



# GETTING MORE DONE

## Using a Journal to Gain More of Your Time and of Your Life

BY MARK SINCEVICH  
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, 1987

*The penetrating sun shines through my double-paned window on this early February winter day. I'm warm and restless in my makeshift sunroom as I open the window a crack to cool things down. The sky, a brilliant blue, has white wisps of clouds drawn out in narrow bands around its' edges. There is stillness unbroken by the occasional car passing in front of my window. The weather has shown its' many faces over the last few days, wind, cold, snow, gray clouds and last night's ice. I believe this stillness is a break from the weather's schizophrenic ministrations. I reach over to shut off my cell phone and silence what I hope to be the last of the day's distractions.*

What you just read is my latest journal entry. It is through writing in my journal that I have developed an outlet to continue the habit of writing and to collect my thoughts in one place. Before I started keeping a journal on a regular basis, my earliest memory of journal writing came from middle school. I had been "forced" to write in a journal by a crass English teacher. This teacher made us go home every night and record our thoughts. The last thing I wanted to do was to write in my journal instead of watching the original "Star Trek" television series. Right about now you are probably wondering, "What does writing in a journal have to do with getting more done?"

It turns out that a journal is a powerful tool that increases our awareness. How do we know what we want to accomplish if we don't know what we have done or how we felt about it? It is a place to record our thoughts, our aspirations and is a record of our lives. I also believe that journaling is very therapeutic. You can say absolutely anything you want in your journal. It's a chance to get something off your chest.

I came up with the idea of writing in a

journal when I went back to college for a second undergraduate degree. I wanted to record my thoughts and feelings. I was back on campus at age 26 and my perspective had changed from that of a naive 17 year-old freshman. I realized that the more I wrote in my journal, the more focused I became in my life. It is amazing what each of us can accomplish if we dialogue with ourselves first.

A journal is a great way to practice what you are going to say during a job interview, on a first date or before a presentation. A journal has allowed me to assemble many thoughts and ideas in one place, and I am able to refer to them on a consistent basis. A byproduct of writing in my journal has been a constant increase in awareness. I started to notice the world around me in greater detail and I was able to learn more about myself. Journal writing is absolutely one of the best things I have ever done in my life!

### Why Keep a Journal?

A journal is extremely portable, it doesn't need batteries and it won't break when you drop it. A journal is widely available for less than a few dollars, and if you run out of room,

you simply buy "freehand." It is an excellent tool for remembering things. Many of us might remember the general story, but forget the details. These are not easily forgotten when we keep a journal and are able to refer to them.

One of the earliest journal writer proponents was Dr. Ira Progoff, a psychotherapist and pioneer in the therapeutic use of journal writing. He has conducted workshops on the Intensive Journal Process since 1966. He said, "The Intensive Journal Process is a complex and systematic method for gaining self-insight by recording thoughts, dreams and significant events, which are then used as focal points for meditation and written reflection in separate sections."

I have gotten my father to keep a journal while my wife and I travel. This is the general part that I remember, but I had forgotten some of the details of what he wrote. After referring to his recent journal, I now realize that his actions probably saved our lives. My dad wrote, "I chatted with Albino about the front brakes. He showed me what went wrong with the caliper bracket and that Linda was very fortunate. It was very fortunate that during the inspections of the front brakes, the bolt holding the caliper bracket literally fell out. I brought the part with me to show you what had developed. If the bracket would have disengaged itself, Albino said you wouldn't have any brakes to stop, but only to crash into something." If he hadn't taken our car to the garage while we were out of town, we would have been involved in an accident!

A journal allows us to leave a legacy for others. I have dozens of journals that may benefit my children just as my father's journals continue to enrich my life. In addition, we would never have known about one of the most famous journal writers, Anne Frank, if she had never kept a journal. In a later passage from The Diary of Anne Frank she wrote, "When I write, I shake off all of my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived! But, and that's a big question, will I ever be able to write something great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer?" Other famous journal writers include, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Jack Kerouac, Leonardo DaVinci and Thomas Jefferson.

I have also used a journal to start and write poetry. In my first book, The Real Ideal, I use poetry as an awareness tool to help spur a call to action by the reader. In "Happy Trails," I write, "Written in place/in time retrace. Increase the norm/thought to conform. Knowing the mind/search to define. Chances for change/no growth insane. Patterns no fuss/need to adjust. Renew the force/feel no remorse. Spirits will soar/trails to explore."

## PART TWO IN A FOUR-PART SERIES

According to journal writer John Robson, he encourages people to use a journal in order to help them to change. He wants to empower others to use their own natural thinking abilities so that they can get out of their ruts. I can't think of a better way to get out of a rut than to start a poem. It demands a completely new way of thinking in abstract terms.

### How to Keep a Journal

Thinking in a creative or abstract way is a habit that needs to be encouraged and developed. For example, if an employee works too many hours, he will get burned out and probably won't be able to come up with a creative solution to a problem. What if the same employee learns how to work fewer hours and get more accomplished through the implementation of a creative idea? If we are too busy working, we won't have the time to develop our creativity. A journal is one of the best ways to record our creative thoughts!

Society teaches us at a very young age to start thinking logically (left-brained) and not as much creatively (right-brained). The funding for many right-brained school programs has been cut and often times only the three R's are emphasized: reading, writing and arithmetic. The three R's are all left-brained oriented activities. A journal encourages the use of the right brain, the creativity that each of us possesses.

If you don't know what you are going to write, then the best thing to do is to start taping newspaper or magazine clippings or photographs in your journal. You will be surprised at how your one-word comments will start to transform into sentences or paragraphs. Don't worry if you can't spell a word correctly or if your grammar isn't what it used to be. It just doesn't matter. The most important thing is to keep your ideas "flowing" with the destination being your journal. You need to come up with more reasons to write in your journal not less.

Too many people have been afraid to write

in a journal for fear that somebody else might read what they wrote. I recommend that you make it clear to your loved ones the rules regarding your journals. I am proud of what I have written in my journal even if it might make certain people uneasy. While I don't encourage others to read my journals, I would never use the "what if it was read" as an excuse not to start. Believe me, the benefits of journal writing greatly outweigh the risk of somebody possibly taking a peak at it.

There are no rules in journal writing. Each of us has the freedom to come up with our own guidelines when we write. You can be as silly or serious as you want. When you are fully focused and present while writing in your journal, you will be able to block out distractions and take a break from your routine. Remember a byproduct of keeping a journal is increasing awareness, but only if we focus on writing and not on other tasks at the same time.

### When to Keep a Journal

A journal isn't going to be very valuable if you leave it in your car. I highly recommend that you always have it with you. Take it to the doctor's office and write in it during the 30 minutes that you are in the waiting room. Carry your journal to the shopping mall and write in it while your spouse is in the dressing room. If you are shopping by yourself, make sure you take a break and write in your journal over a cup of coffee.

I always bring my journal to business meetings so that I can take notes. I highlight certain passages for later action. Once you more fully develop the habit of journal writing, you will be amazed at the amount of ideas that flow onto the page. During meetings or at other times of the day, ideas pop into my head. If I am not journaling at the time, I make sure that I write these down when they happen, so that I can take action on them later. By keeping a journal and having it with me, my ideas will always be in one place.

I put important 'to-dos' at the top of each page for easy reference. I have developed a system of folding the page for importance and use a series of check marks with colored markers. I put all of my 'to-dos' and aspirations at the beginning of my next journal and then I rate each one in terms of its importance to me: L (low), M (medium), and H (high). Since I know where my 'to-dos' are located throughout my journal, I can refer to them on a frequent basis. In older journals, the lists show me what was important at various points in my life. While I wasn't able to do everything, I am amazed at what I have accomplished.

Recently I took my journal to the National Geographic headquarters to participate in their Master's of Photography Lecture series. Photographer Sam Abel gave a lecture that was so inspirational that I ended up writing 10 pages of scribbled notes in the dark. I turned the notes into a very motivational article called, "The Way It Really Is." The article documents my experience entering a photography contest while using Sam's photography advice garnered from the lecture. I never planned to write this article, but if I hadn't had my journal, I never would have remembered what he said.

When you feel equally moved by a lecture or an event, I strongly encourage you to write down your thoughts and feelings. I find great satisfaction in looking at my journal entries over time to remember how I felt. It is important to look for themes and patterns over your life. It will help you in making decisions and will give you a greater sense of stability and control.

Heraclitus, the famous Greek poet from 750 B.C. said, "There is only one wisdom, to recognize the intelligence that steers all things." Keeping a journal on a consistent basis will help increase your awareness about where you have been and where you might want to go in your job and in your life.

...continued on page 22

## JOURNALING EXERCISES

The exercises below are a sample from the work that I do with organizations to help their employees and managers increase awareness through journal writing. By being more aware, they get more done. If you haven't used a journal before, I encourage you to venture to the nearest bookstore and purchase a journal that fits your lifestyle and personality. If you are a current journal writer, these exercises will challenge you to become more proficient.

**EXERCISE 1:** Write down the 12 most important events in your life. I will get you started by sharing the first three

that I wrote; graduating from college, getting married, and having a child.

**EXERCISE 2:** Start writing for 10 minutes without stopping. There are no rules here. Just start rambling on in your journal during this time.

**EXERCISE 3:** Listen to the silence around you for five minutes and simply write it down. If you have the television on, turn it off. If you hear the sound of a generator or the wind, describe it.

**EXERCISE 4:** Make a list of the things that interest you. What are you curious about? I'm curious about what I am having for dinner tonight, so I'm going to write that one down.

**EXERCISE 5:** Dialogue with a part of your body such as your arm, hand, eyeball, etc. You'll be surprised at what you find out about yourself.

**EXERCISE 6:** Who is your inner critic? Write a positive affirmation and do this three times in a row! For example, "There is a divine plan of goodness for me and then write, why?"

**EXERCISE 7:** Again, what are the 12 most important events in your life? Yes, I want you to write them from scratch, but don't look at your original list just yet.

Many times the participants in my 'Getting More Done' programs have

different 'important event' lists. I have found that the second list is a better indication as to where you want your life to go. Now that you know what the most important events in your life are, use these as a guide to what you want to accomplish going forward. How can you have more of the same? I recommend that you use these to help build a personal mission statement directing and aligning your life towards your goals. How do you want to be remembered? How will you use your goals to take more control of your life? I would like to hear how you are doing.

— Please e-mail Mark at [journals@staashpress.com](mailto:journals@staashpress.com)

## GETTING MORE DONE

...continued from page 21

### Benefits of Journal Writing

According to "The Change Companies," journal writing promotes positive and permanent lifestyle changes, allows people to apply key information to personal circumstances, and keeps asking 'what this means to you' for inner reflection. I have come to depend upon my journal as a way to gain confidence before an important decision and journaling has allowed me to increase the meaning in my life.

After I preordered a new car, I was worried about the subsequent payments for five years. Could I afford them? I wondered what my family might say and if it was the right model. I must have written four solid pages on how I felt. When I reread my entry, I knew I had made the right decision and I never questioned myself since regarding my car.

Not only does a journal allow you to increase your awareness, but also it allows you to be more present. Perhaps journal writing is exactly what U.S. workers need. According to Curt Coffman, the Global Practice Leader at the Gallup Organization, "Seventy percent of U.S. workers are disengaged - essentially clock watchers who can't wait to go home." What if these same workers were practicing self-reflection by keeping a journal? They could come up with creative ideas to their current problems and some would discover that they might be in the wrong industry. It is much better for a company to have employees who want to be there. They will make a much better contribution.

One of the ways that I was able to "apply key information to personal circumstances" was during an executive coaching class. We were divided into groups and asked to walk up to complete strangers and ask them, "What do you do?" Many people relayed their profession: accountant, bicycle shop clerk, professor, etc. The most interesting response was from a university student. She said, "I'm a student of life."

I had to write that response in my journal! What do you want your answer to be? Do you want to be a clock-watcher who isn't happy with your job or do you want to take an active role in the direction of your life? Keeping a journal will allow you to gain more control of your time, because you will be spending your time on those areas that are related to your goals. It will also allow you to gain more control of your life, because you can plan your own course with the help of your journal. Imagine being able to look back at your journals to see the progress you have made in the direction that you have chosen!



## CENTRAL COURTYARD BRICKS

purchased since November 2003

The first name is of the person being honored,  
and the second name is of the person making the gift.

### IN MEMORY OF:

**C. John Amborn, Ohio 1920**

John A. Pagin

**Aaron Anderson, Baker 2002**

Joseph H. Peters

**Bob Andrews, Baker 1972**

Joseph H. Peters

**Stan Aufdemberge, Baker 1949**

Joseph H. Peters

**Donald E. Beach, Ohio Wesleyan 1904**

Donald E. Hughes

**Arthur B. Briggs, Ohio 1934**

Virginia Briggs (wife)

**Charles C. "Buck" Buchanan, Hillsdale 1932**

Bruce Buchanan

Stuart Buchanan

**Timothy S. Burnett, Kent State 1991**

Dane O. Roberts

**Gregory E. Cherry, Wyoming 1991**

Shane Kinkennon

**Burke B. Cochran, Purdue 1926**

Brian B. Cochran

**Alan G. Emanuel, Nebraska 1988**

Nicholas A. Emanuel

Francis J. Emanuel

James M. Emanuel

**Ira H. Englehart, Indiana 1917**

Richard H. Englehart

**Virginia Englehart, Indiana**

Richard H. Englehart

**John H. Fleming, Florida State 1960**

Walter J. Fleming

**Paul J. Franz, Jr., Lehigh 1944**

J. William Royer

**Christopher G. "Chris" Freeman, Northern Arizona 2001**

Jake White, Alan Borrett,

Paul Peterson, Nate Pleger, Tim

Mohr, Josh Kammerer, Jay

Schwarz, James Clayton, Donald

Scott, Ryan Ficks, Jeff Merkel,

Spencer Mion, Travis Holt,

Undergraduates of Theta

Omega

**Thomas J. Hall, III, Purdue 1959**

Walter E. Helmick, Jr.

**Russell L. Heminger, Ohio Wesleyan 1914**

Edwin L. Heminger

**Edwin H. Hughes, Ohio Wesleyan 1889**

David B. Hughes

**Edwin H. Hughes, III, DePauw 1943**

Donald E. Hughes

**Francis M. Hughes, Ohio Wesleyan 1931**

David B. Hughes

**Mrs. R. Hunsucker (Mother)**

Terry L. Hunsucker

**K. Evan Kennedy, Carnegie Mellon 1991**

Robert O. Bethge

Jack and Helen Lautenschlager

Donald D. Lautenschlager

**Robert A. Layton, Jr., Delaware 1968**

Richard M. Hayford, Jr.

**Sally Loudin (wife)**

Blaine Loudin

**Norman Macleod, Pittsburgh 1917**

**James Macleod, Pittsburgh 1911**

Louis K. McLinden

**Blair S. McNutt, DePauw 1888**

Richard H. Englehart

**A.J. "Bud" Murphy, Jr., Pennsylvania State 1938**

Jack & Judy Isherwood

John Isherwood, III

**Thomas P.M. Neely, UCLA 1942**

Richards D. Barger

**James A. Olkeriil, Ohio Wesleyan 1979**

Richards D. Barger

**Terry A. Omenhiser, Florida 1972**

John R. Williams

**Jack B. Pagin, Illinois 1916**

John A. Pagin

**Irene & A.W. Reynolds, Sr., (parents)**

Jon F. Reynolds

**Dwight H. Seely, Jr., Baker 1942**

Joseph H. Peters

**Thomas S. Sharp, LSU 1967**

Connie Hudson

**John L. Stephens, DePauw 1953**

Norval B. Stephens, Jr.

**Byron N. Vermillion, Missouri-Rolla 1969**

Leslie D. Benoy

**G. Earl Wait, Jr., Baker 1941**

Joseph H. Peters

**W. Edgar "Ed" West, Ohio Wesleyan 1923**

William A. West

**IN HONOR OF:**

**James F. Barger, Ohio Wesleyan 1978**

Richards D. Barger

**John M. Barger, Ohio Wesleyan 1979**

Richards D. Barger

**C. Anthony Barnhart, Georgia Southern 1975**

Carl Brantley

**Lloyd W. Birdwell, Texas 1941**

Whitfield J. Collins

**C. Reed Black, Baker 1965**

Joseph H. Peters

**Samuel M. Chase, Indiana 1932**

Karl M. Snepp, Jr.

**Burke B. Cochran, Jr., USC 1950**

Brian B. Cochran

**Cliff E. Cochran, Ball State 1969**

Terry L. Hunsucker

**Franz A. Fideli, Stevens 1942**

Laurence M. Altenburg, II

**James A. Fisher, DePauw 1968**

John W. Fisher

**Michael J. Fisher, Jr., DePauw 1991**

John W. Fisher

**Jeffrey E. Fisher, DePauw 1968**

John W. Fisher

**John A. Fitzpatrick, Baker 1942**

Joseph H. Peters

**Brett T. Fleming, Illinois 2001**

Walter J. Fleming

**Dr. & Mrs. Max L. Goodman (parents)**

Michael T. Goodman

**Douglas F. Hastert, DePauw 1996**

John W. Fisher

**Dirk A. Heath, Sam Houston State 1989**

Frank B. Heath

**Thomas A. Hedrick, Baker 1956**

Joseph H. Peters

**Charles E. Hill, Baker 1956**

Joseph H. Peters

**Bettina Hughes**

David B. Hughes

**Charles E. Hughes, Tennessee 1975**

Russell A. Hughes

**Sherry Hughes (wife)**

David B. Hughes

**Kenneth J. Jackson, Baker 1942**

Joseph H. Peters

**Aaron R. Jennejahn, Texas Tech 2005**

Carl L. Brantley

**Daphne Kress (wife)**

Donald G. Kress

**Gordon E. Lansford, Baker 1993**

Joseph H. Peters

**Shirley Lawson, Delta Omicron (Mom)**

Gregory A. Richard

**Ivan L. "Swede" Malm, Baker 1956**

Joseph H. Peters

**Thomas W. McMillen, Georgia Southern 1975**

Carl L. Brantley

**John Evan Mickel (son)**

Christopher Mickel

**Cecil R. Miller, Baker 1953**

Joseph H. Peters