

7 EASY STEPS TO BEGIN JOURNALING

Journaling helps gain clarity, embrace your inner child, live life with passion, purpose and joy

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INTRODUCTION

POWER OF JOURNALING

Write a different story

Journaling is one of the most powerful and therapeutic ways to embark on a journey of self-discovery. I like to think of it as conversations with SELF, getting to know who you are and what makes you, YOU.

Millions of people go through life not fully understanding who they are, how their early childhood environment influences everything they do to this very day and resign to living a life of compromise and mediocrity. Most people wish for a better life but think they are powerless and cannot do anything about it.

I'm here to tell you that you can.

Journaling gives you power to do a deep dive into your psyche, your subconscious, to unearth the good, the bad and the ugly. I believe that 99.9% of us are good, that all of us have traces of not so good, and that even the 1% that might be the ugly have some good. Journaling helps you uncover your authentic self, dig out the good, unleash your hidden potential and live a life of fulfillment, happiness and joy. Write the story you want your life to be, then live your story.

When I first started journaling I had no agenda. It really was just pen to paper and from there it evolved. As I journaled, new thoughts came to mind, new challenges appeared, and welcome projects arrived. I got to know myself better. Began to gain clarity. Embraced my inner child and set to improving every area of my life.

Over time I found that going about journaling in this higgledy-piggledy way was intuitive rather than process driven and that allowed me to write with no bounds. My sole purpose was to write about myself, my experiences, my life, my yearnings, my past, present and future.

Years of journaling have helped me develop a holistic approach that takes in the whole of my life, aspirations, challenges, creativity and more and that has changed my life for the better.

In the pages that follow, you will discover ways that you too can take a holistic approach to journaling. Full disclosure. This approach is not to be confused with holistic treatments that aid in the recovery of mental and physical difficulties. I am not a psychiatrist nor psychologist – just an everyday person with a passion for living with purpose.

To Your Journaling!

Valentina

STEP ONE - TOOLS

All you need to start journaling is a notebook of sorts, a pen or pencil and a table to sit at and write.

Why physical tools when there are many apps available for journaling online? Because scientific evidence shows that the very act of physical writing opens new neural pathways in your brain. Writing engages the analytical left side of our brain, leaving the creative right side to come up with solutions. In this way the brain becomes aware of what you want to achieve, where you want to go and will actively seek solutions.

Notebook: Visit your local stationary store and buy yourself a notebook. Take your time in choosing one. Pick up a few, feel the weight, run your fingers over the blank pages, look at the height of lines, are they narrow or full? Imagine what your writing will look like on those lines. The notebook can be as fancy as you want or as simple as a lined spiral bound notebook.

Something to write with: Ballpoint, roller point, gel or simply a set of mechanical pencils. For no particular reason I like mechanical pencils – I find I can write faster, clearer (better penmanship – go figure), and if I want I can erase something, but most often I just cross out and rewrite.

Place to write: Pick a nook in your house that feels cozy, private and holds the space around you. This is your time and you don't want any interruptions or someone glancing over your shoulder. In my case, I work from home and even though I have a spare bedroom that is set up as an "office" I choose to work at my kitchen table. I like that it looks out onto the garden and it feels more intuitive to see and feel whatever is going on outside. Makes me feel good. The window in the spare bedroom is higher up and the room is dark. Besides, when I do my journaling in the morning no one, and I mean no one is up. I have my privacy.

OK. You're ready to write your first entry in your journal.

STEP TWO

WHERE ARE YOU TOMORROW

Stephen R. Covey, was an American educator, author, businessman and keynote speaker. His fame spread far and wide, but he is most remembered for his quote:

“Begin with the end in mind”

From his book **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.**

Journaling allows you to write a different life story from the one you are living. What do you want that story to be? And how can you get there? Think of it as a time destination.

Open the notebook. On the first page, somewhere in the center, write a short note, something like:

So excited. Writing a Different Story Journal. Story begins with the end in mind.

Date of Commencement: month, date, year.

Sign it.

Your first entry is to pick a date in the future – three years or max five – and write about that date. You can write anything but it should be typical of a day in your life as you envision it to be. No holds barred, no judgement, just the power of imagination at work, a notebook, and a writing tool. As you write use your sensory powers, Here are some prompts that might be helpful:

1. Begin your journal writing on the right-hand page of your notebook.
2. Enter the future date

3. Begin with a salutation:
For the longest time I opened every entry with Good Morning Pages.
4. Begin the entry with your waking up.
Is it morning? Is the sun up? Still dark? What sort of bed do you find yourself in? And the bedding? What are the pillows made of? What kind of sheets? Cotton, silk, satin and what color? How do they feel?
5. Are you alone or is someone lying beside you. What is the view from your window. Where do you live. In a city (name the city), condo, townhouse or house/cottage with its own yard. Family living with you? Grown and gone? No kids, just house cat and dog? What kind? Tabby cat, corgi dog? Don't skimp on the details.
6. Do you have a morning ritual? What do you do when you slip out of bed? Is journaling part of your morning ritual. When you open the window, what do you smell? What does the air feel like – is it cold, brisk, hot? What sounds to you hear?
7. Do you walk down a hallway to the kitchen, or do you go down a stairway. Describe your kitchen. Do you make coffee or tea. Describe the process. Or do you first go for a walk or run, come back, shower, and then have coffee and a full breakfast.
8. What do you have scheduled for the day? Who are the people you will rub shoulders with today: friends for coffee, business lunch, workshop? What is your choice of clothes? What was lunch? How did the food taste? Was it at a fancy schmancy restaurant or on the run at the food court? Or perhaps you have shopping on your list? What are you shopping for? Groceries? Clothing? Art? Gift?
9. What is your career? Successfully making your way up the corporate ladder? Professional? Own your own business? Bricks and mortar or digital?
10. What about finances: Net worth? Do you own your home? What's your lifestyle? Who are your friends? What do they do? Your hobbies and pastimes?

Write for as long as like. Make it as detailed as you can. Aim for three pages at the very least. This is not meant to be a fairytale dream come true. Avoid the temptation to write as if life is perfect, without challenges, kumbaya and love-ins. Life is not like that.

What I find Interesting is that most take this assignment as a springboard to a better life, a more comfortable life, one of financial freedom. It seems to be a universal desire and it is something that is both attainable and realistic.

But what does financially free mean? A common response is to be free of debt, have a reliable income that allows you to do, buy, live however you want without first having to check your bank balance.

Another common response is to always have enough, to never be beholden to anyone or anything, Always having enough gives you independence and ultimate freedom.

Still another is to live my life on purpose without the worry of money.

If your future typical day includes financial freedom, what would that mean to you? How would being financially free inform your day? It's worth a thought. Are you living your life with purpose, does the end of each day bring you satisfaction, that as you lay yourself to bed have you helped someone else's life be brighter even if only with a smile or a kind word? Did you move the needle even if only infinitesimally in your own personal growth? Small incremental changes bring about exponential results.

STEP THREE WHERE ARE TODAY?

Taking the previous journal entry, do the reverse. Write about your typical day right now. Note the gaps between today and tomorrow. What needs to happen to close the gap? Are there obstacles that seem insurmountable? What are they? How and why did they come to be.

STEP FOUR WHERE WERE YOU YESTERDAY?

Not as in the day before today. No. Go back to your childhood. What is your first memory? What do you remember of your parents? Grandparents? Where did you live? Brothers, sisters, cousins? What was it like living back then. Recount moments of

happiness, of disappointment, of sadness, of victory. What did you play at? What did you want to be when you grew up?

Aha! All that is still with you. It has been imprinted on your being and is alive and well living in your subconscious mind. How did your formative years effect you as a person? What are your strengths? Weaknesses? What can you do to bolster your strengths and control your weaknesses?

The act of writing not only opens new neural pathways in your brain, it also awakens your inner child, the one that had big dreams that got silenced by reality, conformity, society's expectations. There is much good that you can recover from those years, embrace your inner child. So flying on dragon backs is fantasy, but what kind of dragon can you learn to ride today? Instead of playing big have you succumbed to playing small?

Question: Are you beginning to get a glimpse of who you really are. What your hopes and aspirations are. How by just going over your life as a child you begin to see the correlation of events then and now. This is very important. This is the engine that runs your life, and this engine may need a minor reno or major overhaul if you are serious about tomorrow as you envision it now.

STEP FIVE – GRATITUDES

I hope that as you are getting to know YOUR SELF better, that you like who you are. Do you know that you are unique, that there is no one else on this planet who is like you? That you have thoughts, abilities, strengths, likes, dislikes, assets, perspectives, attitudes, values, beliefs and desires which when combined, create a unique human being that is YOU. There are a lot of good things about you. You also have a lot to be grateful for – yes, even if you think life is miserable. This session is for you to write all the things you are grateful for. You won't have trouble identifying the big things, but don't forget the little things.

Quick story. If you have never lived without hot running water and central heating in your home, you do not know what a luxury they are. Hot running water and central heating/air conditioning are common everyday amenities that we take for granted. When I was growing up, we did not have either. Imagine how it felt when we finally had a home with hot running water! Central heating came later. To this day I have never lost site of what a luxury this is and frequently include these two items in my list of gratitudes. Yes, you can repeat the things you are grateful for.

Go ahead, give yourself a half hour or more, and make a list of things, people, places, education, parents, grandparents you are grateful for ... and write a snippet about each one, i.e.:

- I am grateful for the house I live in. It gives me shelter from the outside elements, a place to live, laugh, love, and rest.
- I am grateful for my friend [name]. As children we lived next door to each other and were best buds. I treasure the memories I have of our adventures. They enrich my life and give me reason to smile.

When you are grateful for the things you have in life, you will have more things to be grateful for.

Journaling is part of my daily ritual. Including a gratitude is part of that ritual.

STEP SIX

WORK ON THE ENGINE

When you compared your tomorrow with today, what gaps did you see. Which gaps would be relatively easy to bridge and which present challenges? Pick one and start working on it. For ease of presenting an example, let's say financial freedom is at the core of the tomorrow lifestyle.

1. Define what financial freedom means to you
2. How big is the gap between where you are and where you want to be
3. What are your options:
 - work on money management
 - increase income - how?
 - debt free
 - constant and reliable income to cover all living expenses

It could be one or all of no. 3. Well you get the idea.

To bridge a gap you may need to replace a self-defeating habit with one that supports your aspirations. Staying with financial freedom, it may be that you need to build up your money management skills. Where do you begin? Do you know where the money you make goes? Money management is broad, but it begins with knowing how you spend what you make.

I once worked for a man who owned a small but growing business. He began every day with a printout of the previous day's sales, payables, and working capital. His daily goal

was to move the needle in each category – if only one more sale than yesterday; if only one dollar less in payables than yesterday, if only a few dollars more in working capital.

Develop a habit of checking your financial status every morning. Doing this one thing will build some serious money muscles. You will find that you do have control over your money, that you begin to look for ways to improve your situation, that bit by bit money begins to work for you instead of you working for it.

There is a saying goes, it's not how much you make, it's what you do with what you make.

STEP SEVEN

POWER OF DAILY JOURNALING

After a few days of journaling the excitement of writing in your journal may begin to fade. After a few weeks you are bound to face resistance: you got up late and now have no time, you got home late and now you are too tired, yada, yada, yada: “ ... yeah, ok. I'll catch up tomorrow” you say, but something else happens tomorrow.

DON'T LET THAT HAPPEN!

Make a commitment to journal daily. It's best if you schedule a time for journaling. Mine is 6.00 a.m. I like mornings. Get up early and write without interruption. If you oversleep, don't beat up on yourself. Whisper a gratitude. Give thanks for the sound sleep you enjoyed, that gave you the rest that you needed and for the comfort of the bed that you slept in. End with, tomorrow I will awake at 6.00 a.m. fully rested and begin the day with my journal writing. Close the day with a reminder “Tomorrow I easily wake up at 6.00 fully rested and begin the day with my journal writing.”

Daily journaling is the most potent and powerful keystone habit that you can develop. It enables you to make small but consistent steps that make you show up better in every area of your life. To sum it all up it is fitting to end with a quote by Stephen R. Covey:

“Keeping a personal journal a daily in-depth analysis and evaluation of your experiences is a high-leverage activity that increases self-awareness and enhances all the endowments and the synergy among them.” — Stephen R.Covey