

Common Sole

Resource

Personal Business Inventory

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Exercise Description

It can be hard to prioritize self reflection when your days are a flurry of activity. For freelancers this is especially true—often your best and most creative energy is dedicated to clients, and it can be hard to find the energy to be equally strategic with internal work.

The following is a wonderful 1-2 hour guided reflection exercise for anyone who wants to prioritize self improvement—whether in your career, as a freelancer or business owner, or even in your personal life.

Be sure to set aside 1-2 hours of uninterrupted time. Find a quiet place and turn off your notifications, be sure to bring a stack of post-its, a pen or marker, and a notebook.

Guided Exercise

Step 1: Reflect

Take 5-10 minutes to create a list of all of the projects you have worked on the past year. Write each project on a separate post-it note.

For the sake of this exercise, you can think of a project as a unit of work, so a single client may represent several projects. For example, I was a wedding photographer, each wedding might be several projects: the engagement shoot, shooting the wedding, and editing the photos.

Your list can include personal projects, unpaid projects, and internal work required to operate your business.

Step 2: Organize

Take a look at all of your post-its. Sort them into 3 columns: projects you would do again, projects you might do again if there were changes, and projects you don't ever want to do again.

Step 3: Breathe

Take a moment to let go of any feelings of guilt for that last category. The goal of this exercise is to look for opportunities to guide your work toward more of the things you enjoy, not to focus on negative experiences.

Remember, each bad project is a valuable learning opportunity. Give yourself permission to distance those projects from who you are as a person and a professional.

If you need to move any post-its around, or add a few more in light of this, take a few moments to do so.

Step 4: Identify Patterns

Observe the consistencies and trends you see across your project inventory, and start to create a list of insights. Are there any obvious trends? Is anything surprising? Of the projects in the middle category, what are the things that need to change for you to want to take that type of project again?

Start to create a list of insights from what you have observed. For example: “Every project that requires a tight deadline ends up in the ‘Nope’ pile. Projects with ample time to plan end up in the ‘YES’ pile, because I have time to create a deliverable I am proud of, and feel less anxious overall.”

If you are doing this exercise with a friend, take a few minutes to share your insights with each other.

Step 5: Be Curious

Now that you have identified some of the biggest challenges and opportunities unique to your career or business, it's time to start reframing them as questions. This helps transition your mindset into that of curiosity over frustration, but also helps us generate ideas along the way.

Take a look at your insights and create 2-3 “How Might We” questions that are not too broad, and not too narrow. Too broad and it is hard to know where to start, but if too narrow your solution may not be impactful enough.

A great HMW question fits the following criteria. (source: Ideo.org)

1. Is the question focused on ultimate impact?
2. Does the question allow for a variety of solutions?
3. Does the question take into account context and constraints?

Step 6: Generate Ideas

This is the fun part. With a partner or by yourself, take 5-10 minutes to generate ideas for each of your HMW questions.

Step 7: Prioritize

Prioritize these using the prioritization grid on the next page.

This exercise is adapted from a workshop at Greater Good Studio, with reference to materials from IDEO.org

We would love to hear how this went!

Email us at info@commonsole.com to share any insights, photos or “ah-ha” moments that came up during the exercise.

How might we _____ ?

