

1. Set the tone for a great leadership day.

Spend a few mindful moments at the start of a day jotting down your leadership priorities and what you want to do to fulfill (or improve) your performance today. Cap off the day with a review of what worked! As you wind down and before you log off or pack and go, take a few minutes to compare/contrast your day with your earlier intentions. In particular, seize upon those things that worked and jot a reminder to do more of those tomorrow.

2. Strengthen as a decision-maker.

We can all strengthen as decision-makers, but it takes deliberate effort and, importantly, data. Use the journal to log information surrounding big decisions. Jot down the assumptions, expectations, options evaluated, risks identified, sources checked with, and others.

Set a date in your calendar to come back and look at what happened. Based on actual outcomes, use the data you logged to identify where your decision analysis worked and where it might have missed. Use these insights to improve your next major decision.

3. Improve your navigation of challenging feedback conversations.

I love using the journal to capture, plan for, and evaluate my effectiveness in conducting challenging conversations.

Similar to the decision-monitoring process described above, log the issues surrounding these conversations. Use the journal to plan. Think through and jot down your opening sentence and your expectations for the receiver's reaction. Plan your responses to different potential reactions.

Once the conversation has concluded, describe the outcome, expected follow-up, and then step back and self-assess on your performance. Did you comfortably and clearly express yourself? Did you promote a dialog? Did you de-escalate any potential for conflict? Was there a mutual effort for plan development? What do you need to differently/more effectively next time?

4. Keep a simple scorecard of your positive to constructive feedback ratio.

I couldn't write this article without sneaking this one. I advocate that we dispense positive feedback (well-earned, behavioral, and business-focused) in a 3:1 ratio versus constructive or harmful kind of feedback. Far too many managers struggle even to realize a 1:1 ratio.

When working with managers who seem to thrive on the negative and avoid the positive like the plague, I have them keep a simple running tally of their conversations. The visual indicator and often overwhelming numbers on the negative side do a great job spurring increased delivery of well-deserved positive input.

5. Capture notes and commitments for development discussions.

I assume you've got a handle on how to navigate your daily business commitments. In this case, your leadership journal is an ideal place for capturing your obligations to support the professional development of your team members.

Too often, well-intended managers conduct future-focused discussions with team members only to lose track of their commitments and responsibilities in helping define and bring these opportunities to life.

Capturing key points and follow-on activities in your leadership journal helps you prepare for and keep building on ideas in subsequent coaching sessions.

6. Monitor your internal relationship development.

Good leaders invest time and energy in the building, enhancing, or repairing relationships with peers, bosses, and influencers. Use your leadership journal to monitor your activity and even set networking reminders.

One senior manager I worked with recognized her dependence upon peer managers for some of her key initiatives and used her journal to remind her to reach out and promote new and strengthened relationships.

The Bottom-Line for Now:

The productive uses of a leadership journal are limited only by your imagination. While not quite a daily diary, since I advise individuals to separate the tactical tasks and to-do lists from the leadership work with this journal, this is a constant reminder of your purpose and responsibilities as a leader. Choose your preferred medium, digital or analog, but starting today, add a leadership journal to your personal, professional development activities.