Time to Reflect

According to David Kolb's model of learning, Reflection is an important part of the learning process. By observing and reflecting, then coming up with concepts and ideas, we make sense of our experiences and learn from them.

So how do you and I reflect?

My personal experience is that my best reflection is stimulated by a question. Without a question to focus my thinking, I can ramble off all over the place, considering a wide range of experience and information but without coming to any useful conclusion. To be honest, this is probably best described as 'day-dreaming' rather than 'reflecting'!

So here is an exercise in reflective learning that you can do anytime, anywhere. It can apply to a very specific context, or you can relate it to a much larger experience or longer time-frame. The important thing is to fully consider each question. Take your time and really reflect on everything that is relevant.

If you're not currently in the mood for this kind of thinking, keep it until you're in the right mood. Reflection goes with the least active periods of your daily rhythms, so don't fight against your natural patterns. You may find it helpful to write some of this down as you go along.

Here goes…

Firstly, **what do you want to reflect on today?** As an example, let's say you're going to consider the whole of your personal and professional development during the past year.

What have you experienced? Reflective learning concentrates on learning from experience, so it's helpful to take stock of relevant experiences.

In the context of development during the past year you might consider a number of types of experiences:
- Training programmes you participated in, both live and on-line
- Coaching your received
- Books you read
- Challenging experiences at work and in your personal life
- Major decisions you made etc

What have you achieved? For each of the experiences, consider what you achieved through that experience:
- Information learned
- Skills acquired
- Confidence gained
- Self-awareness discoveries
- Attitude shifts
- Relationships built   etc

How can you apply those achievements in the future? Look at your list of achievements and consider how you can make use of that new knowledge, skill, awareness or confidence in other areas of your life.

Now let's take a different tack:

Reflecting on the same context, **what HAVEN'T you experienced, that you would have liked to have done?**

It could be specific learning opportunities like a course or a qualification; it might be an experience like presenting to the Board, or securing an interview for promotion. It might simply be some books you didn't get around to reading or a conversation you wanted to have with a particular person you couldn't get the time with.

If you had experienced those things, **what else would you have learned?** Think about why you wanted those particular experiences and how you would have developed as a result.

In other words, **what learning have you missed out on**?
- Information learned
- Skills acquired
- Confidence gained
- Self-awareness discoveries
- Attitude shifts
- Relationships built   etc

From here you can identify the areas of learning that are still relevant and which you still want. Having missed out on them this year, you might make them a priority for next year.

Let's go one step further…

Reflecting on what you have found out by doing this exercise, **what do you now know about yourself in relation to learning and development?** Are there particular types of learning experience that are especially meaningful for you? Are there some that are less easy to get benefit from?

How can you use that insight to improve your approach to personal and professional development?

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