

Consider: Harnessing the Power of Reflective Thinking in Your Organization

By Daniel Patrick Forrester
Palgrave Macmillan, 2011
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Reviewed by Richard M. Meinhart

Consider succinctly articulates the need for senior leaders to create “think time” and to reflect in their personal schedules and organizational processes. Forrester firmly believes that “embracing think time and reflection as habits and organizational capabilities will determine success or rapid failure in the twenty-first century.” He supports this perspective through interviews with 55 successful people with varied experiences and identifies these individuals in the acknowledgments section. They include business and military leaders, musicians and designers, academics and economists, and advisors and diplomats.

The book is organized logically starting with an introduction to clearly set its

context and focus, which is followed by 10 short chapters of about 20 pages each. These chapters illustrate particular aspects of the value of think time and reflection and explain ways to embed these practices within an organization’s climate and culture. The author concludes the insightful introduction by articulating in six sentences what to expect from the book while encouraging the reader to “think with me for a while.”

In the first chapter, aptly titled “The Human Need for Think Time,” Forrester clearly identifies the need for reflection. He engages readers with what they may already know by describing how little time we have to really think and reflect because of longer work days, drowning in data and information enabled by technology, and the 24/7 news cycle. He broadly identifies ways to address these challenges by citing succinct comments from a variety of successful people. He also provides specific leadership vignettes to illustrate the value of providing think time, examining former Commandant of the Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen’s experiences with organizing the U.S. response to the British Petroleum Gulf oil spill and renowned violinist Joshua Bell’s performance routine. Forrester routinely brings in different types of experiences; hence, the book has a broader appeal as different readers can relate to different vignettes.

In chapter two, Forrester identifies ways to force think time in an individual’s schedule by illustrating how Abraham Lincoln, David Petraeus, Bill Gates, and current Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, among others, used various techniques to accomplish this. He concludes this chapter by identifying six questions and issues leaders need to consider should they want to mandate that subordinates take time for reflection. This technique of telling compelling stories and short vignettes to frame the issue, which is followed by specific lessons to apply at the chapter’s end, is also used in other chapters, and helps the reader gain closure on the relevancy and use of various insights. In essence, he identifies *What?* and *Why?* from reflective interviews and concludes with *So what should I do?*

In three other chapters, Forrester examines the value of reflection from three different venues in greater detail. In essence, these are mini–case studies vice short vignettes. From a business viewpoint, he focuses on how ideas are nurtured at Google and how think time is embedded at Whirlpool. Leaders of these two very different organizations use different ways to identify and address ideas about using think time and reflection. From a financial viewpoint, he provides insights from two financial thinkers who provided unwelcome views associated with the dizzying run-up to the financial collapse. Since their analysis went against the cognitive bias and anchoring that generally existed in the financial sector, their ideas were not reflected upon or valued. In another chapter, he examines how Generals David Petraeus and James Mattis provided time to contemplate the nature of war when developing counter-insurgency doctrine for the Army and Marine Corps from late 2005 to early 2007. They examined existing warfare assumptions, gathered different views, and got people out of their comfort zones to examine paradoxical perspectives before publishing the new doctrine. Using these three examples, combined with the succinct lessons at each chapter’s ending, Forrester provides insights that can be applied to a wide range of issues.

Chapter nine, titled “Reflection in Extreme Situations,” makes the case that reflection needs to be embraced in pressure-filled and consequential situations so that it trumps fear and anxiety and provides three examples. The first articulates the importance of commander’s intent using insights from General Mattis in Iraq in 2003 and General Petraeus in Afghanistan in 2010. The second example is from a former street hustler who teamed with an epidemiologist to address gang violence in Chicago. The last is from a mediator who could bring diverse groups to accord while refereeing emotional cases under short timelines.

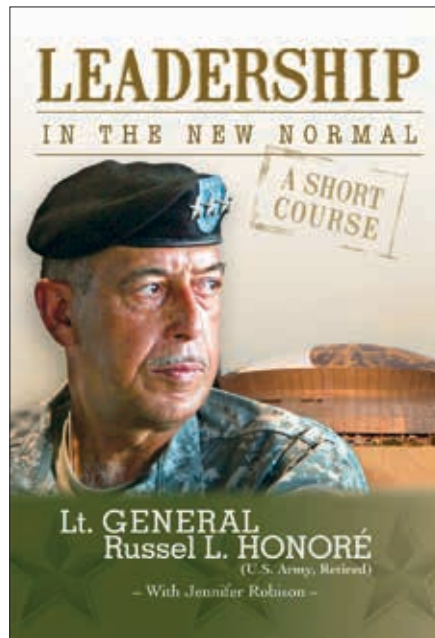
The last chapter concludes with five guideposts to provide evidence that reflection is valued: Technology Versus Human Capacity, Real or Masked Dialogues, Dedicating Time

for Thinking, Leaders Who Walk the Walk, and Cultures of Dissent and Deep Thinking.

The book's strengths are the diverse perspectives, interviews with key leaders to support the author's argument, and the lessons learned and questions that need to be answered at each chapter's end. The main weakness is the lack of analytical data in comparing the success of organizations that have think time in their cultures with those that do not. Perhaps these data do not exist.

The book's relatively short chapters are written in a storytelling style, which is a compelling way to convey the value of think time and reflection. The author seems to be having a conversation with the reader as opposed to lecturing or aggressively pushing a specific way to provide think time. National security or senior military leaders will find this book relevant to their professions. The insights and examples make the link from the conceptual to the practical as leaders reflect about their own experiences. We learn from others' failures and successes, and many are identified throughout, some with short vignettes and others in relative detail. JFQ

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Leadership in the New Normal: A Short Course

By Russel L. Honoré, with Jennifer Robison

Acadian House Publishing, 2012
183 pp. \$16.95
ISBN: 978-0925417817

Reviewed by Gerald L. Mitchell

L*eadership in the New Normal* is a short course in leadership in which the author traces good to great leadership attributes in such forefathers as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and by doing so he really describes the nature of leadership itself. Lieutenant General Honoré, USA (Ret.), postulates that we won our freedom because of leadership during the critical times in our history, such as Valley Forge and the Civil War, and leadership will continue to help us as we transition to the next “new normal” period.

From history and from his own vast experiences in tough command and staff assignments, Honoré shares his thoughts about the first three lessons of leadership:

- good leaders learn to do the routine things well

- good leaders are not afraid to act even when criticized
- good leaders are not afraid to take on the impossible.

The author backs up his assertions with historical examples and with his own highly publicized experiences as commander of Joint Task Force Katrina. He provides a framework for success through leadership, whether it is at the national security level, in the military, in the business world, or inside a family. His motto of “See first, Understand first, Act first” is described in terms of understanding the environment, understanding what is important, and understanding how to determine the best course of action, solution, or option as fast as possible. He also describes how to get subordinates to buy in to the mission. The leadership he portrays is applicable to any and all types of organizations—even at home (and maybe most importantly there).

The story is told of a prize pig that has a leadership lesson for us as we wrestle with the dilemma of resource constraints—near-term, instant gratification versus long-term growth and development. Every organization from the government, military, businesses, and education system faces this dilemma.

What is unique about Honoré's instruction is that he tackles the difficult issues with an old-fashioned common sense approach. What is the nature of leadership? What are the crucial lessons gleaned from the study of some of our nation's greatest leaders? How do the important aspects of leadership change with the strategic and global environment? How do leaders instill a philosophy and culture of “mission command” in their subordinates and organizations? How do they know and recognize the right problems to solve? How do they motivate their people? What does education have to do with leadership in government, the military, or business?

The author takes on these questions in sequence. Chapter 1 describes his take on the “nature of leadership.” He goes back to our nation's beginning and uses George Washington's ability to lead “a rag-tag army” to victory over a far