day-to-day actions, the projects we're trying to complete with them, the areas of responsibility we attempt to maintain at our standards, the outcomes we want to accomplish in the future, the lifestyle expression we want to achieve, and our purpose as human beings.

Each can rightly be called your "work." But the volume, speed, and intensity at the lower levels can easily grab your focus and cause you to lose the perspective required to keep you sane. It is so easy to sacrifice the higher orders of business for the lower. You have so many things to do today. So you don't keep an overview of all your projects, you ignore some of the areas of your life you should focus on, you avoid drafting blueprints of positive futures, and you forget to connect back to the source of the whole game to begin with – you.

Your world can't be ignored, nor can it be completed

How do you unhook from the pulls and pressures of your world? It would be nice if you could just shut your door, or go into the garden, and the harpies in your mind – all the niggling things to do and deal with – just went away. Or, if you could just finally get it all done, so there was nothing left to contend with. Neither is likely to happen.

Your freedom will not come from trying to ignore all the “stuff” or by trying to complete everything – it requires truly detaching from it. But how do you do that? By getting it all out of your head, and reflecting on it all, appropriately.

Emptying “psychic RAM”

Much of the stress in the professional world these days is the result of the huge volume of implicit agreements kept in the mind and not captured, clarified and organized. The first process in the coaching I do is to have my clients do a major “core dump” of everything they have attention on – personal, professional, little, or big – onto pieces of paper and into their in-basket (which usually takes one to six hours!) Then I have them decide what they really intend to do about each of them – the actions required – and park the resulting inventory of concrete things to do in appropriate categories in some personal management system they can trust to remind them of all that at the right times. Without exception, they come away with an incredible rush of released energy and inspiration. Why? They renegotiated all their agreements with themselves, so they can feel OK about what they’re not doing! They stopped the infinite loops in their psyche caused by situations they’ve told themselves need to be different but which lack the decision about what they need to do about it.

Incomplete commitments like that kept only in the mind reside in “psychic RAM” – a memory space that has no sense of past or future. It all feels like it should be happening now in this moment, which creates automatic stress and failure, because you can only do one thing at a time, not all of them. RAM must be emptied. And as you go even deeper and more reflective, there are greater depths and many more subtle “open loops” that can surface to facilitate the release of stored creative energy.

The journal as a spiritual in-basket

Just making a free-form list of all the things you have attention on is a form of journaling and is at least momentarily liberating. On the most mundane level, it is capturing all of the “oh, yeah, I need to...” stuff – phone calls to make, things to get at the store, things to talk to your boss or your assistant about, etc. At this level it doesn’t usually make for a very exciting or interesting experience – just a necessary one to clear the most obvious cargo on the deck. Instead of cluttering your nice leather-bound intimate notebook with “Call Ana Maria re: her day camp suggestions,” keep a simple notepad ubiquitously at hand to collect such business-of-life details.

On the other hand, I often use my journal for “core-dumping” the subtler and more ambiguous things rattling around in my psyche. It’s like doing a current-reality inventory of the things that really have my attention –the big blips on my internal radar. These can be either negative or positive, like relationship issues, career decisions, or unexpected events that have created disturbances or new opportunities. Sometimes this is the best way to get started when nothing else is flowing – just an objectification of “what is” on my internal landscape.

Something healing and positive always happens when I express outwardly and reflect inwardly on that expression, and let nothing remain resident running around in my internal squirrel cages.

Spiritual disciplines teach that neutral observation is the first gate to real inner awareness and enlightenment. And when I just observe – what I feel, what I think, what I’m doing – it shifts me more into the one who is not my emotions, my thoughts, or my body. There is no better tool than my journal to move me into that perspective. The things that distract me lose their grip, because I release my grip on them. But that happens because I write them down and somehow the light of my own consciousness begins to dissolve the knots.

Getting up to business

Though sometimes it is enough to use the journal for a good housecleaning, refreshing the psyche and straightening some of the inner kinks, there is always more gold to mine. There are still places to go, things to see, things to know and experience. Not out in the physical world, but into those worlds wherein the meaning is found for everything you do. This is the bigger game, your real job. A conversation with your higher Self is wanting to be had. Information and inner awarenesses are waiting for an opportunity to be disclosed. Intelligent creativity is in store.

Don't let your busy-ness get in the way of going to work. Step into your journal and take the executive chair. There may be some even more interesting loops to discover you can close, and some real executive compensation for it, where it really counts.

Clear to journal? Journal to clear...

- Whenever you are feeling overwhelmed, do a “core dump” – write down on a list or separate pieces of scratch paper absolutely everything you have attention on in the mundane worlds of your life and work. Don't censor, organize or analyze any of it. This is not yet a “to-do” list – it is merely an objective collection of anything that pops into your head you might need to do or do something about. Sooner than later, go through all the items and make objective decisions about what actions you are going to take on them, and park the results in a trusted system, to keep it out of your head. Keep a small note pad with you at all times to continue capturing new commitments and ideas, to ensure that nothing is allowed to crawl back up into “psychic RAM.” (This is likely to happen especially as you begin to move into reflection and contemplation.)
- Create a list of all your projects (things you want or need to do that take more than one action to get them done). Create a list of all the areas of responsibility you feel you need to keep your eye on (e.g. health, finances, family, staff, etc.) Ensure you have all the projects you need for those. List any goals or visions that you have for your future. Ensure you have projects and actions for those.
- Practice picking up your journal in the middle of a crazy day, when it makes no rational sense to do that, and just observe and write about all the levels of consciousness you are aware of.
- Use your journal for collecting the more subtle and ambiguous things that still have your attention. Describe as completely as possible all the main things currently on your internal radar. (This is a great way to kick-start your flow.)
- Once psychic RAM is as clear as you can get it, keep writing. Ask yourself what deeper conversation wants to happen, to be expressed, and to be resolved. Notice anything that is not pure stillness. Give it a voice and notice where it goes, and when it's complete. Balance going with the flow and letting go and listening.

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