

ESSAY

Looking In. Looking Out.
Within You. Without You

DesignIntelligence®
Quarterly



MICHAEL LEFEVRE

Managing Editor, DesignIntelligence

Looking In. Looking Out.

(Within You. Without You.)

DI's Managing Editor, Michael LeFevre, examines the relationship of introspection and self-awareness to perspective and offers tools for plotting personal and professional journeys.

Keep It Loose Keep It Tight

When I was younger, I wasn't the kind of person that had it all mapped out. I enjoyed the freedom of being able to react to what life sent my way. But over the years I've learned the value of looking within as a springboard for mapping the personal journeys we call our careers and lives.

In the early days, I relished the freedom of being foot-loose and fancy-free. Let those other people take notes, schedule their days and plan. Nerds and teacher's pets, all of them. When a friend called and suggested a spur-of-

the-moment road trip, they'd have to say no. (They had homework or guitar practice.) Not me, I was loose — ready to avail myself of what life offered. Maybe I just knew who I was and where I was on my plan, but not likely.

In the years that have followed, to cope with more responsibilities, I've adopted a hybrid approach, one that alternates periods of reflective planning and contemplation with the freedom to be in the moment, allowing for serendipity, the whims of fate and surprise. It's worked for me.

I've only consciously decided a few significant things in my tenure on this planet. In hindsight, each of those decisions dramatically shaped who I am. Now in my seventh decade, I wonder why I didn't do it more often. In hindsight, periods of reflection, coupled with well-timed visioning and planning tools armed me to make informed decisions.

A Few Tools

In my late-to-the-party embracing of the value of planning and visioning, I've come to scavenge and stash a handful of tools along the way. Now, safely tucked away in my overstuffed cache of professional goodies — and having been shared with countless colleagues — I've come to treasure them. Since we're immersed in introspection, I'd like to share them with you. Here are my top tools for effective introspection, thinking, planning, and action.

“

*Life is what happens when
you're making other plans.*

-John Lennon

1. One Thing

In the film “City Slickers,” Billy Crystal plays radio adman, Mitch. Amidst a midlife crisis, Mitch and his city friends embark on a Wild West holiday driving cattle. There, they encounter Curly, a grizzled, cynical cowboy, portrayed masterfully by veteran movie curmudgeon Jack Palance. Enchanted with Curly’s spirit, they inquire: “Curly, what’s the secret to life?” “One thing!” Curly growls. “Okay, okay, what is it?” they plead. “That’s what you have to decide,” Curly snarls.

Every book I’ve ever read on self-analysis reminds us: to know where we’re going, we must begin by knowing who we are. What do we like? What are we good at — or not? Such self-audits or self-assessments are the point of beginning for self-direction, the essence of introspection. You look within. Useful in times of reflection and redirection, such inward looks are most useful following failure. In military parlance, an after-action review. Immediately after an event, good or bad, take time to debrief and analyze it. What worked? What didn’t? Learn and advance to be better next time. What’s your “one thing”?

2. Role Models

In searching for your “thing,” it may be valuable to look to people. Consider your role models. Who do you admire and why? Specifically: parents, colleagues, celebrities, teachers? Which attributes do they have that draw

you to them? Humility or bravado? Are they thinkers, leaders or doers? Assemble a collection of those you admire and analyze the qualities common to all. In those commonalities you’ll find gold. Emulate their good characteristics. Shun the bad. Increasingly, you’ll know who you are, who you are becoming and who you want to become. Use your role models to inform who you are and what you must do.

3. Start with Why

A variant of the Curly method and still one of the most watched TED Talk videos is Simon Sinek’s presentation, Start with Why. Sinek sagely advises: Don’t ask what you do or who you do it for, start with why you do it. That will lead you to your answer — your “one thing.”



No battle plan survives contact with the enemy. When your plan meets the real world, the real world wins.

— Helmuth von Moltke

4. SWOT Analysis

A classic introspective organizational analysis tool is a periodic analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, or SWOT. Do this in written form and as a group if you can. Based on the results, develop a plan to do something about what you learned. What must change? What should keep going?

5. Force Analysis

This classic decision-making analysis tool deconstructs larger questions into their smaller, more easily under-

standable constituent parts. At its core, it's simply a pro and con list with weighted factors. Facing a decision? Take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle. On the left side, list factors in favor of this course of action. On the right side, brainstorm and list forces pushing against this approach. Use the seven W's as a guide, i.e., who, where, what, when, why, how and how much? Then weigh the factors using a three-part "triage" metric to assess small, medium and large considerations. Beyond the power of the list alone, the secret is to weigh the factors in relative terms, analyze them and do something as a result of the analysis — make an informed decision.



*Setting a goal is not the main thing.
It is deciding how you will go about
achieving it and staying with that
plan.”*

— Tom Landry

6. YouMap

Since we're talking about introspection, what better place to start than with yourself or with whomever you're coaching. What if we created a visual representation — a picture or graph — of you or them? Specifically, your capabilities in key areas. My own adaption of kite graphs, scatter graphs and rose diagrams as pioneered by process gurus such as W. Edwards Deming, et al., is called YouMap. YouMap provides a visual plot of an individual's capabilities along multiple axes to guide reflection and freeze it as a snapshot in time. Current capabilities for design, technology, leadership and any number of other self- or firm-valued capabilities — both soft and hard skills — can be graphed. When done for current and desired future states, users can visualize their paths, target growth areas and make plans to achieve them.

7. SMART Goals

Having done countless personnel development reviews over the years, I repeatedly found one aspect lacking. We'd have a deep discussion of current status and desired states, but always ended without a plan to improve things. In my years developing people and teams, much of our work took us into uncharted territory. There was no manual or rule book for Building Information Modeling (BIM). No job descriptions either. No one had ever done it before. We had to write them. Inevitably we'd meet and agree that improvement was needed in a category — say, technical software skills. Great! We agree you need to improve in a specific area. But what next? The conversation would end there. Jane wants to develop her prioritization skills and John want to become a better public speaker. Fantastic! Laudable goals, but how to achieve them?

Do we hope they miraculously appear? Wait patiently until some benevolent mentor drops them in your lap? No. To self-actualize your introspective findings and goals, you need a plan. A fine model I've used on many occasions is to develop a SMART Goals action plan, creating goals that are specific, measurable, actionable, reasonably achievable and time-based. Using a spreadsheet, simply list your goals, grouped by category. Next, under headings such as what, when and how, log whether you'll use a class, a book, online videos, personal discussions, on-project experience or other means to achieve each goal and by when. At the end of the year (or your next review period), tally the number of goals

accomplished to give yourself a score. Then, update your plan and continue anew. Armed with hard data, you'll no longer have to rely on the vague wishes and regrets rambling around inside your head. You'll know. You'll have the metrics.

8. Visioning

Stepping back from management, tracking and metrics tasks, have we unleashed the power of dreaming? An old anecdote describes Jack Nicklaus before he steps up to the golf tee. With a graceful swing he strikes the ball. It flies skyward in an elegant arc, lands on the green and rolls into the cup. What was his secret? He envisioned it. He saw it in his mind in advance. More than once.

Staying with the golf analogy, we recount the tale of a prisoner. After having been wrongly convicted and spending 10 years in the penitentiary, on the day of his release he returned to the golf course with friends. As they wrapped up play, his friends were amazed at his four-under-par round. "I played 36 holes in my mind every day for the past 10 years," he replied.

Visioning is a learned skill. With practice you can become better. In 2006, while attending the CIFE summer session at Stanford, I was privy to a session on visioning. There, we were taught to call on our senses for specific, vivid imagery while dreaming of future states. In your future dream state, who is in the room? What does it smell like, look like and feel like? Be specific. Like all



good writing, be detailed: show, don't tell. As an outcome of having learned and practiced visioning at CIFE, my future vision for BIM and collaboration was featured by ENR as the cover story of their June 6, 2006 issue.

9. Annual Planning — “One Year at a Glance”

Years ago, management consultant Bill Bean, CEO of Strategia, shared a liberating idea. Rather than keep separate calendars for work and home, he coached us to integrate and keep just one. Even better, create a view of it that shows an entire year at a glance. With a year-at-a-time in view, it's easy, via color coding, to space out activity types. Using, for example, blue for work (including work calls and conferences), gold for family and friends (e.g., vacations, outings and holidays), green for self (health, hobbies, exercise, fun, meditation), and red for learning and spiritual development (planning, reading, church, community, growth), you can plan and block activities in desirable patterns. This technique leverages the science of LEAN visual controls and data compression to enable powerful visibility and thinking in annual cycles. Gone will be the days of being enslaved to day-by-day humdrum. You'll have considered a larger perspective and looked ahead. You'll have a plan and can live and be in the “now.”

10. Life Master-Planning — “The Ten-Year Plan”

Having embraced the one-year calendar and seeing the

crest of my career ahead, in 2005 I decide to scale this technique and create a 10-year plan. In contractor parlance, I called it the 10-year look-ahead schedule. Each of us has predictable segments in our career arcs. Planning and logging recurring activities by putting them on a list removes their ability to live “rent-free” in your brain. You can forget about them and focus on the important things, freeing time to live in the present and react to change. With categories for work, health, home, health, family, finance, travel, things (e.g., cars, computer, cell phone) and others, I was able to reasonably see, predict and plan for the road ahead. Again, I used a spreadsheet — valuing its freedom as infinitely flexible graph paper, sortable, hierarchical, editable and portable — to plan and track life. As I approached the original 10-year milestone, I extended the tool another 10 years to give conscious thought to the next decade of my reinvention (a.k.a. retirement.)

11. “Project” Scheduling

Regardless of size and complexity, there is never enough time to complete our projects. Having a sense of urgency is what makes them fun. Whether you're designing a roadmap for your team to attempt the daunting task of scheduling the messy process we know as design, or simply pre-thinking a different kind of life project, you need a plan. Even if you're just building a doghouse or planning a trip, the greater the degree you've considered in advance what it will entail, the better your chances for success. Scheduling is a core skill of anyone who considers themselves a project manager — the responsibility of



To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan and not quite enough time.

— Leonard Bernstein

advancing an objective from A to B. Guess what? Your life is a project. Manage it. You're a professional. You've done this before. You DO know the steps. Go to a quiet place and rack your brain to list them all. Not just your activities. Include the tasks of all those you'll interact with to accomplish your project.

Most important is the list. If you omit a step from your sequence, you will attempt to bake a cake without a key ingredient. To develop a good schedule, list activities first, then sort them into sequence; next, assign durations followed by dependencies. Allow for contingencies, surprises and new information. But what if you're wrong? Fine! No problem. Expect to be "wrong," because life will happen. But if you have done a schedule, you'll be miles ahead when called to update it or completely rethink it due to some external chaos event.

Schedules offer two other valuable functions. First, given that we never have enough time, they force us to create deadlines to manage with. As Leonard Bernstein suggests in his quote above, having a sense of urgency is a powerful force. Second, having worked backward to list, sequence and fit activities within the deadline, you're a step ahead. You've at least considered how to proceed.

12. The Creative Process — and Critical Thinking

There are many classic models for the cyclical path of creating. The list easily begins with W. E. Demings' Plan/Do/Study/Act model. Feedback loops, systems thinking, iterations and rapid prototyping as discussed by experts such as Michael Schrage and inspiration, immersion, ideation, incubation and implementation as described by IDEO's Tim Brown and David Kelley are also proven models. Another classic, the scientific method, advises: 1) form a hypothesis, 2) design an experiment, 3) collect data, 4) analyze data and 5) draw conclusions. This method may serve science well but is perhaps too structured and rigorous for the serendipitous free-flow and discovery of explorative design. For its simplicity and scant three components, my favorite is an amalgam of many design methods thinkers: collect, analyze, synthesize. By engaging in each subprocess in isolation, we focus energy acutely for better outcomes.

13. Sharing: The Sanity Check

Regardless of your interest in and use of any of these tools, the most important context for using them is perspective. After you've spent time within yourself, get outside yourself. Run your thinking by a peer, partner, mate, sibling, client or external expert sounding board of some kind. Without such sanity checks, you may stay mired in a vicious, self-defeating vortex — being unable to see your own forest for the trees.

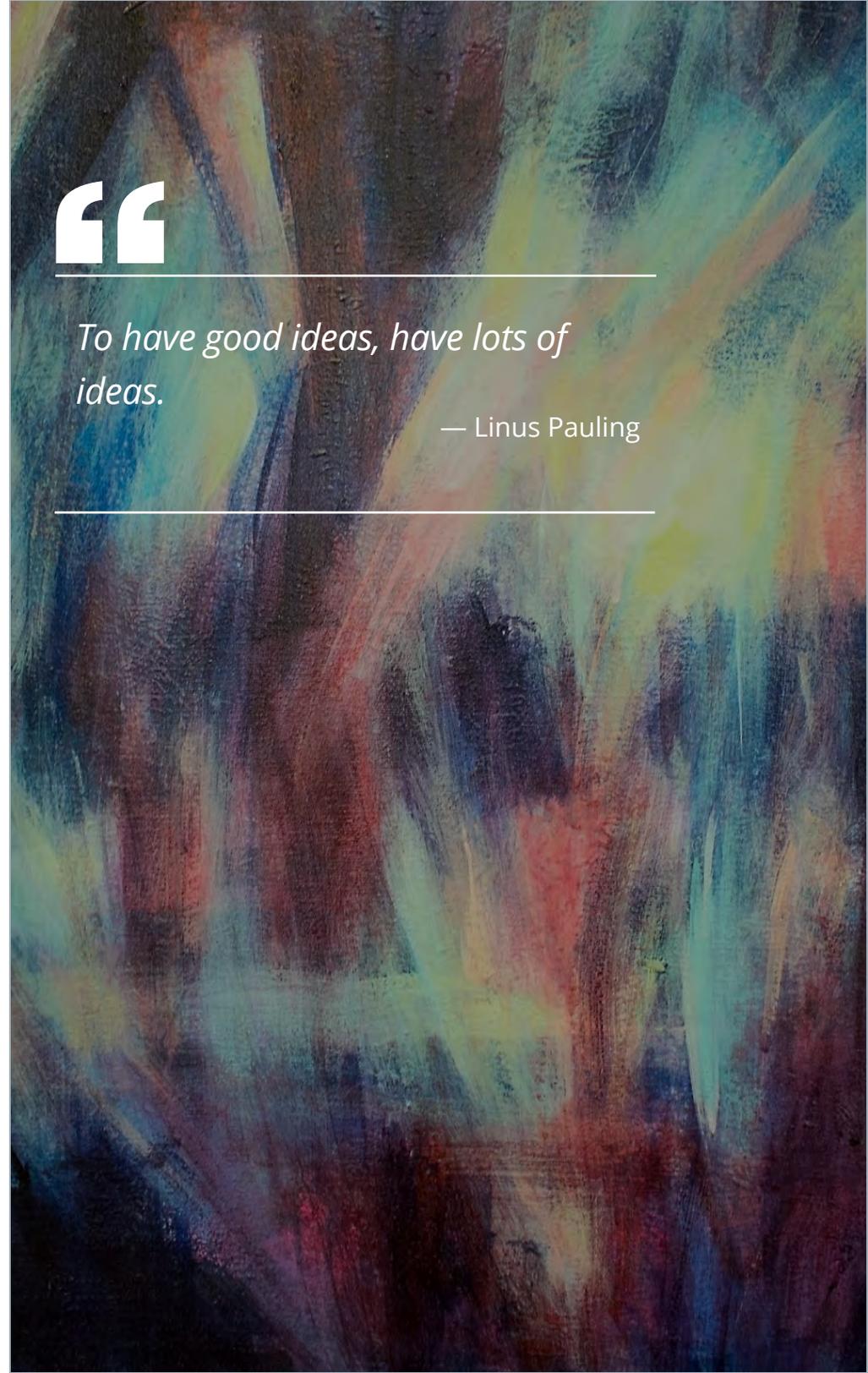
14. Be Prolific. Shoot Often.

A final bit of advice is self-evident. Keeping your head down can be a strength, whether you are being deeply introspective or deeply productive. If you work hard, you'll increase your chances of coming up with a good plan because you'll have taken more shots. Keep shooting.



To have good ideas, have lots of ideas.

— Linus Pauling



Get In. Get Out. Keep Going.

Introspection is an act of beginning. It fills us with an honest assessment of where we are, an admission of failures and a recognition of strengths and opportunities. Introspection can be the spring point of determination to change, get better, defy the odds or set a plan. But after having looked within, we activate true potential when we recast our gaze to the world — and the people and context that surround us.

The idea is to alternate view, scale and direction. First inward, then outward. First backward, then forward. When we initiate a Janus-ian dialogue between ourselves and the outside world, we gain perspective. In looking in, we see and know ourselves. In recasting our gaze externally, we are “looking out” for others in two ways. First, in our attempt to see them, second in the sense of caring for and about them. The spaces between these alternating views become precisely the kind of clarifying moments we desperately seek.



The spaces between these alternating views become precisely the kind of clarifying moments we desperately seek.

When it comes to introspection, get in, then get out. Be looking, be thinking. Move from within yourself to without — iterating, thinking and doing. Use tools and other people when you need to. Plan, then adapt. If you can get better at knowing who and what you are, you’ll have a much better chance of enjoying your journey — whether it goes according to plan or is lucky enough to be enriched with life’s surprises. Enjoy it.

Michael LeFevre, FAIA Emeritus, is managing editor of DesignIntelligence Media Group Publications, and author of Amazon #1 new release, “Managing Design.” Contact him at mlefevre@di.net.