

## 5 Powerful Reasons to Make Reflection a Daily Habit, and How to Do It

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It's New Year's Eve (where I live), and I've been doing a lot of reflection over the last year. It's the perfect time of year to look back and reflect on what you've done right this year, to learn from what you've done.

And on further reflection, this habit of reflection is something that I've developed pretty strongly this year.

It's actually one of the secrets to my success.



Photo by [floodmat](#)

At least once a day, and more often several times a day, I reflect on my day, on my life, on what I've been doing right, and what isn't working. I reflect on every aspect of my life, and from this habit of reflection, I am able to continuously improve.

Reflection is what gave me the topic of this post, and the tips that are to follow. Reflection is what gives me the content of every post I write here on Zen Habits.

I highly recommend that, if you haven't yet, you develop the daily habit of reflection, in your own way. It could have profound changes on your life.

Here are but a few:

**1. It helps you learn from your mistakes.** If we don't reflect on our mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them. And that's not very smart. However, if we reflect on those mistakes, figure out what went wrong, see how we can prevent them in the future, we can use our mistakes to get better. Mistakes, then, are a valuable learning tool, instead of something to feel embarrassed or upset about. Reflection is an important way to do that.

**2. It gives you great ideas.** Like I said, every single post idea that I have for Zen Habits (or other blogs I write for) comes from reflection. Basically, I reflect on things that I'm doing or that are going on in my life. If things aren't going well, I learn stuff I can share with others. If I reflect on something that's a success for me, I think about

how I got that success, and share that too. I've had hundreds of great ideas this year from reflection.

**3. It helps you help others.** The ideas I get for posts are not just things I feel like writing about ... they're ways that I can share what I've learned to help others going through the same things. And this year, I've learned just how powerful that is. I began the year with the hope that some of the things I've learned in the past couple years can help others ... and I'm ending the year with the profound realization of how such simple little tips can change people's lives. I've had hundreds of emails from readers who tell me how little tips, like how to wake up early, or how to start the exercise habit, have changed their lives. That's incredible. I'm overjoyed if I help people or inspire them.

**4. It makes you happier.** If you reflect on the things you did right, on your successes, that allows you to celebrate every little success. It allows you to realize how much you've done right, the good things you've done in your life. Without reflection, it's too easy to forget these things, and focus instead on our failures.

**5. It gives you perspective.** Often we are caught up in the troubles or busy-ness of our daily lives. A mistake or a high-pressure project or something like that can seem like it means all the world. It can overwhelm us sometimes. But if we take a minute to step back, and reflect on these problems, and how in the grand scheme of things they don't mean all that much, it can calm us down and lower our stress levels. We gain perspective, and that's a good thing.

### **How to Make Reflection a Daily Habit**

If reflection isn't something you feel you do enough, consider making it a habit. Here are some suggestions for doing that:

**1. Start a one-sentence journal.** I picked up this trick from my friend Gretchen Rubin of [The Happiness Project](#) ... basically, it's the easy way to start the journaling habit. If you've tried and failed at journaling in the past, try the one-sentence journal. It's a habit that you'll love, especially when you look back on a year's worth of entries.

**2. Focus on doing it at the same time, every day. No exceptions.** Even if you don't start a one-sentence journal, get into the reflection habit by taking just a few minutes at the end of every day to reflect on your day. Journaling helps crystalize those reflections. Either way, whether you write it down or not, make reflection a daily habit. Write down your goal: what you'll do, when you'll do it, and where. Then focus on doing it every single day, same time, same place, no exceptions whatsoever. If you have a trigger (such as, "right after I brush my teeth"), this will help establish the habit. Otherwise, sign up for an online service that sends you a daily reminder at the same time each day.

**3. Exercise.** One of my favorite times to reflect (other than at the end of the day or while driving) is during one of my runs. I like to take that time to think about my life, and my work. Some of my best post ideas come during runs. If you don't run or have some other form of daily exercise, consider just taking a walk and using that time for reflection. Make a daily appointment and don't miss it!

**4. Think about your day, your work, your life.** In that order. I like to take a look back on my day, to think about what I did right and wrong, what could be improved. Then I take a look at my work, to see how things are going there. Then I step even further back and take a look at my life as a whole. It's a three-step system that leads to a lot of improvement over time.

**5. Write about it publicly.** If you post your reflections on a blog, or a forum you belong to, or just on a LiveJournal account viewable to friends ... you're holding yourself accountable to a group of people. Your reflections are shared with others, and once people start to read them and expect them, you'll feel that positive public pressure to keep it up. That's what has happened with this blog, and it's been a great thing for me.

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