

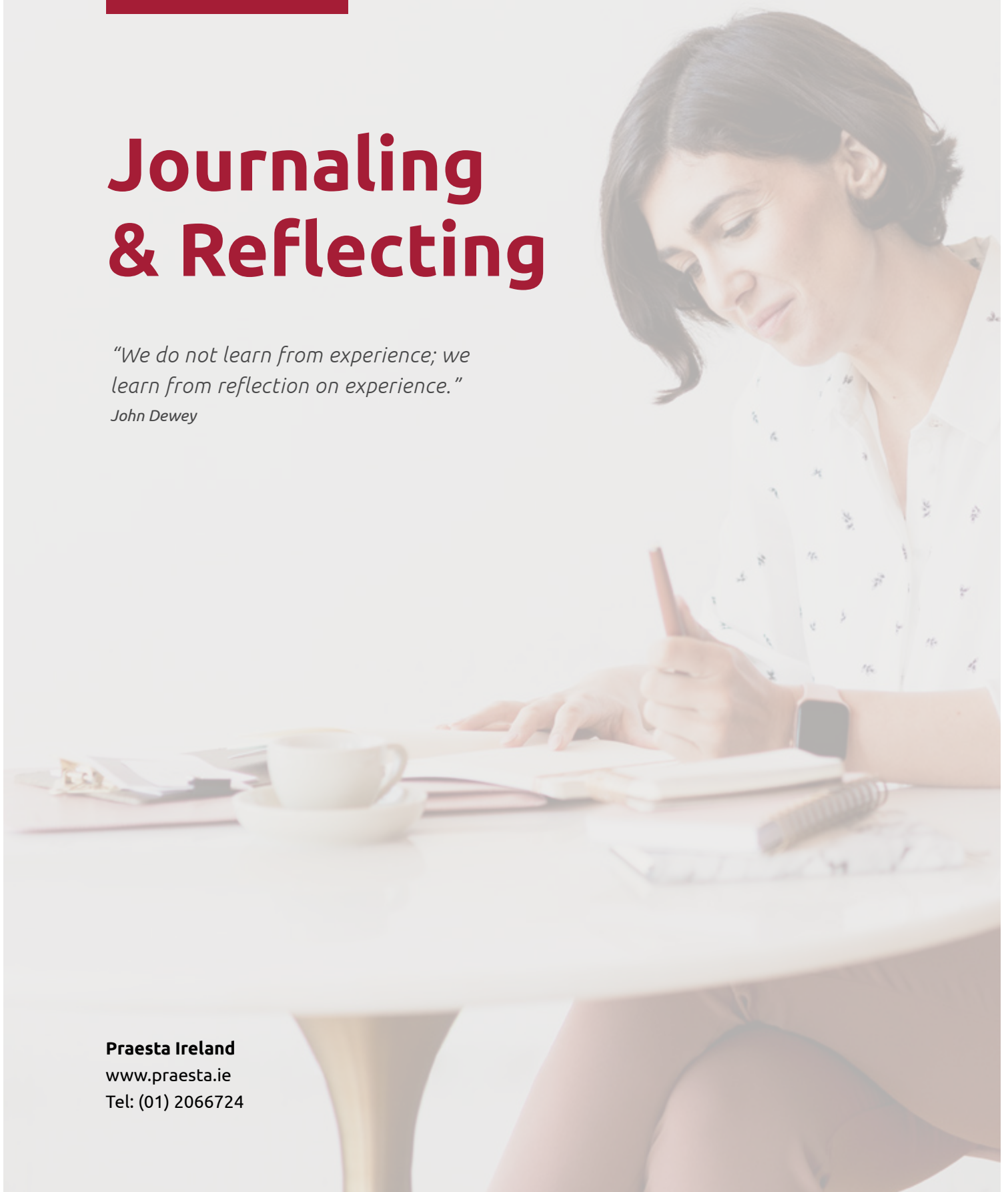
PRAESTA

Journaling & Reflecting

"We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflection on experience."

John Dewey

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Journaling & Reflecting

"The way you look at things is the most powerful force in shaping your life."

John O'Donohue

We generally think 'reflection' is a good thing to do, like eating well and exercising. It implies maturity and better outcomes. However, like many aspirations towards a better quality of life, it can also imply not being busy enough.

Reflection can be seen as a waste of time, time which could be more purposefully spent 'doing'. The nature of most business environments is a bias towards action. However, leading involves harnessing hearts and minds for the best outcome, influencing people and processes to accomplish a collective aim and doing that well depends on understanding ourselves and our impact. Reflection leads to understanding the 'why' and 'how'; the critical stages beyond 'what'.

Reflection is a very powerful tool and for leaders who are sufficiently disciplined to have a regular practice, it's a differentiator.

What do we gain?

We gain greater insight and clarity, become more aware of our default thoughts and behaviours. Insight gives us more range and choice in how we impact others in our lives.

Reflection allows us to uncover our currently out-of-awareness patterns, how we act and react, and the triggers for each. We begin to see our strengths more clearly, what is working for us and against us, what is frustrating us and how we could move beyond it.

- We can clear out mind clutter and re-focus.
- We can stay closer to our purposes and goals.
- We can see patterns in how we think and behave and what is working well for us.
- We can allow new ideas and thoughts to emerge.

How?

If it is a new habit, you will have to make it happen. You need to schedule reflection until it becomes a habit. Give yourself 5-10 minutes a day. If you think you don't have 5-10 minutes available to you, you have a problem worth reflecting on...

1. Find a comfortable, quiet place that is free of distractions.
2. Close down anything that will distract you: phone, email, any interruptions.
3. Start writing...

You can approach your reflection in any number of ways. A few suggestions follow. Feel free to mix and match and create your own approach.

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action".

Peter Drucker

Topping and Tailing for a week.

To experiment with this process, devote about 15 minutes a day (5 minutes in the morning and 10 in the evening) to the exercise below for five consecutive working days.

- Each morning, before starting into work (opening your laptop, checking emails, or whatever action for you indicates 'starting work'), take 5 minutes to write around the following questions:

My Aim	What matters most today? What are the most important activities and people I will deal with today. What is my overall aim?
My Attitude	What is my attitude right now? Will it help or hinder me? What attitude will be of most help?
My Attention	Where do I want to focus my attention to help me achieve my aim?

- Each evening, when you have finished work (closed the laptop, or whatever action normally signals 'I'm finished for today'), take out paper and pen and give yourself ten minutes to reflect on the two questions below. Write freeform. It's only for your eyes and not to be read by anyone else.

My Aim	Did I achieve what I wanted? Did I achieve something else?
My Attitude	How did my attitude today help me? When did it help most?
My Attention	Where did I put most of my attention today? What did I notice today?
Went well	What went well today? What made me feel good? Why?

- Alternatively, use your own questions, ones that occur to you as useful. The important thing is to reflect and write.
- At the end of the 5 days, consider the ROI on your time.



Free Form Writing

Free form writing is a way of getting in touch with 'first thoughts', which often have great energy. It is the way the mind first flashes on something. Our internal censor often squelches them, so we live in the realm of second and third thoughts, thoughts on thought, twice and three times removed from the direct connection of the first fresh flash of thought.

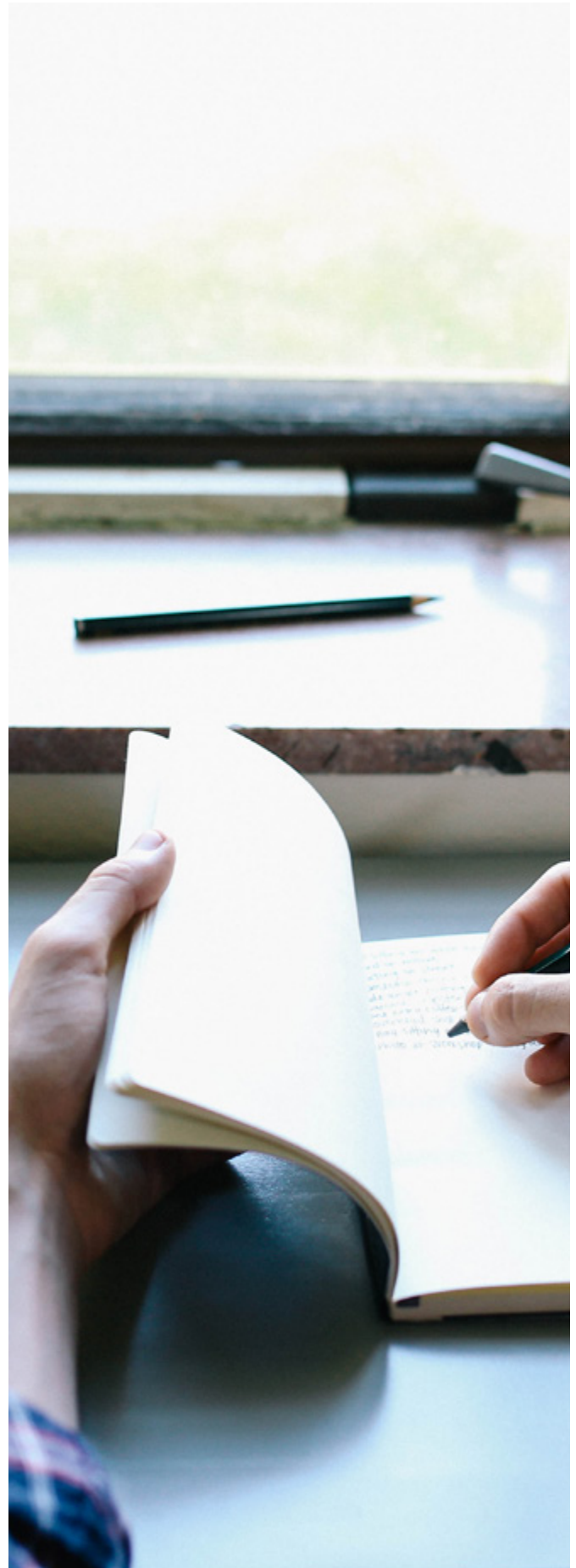
Free form writing encourages you to empty your thoughts on to the page, to write without stopping to think or edit. The practice is to write and not stop for anything; go quickly without rushing. Never stop to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. Just write whatever is in your head at that moment, even if it is *"I don't know what to write next...where am I going with this..."* just keep writing. Writing will unblock you and more will come.

The act of articulating your thoughts and emotions kickstarts a journey which can result in greater calm, unexpected clarity and more compassion in your life.

Beginning to articulate your feelings on paper can feel less threatening than speaking them out loud. It offers a safe space to express strong feelings without the fear of upsetting someone. It provides a release and eases the tension from unacknowledged thoughts or emotions.

To start you might like to set your timer for 5 minutes or 10 minutes and then just write whatever comes to your mind until the buzzer goes. The idea is to get 'stuff off your chest' on to paper.

Later reading back, you may see patterns emerge which will increase your self-awareness and offer the power to take more responsibility for your actions, and maybe even choose different ones.



Free Form + Question

A combination of Free Form and a specific question (for those of us who like a bit of freedom and a bit of structure!), this is a useful little tool and can often lead us to understanding or reaching a resolution around issues that we might not be able to find by just thinking about them, or even talking about them.

- *Pose yourself a question, such as 'How am I right now?' or 'What matters most to me today?' or 'What really happened at that meeting yesterday?' or 'How do I approach Mark about this issue?' or 'How do I feel about what my daughter/son/sister/brother is doing/said?' You can start out wide or come into tight focus.*
- *And then simply put your pen to the page and start writing. Move the pen across the page and write down what is in your mind.....happy, confused, messy, unstructured, repetitive, negative, looping back on itself, whatever. You're clearing and cleaning and sorting.*
- *Ignore your writing, your grammar, your spelling, your sentence structure. None of that matters. This is not for anyone else to read – you may not even read it yourself. Sometimes the act of writing brings you to a clear conclusion and you don't need to re-read it.*
- *Don't avoid the negative. Those thoughts are there anyway and giving them expression often loosens their grip. It is cathartic to express thoughts or feelings that can be hard to share with others (the dark one, the angry ones, the whiny ones, the mean ones.....we all have them.) Writing them on a page takes them out of your head and can change their shape.*
- *Expressing the negative, or even just a small issue around something, will often open the space for the solution to flow in. You're creating the space for that.*
- *There will be positive thoughts too! Writing down what is working well, what you are feeling good about, can lead to more creativity and clarity.*

Draw it

On days when you can't find the words, try putting the date at the top of the page and drawing..scribbling.. mind-mapping... sketching for five minutes.

As with all of your journaling, it's not for anyone else to see or comment on. This is your private space.

"We had the experience but missed the meaning. And approach to the meaning restores the experience in a different form."

T.S. Eliot

