

# 3 Steps to Keeping a Self Discovery Journal

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Many people are intrigued by the notion of keeping a journal and yet don't actually ever engage because they are uncertain or believe that journaling is a difficult process to master. In this article I share with you what I've discovered for myself about journaling and what I share with my coaching clients. If you too are looking to discover how to get started, what you can journal about and what difference regular journaling can make in your life read on.

I believe that one of the most powerful things we can do if we are committed to creating a life worth living is to mindfully Self reflect; to pro-actively engage in a process of looking inward to discover all that there is to discover about the myriad ways in which you are wonderful, gratified and positive.

I've also realized that regardless of the discoveries you make through Self reflection, if you don't write them down somewhere your insights about your Self are quickly forgotten ...and you are left with a vague feeling that you know something new about yourself, but what?

I've discovered for myself that when I journal my Self discoveries they seem to settle into my awareness more permanently. Journaling my insights also means that as life continues to unfold and I have moments of confusion or Self doubt, I can refer back and remind myself of where I've been on my journey through the mysteries of life.

*"How do I journal?"* is a conversation that comes up regularly with many people, including coaching clients. Like me, many have tried to journal many times but were unable to stick with it. I have found that the following three pointers have made a huge difference for me:

## **1) *The medium sets the context***

Here's what I typically share with non-journalers about what's made the difference for me: the journaling medium you select seems to be very important.

For example, I've learned that I love to write in journals that have unlined pages, rich paper and a binding that allows the book to lay flat open. A cover that I find aesthetically pleasing is also important. And my wonderful Mont Blanc fountain that glides effortlessly over the pages as my thoughts pour out feels glorious. Journaling then becomes, for me, a sensual experience

that I enjoy and that seems to open my mind up to the flow of inner thoughts.

So I ask my clients to take some time to figure out what they think they'd find attractive. Some prefer lined paper; some want small books to write in, others want outsized volumes. Some like thin, wispy paper. Others are drawn to heavy, textured pages. What turns your crank?

What kind of writing device appeals to you? I've talked about my special fountain pen. Others I know they prefer pencils or a specific kind of ball-point pen. Some like fine tips, others prefer thick ones that make a real statement across the page. It doesn't really matter what your preference is, the key is letting yourself connect with what feels special and enjoyable to you.

Writing my most private thoughts by hand also seems to be a key to the journaling process for me. I've tried using the computer for journaling, but those conversations usually then become head-based explorations with myself. The subtle body awareness that comes with handwriting with fountain pen seems to be an important component for me.

Handwriting a journal isn't the only way, though. I have clients who find that the speed available from keyboarding is much more useful for getting out of their head than is the kinesthetic of handwriting.

I encourage you to try out different writing media until you find the one that works best for you. Some are inspired by lined scribblers, others need a computer screen and still others will be drawn to fine, unlined paper.

I believe that finding the right medium is key to exploring your message ...and that's what journaling is really all about!

## 2) ***What's the purpose of your journal?***

I've learned that the *content* of my journaling relates directly to the purpose of any specific journal. You might gather from that statement that I have more than one journal. Indeed I do. My main journal is a place where I capture insights, discoveries or challenges I'm experiencing in life. I have another journal which is really more of a list where I keep track of ideas for articles, businesses, projects, books I want to write and other stuff. The raw material from my Ideas journal frequently makes it way into my main journal as I explore it, flesh it out, pay attention to what excites me and scares me about the idea, etc.

Equally important is the clarity that I've gained about what my main or primary journal isn't:

- it isn't a diary to capture the what's & where's of my life (you know, I went grocery shopping today; I had a fight with Sally, etc.),
- it isn't a place for me to gripe, complain or host a regular pity party for myself,
- it isn't a place for me to take notes or otherwise use as a vehicle for training my intellect.

My main journal is a place for Self reflection and discovery. I've found that for those who engage in regular Self reflection and who then journal their discoveries, what develops is an on-going dance with Self ...a free-form interchange where, over time, you get to see the bigger questions and challenges that keep recurring ...the 'themes' of your life, so to speak.

Your journal becomes an emergent dance where you also get to notice the progress you've made and the many areas where you used to struggle but now life feels effortless. ...you also have an on-going place where the new ideas, thoughts and curiosities that are surfacing into your awareness get captured and explored at deeper and deeper levels of thinking.

Your journal can become a private, intimate, sacred place where you get to play with the constantly unfolding You, the You that is always growing and perpetually in the process of becoming more ...the question might then become ...do you believe that there is more for you, or is who you are today all that is possible for you?

### 3) *When are too many too many?*

I keep three journals. One about gardening, which is one of my major life passions. In it I keep track of what I've planted and where; what the weather is like season in and season out; what my response is to different situations that occur throughout the gardening year. It is probably more of a diary than a journal, but I know that I think of it as a journal, so therefore it is!

I also have my Ideas journal, which really is a list of stuff. I use it intermittently and am often surprised how certain ideas keep surfacing framed as different projects or possibilities until one really takes hold for me. In it I capture thoughts for future projects, article and books I want to write. Names of books and authors I want to read. Quotes and short anecdotes that come to my attention throughout the day are also captured here. In fact, my Ideas journal is really a small notebook that is always in my purse.

And then there is my main journal, the one where the essence of me gets explored; the one I write in several times each week; the one that comes on vacation and business trips with me.

And that is more than enough for me. However, I have some clients who keep only one journal, where everything is consolidated in one place. And I have other clients and friends who have at least a half-dozen journals, each one focused on a specific area of life.

I don't think there is any magic number. But I do think it is important that you let yourself become aware of when you are spread too thin in the journal department. Consider:

- When do you notice that it is easier to write nothing than to try to figure out which is the appropriate journal?
- When do you find yourself Self editing thoughts and comments because you deem them inappropriate for the particular journal you are writing in?
- Do find yourself wandering around the house or apartment trying to find where that particular journal you want is?
- Do you find yourself not wanting to start conversations with friends and family or cutting conversations short because you want to write in one of your journals?

These are all signals that you may be over-dosing, either in the number of journals you have on the go or in the role that journaling has in your life. Remember, the journaling process is one designed to support you in living the best life possible, not to become a substitute for interactions with others or as a place to lose yourself!

### ***Closing Thoughts***

Journaling is a powerful tool in the domain of Self discovery and Self exploration. Like anything else in life, you can engage it as a playful, enjoyable experience or you can turn it into a fetish, letting it become over ritualized and a highly serious endeavor.

I encourage you to give journaling a try if you've never tried it before. I encourage you to try again even if you've tried many times before, only this time pay attention to the medium and your purpose or intention. I bet you'll find those two critical items make a difference.

There are many books out there about the journaling process. I encourage you to ignore them all and simply begin to write about whatever appeals to you, as frequently as it appeals to you and for as long as it appeals to you!

The tips included in this article may be useful to you as a starting point. If so, great. But don't let yourself be limited by them. Make journaling a process that you love and that feels invitational to you. You'll discover that it

is a lot like life ...the more you invest yourself in it the greater the rewards you'll reap!

And for heaven's sake ...have fun!

**Gwen McCauley** - I am an ordinary human who lives an extraordinary life full of fulfillment and joy. I coach, create workshops and entice folks to spend time on professional development retreats to exotic locales so that they too can discover that a wondrous life is possible. No matter the challenges, disappointments, disasters or successes you've had in life, the future is yours to craft however you wish. I know you can because you are the same as me and I have done it! The big question is: can you move beyond the limits you have set for yourself?

I published "*The Alchemy of Energy ...exploring The CODE Model™*" in 2004 and "*Sekhmet Rising ...the restlessness of women's genius*" in 2006. I'm currently working on "*Splish Splash ...painting for personal discovery*" and my fourth book about the family prism. Visit [www.ouicoach.com](http://www.ouicoach.com) for workshop and seminar details as well as book reviews, interesting articles and annotated web links.