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## Journaling: A Practical Approach

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## Journaling: A Practical Approach

Have you heard of the saying, "sometimes we are our own worst enemy"? I started journaling when I realized that many times, I was my own worst enemy stopping myself from achieving success. The thoughts of 'expectation of the worst' or 'gloomy outlook' kept me stuck in the same old rut day after day. I did not want to live the rest of my life driven by negative thoughts. I would be the same person I was yesterday. So, I started to practice being more mindful with my thought processes. As I became more conscious, I noticed it was impossible to capture the nagging worries of the day as the worries would swing by one moment, then a different thought the next moment... It was like catching smoke with your hands - IMPOSSIBLE!

I wanted to pinpoint the thoughts and have the power to keep them, remove them, or figure out the deeper root of the problem. Offloading my thoughts onto a paper offered that ability to physically see the deep-seated mental chatter and pinpoint (w/ a highlighter) those beliefs. This gave me invaluable insight into my unconscious mind. The calm and serenity that followed each journaling session was a cherry on top. Since then, journaling has been like talking to a friend. If something is bothering you, you kind of know the cause of this uneasiness, but it is extremely difficult to see through it. It is as if the brain has such a tight grip on the problem that it is nearly impossible to think about anything else but the problem, even the possible solution for it.

Then you talk to a friend. You feel as if a burden has been lifted and suddenly you see the remedy to your ailment. I find the solutions to many of my worries through journaling. The mind decluttering that journaling offers has been an invaluable tool during my first year as a medical student. As I go through one challenge after the other in medical school, journaling keeps my head clear to welcome different ways I can approach challenges.

On the days when my mind is running a mile a minute filled with anxiety and fears, I practice a process called *brain-dump*. I set a timer for 15 - 30 minutes. I write anything and everything that comes to mind until the timer goes off. If I think, "I don't know where to start", I write that too. It is important to not worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar during this, and if my thoughts decide to jump from one topic to another, I embrace it and write that.

After 15-30 mins, I review what I wrote, and highlight anxious, fearful thoughts as well as empowering thoughts. Most of the time, by the end of this, I feel much better. However, if I have time, I go one step further.

I dig deeper and journal on those anxious thoughts asking myself "why am I thinking this way? what can I do to improve the situation?".

I change how I journal from day to day, depending on what I want from a session. Somedays I practice a gratitude journal. Other days, I practice brain-dump. Sometimes, I like to document different activities I did during the day in bullet form. Other days, I prefer journaling about dreams. I give myself the freedom to journal in a variety of ways keeping the mind decluttering process a novelty.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** TANISZAHERA MOMIN  
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