

The power of reflection during the lockdown

by

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When President Ramaphosa announced the national lockdown with effect from midnight on 26 March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 virus, most South Africans were not ready for such a dramatic change to our work and lifestyles. In essence, people had only three days to get ready for the lockdown. Panic buying ensued, people left their workplaces, and students left their campuses to return home. Since then, society was inadvertently split into four main groups: Non-essential services, essential services, students and lastly, the homeless and unemployed. People had to adapt overnight to make arrangements for the lockdown and organisations embarked on immediate response plans.

As citizens we must be able to stand back and reflect on the current progress with the lockdown, including our own behaviour and situation we find ourselves in. The lockdown challenges us to reflect and identify opportunities for self-assessment. This requires honesty and commitment to do the right thing as well as a continuous focus on how you are dealing with the situation. Sometimes people become complacent, defensive, resistant, aloof, non-compliant, and arrogant – all enemies of reflection. Think about the people who were non-compliant, these people continued with their lives as if nothing really changed and many of them were arrested by the police. Some people thought they were on a 21 day holiday that was later extended to 35 days. The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande reminded students that this was not a holiday and that they had to continue with their studies. Likewise, in the private sector, CEOs were forced to let non-essential staff work from home. Many government departments stepped up in significant ways to deliver services to communities, in addition to implementing the disaster management and lockdown regulations.

The purpose of reflection is to face reality and to evaluate your role as an individual, and also as a team collectively. However, traditionally most business people are so busy running from one meeting to the next and leading so many projects and initiatives simultaneously that they do not get the time for reflection. Similarly, in times of stability students run from class to class at school or campus to learn as much as they can from their different lecturers or teachers. Thus, our culture of busyness has become an obstacle to reflection, because we never make time to think and reflect about our lives. We spend too much time doing things, and not enough time thinking about things. We now have an opportunity to also schedule time for thinking. Here are 10 questions for you to think about to encourage you to use the power of reflection in your life during this period of lockdown:

1. What did you learn about the lockdown thusfar?
2. What changed in your life and behaviour because of the lockdown?
3. To what extent did you comply with all the lockdown regulations?
4. How many times did you leave your home and why?
5. Do you think you are safer because of the lockdown?
6. What did you enjoy about the lockdown and what did you achieve?
7. What did you find difficult or challenging during the lockdown and how did you deal with it?
8. To what extent do you think the lockdown made a difference to the spread of the virus?
9. Which relationships did you really value during the lockdown and how did you stay connected?

10. Is there anything you will do differently after the lockdown?

Most of these questions will have interesting answers. The questions require you to take stock of your life and decide where you are at. Perhaps there were certain things you took for granted and you now value these things more. Perhaps you learned more about yourself and your relationships with other people. Reflection provides you with an opportunity to do a much deeper evaluation of yourself and your environment. It is possible that you observed things that you never noticed before or took for granted. Perhaps you surprised yourself and others with your adaptability, grit and perseverance. Or maybe you learned new things about yourself, colleagues, family and friends.

Hopefully, part of our reflection included the need to view ourselves as part of humanity and to acknowledge our blessings and privileges in our own situations, especially when we compare ourselves to people who live in poverty, unemployment and being homeless. Reflection does not only create insight, it also offers opportunity to rise to the occasion in deciding how you can make a difference to the lives of other people. Moreover, as President Ramaphosa asks us to do last week, don't discriminate against people who have been infected with the virus. Think about the inconvenience, sacrifice, stress and anxiety in a household in which people with Covid-19 were required to be fully isolated for 14 days or longer. Think about the fear and anxiety of every single essential and healthcare worker going to work risking their health and lives for the rest of us staying at home.

As in all things in life, be mindful of the importance of balance in your life – including thinking, behaviour and action. Overthinking and worrying too much is also not good for you. Reflection is a focused approach of being mindful and balanced about the things around you, and to extract learning opportunities from this unique and abnormal situation. And life needs to go on. While non-essential work continues, essential work is more important than ever before. Education continues albeit in an online format. If we are really honest with ourselves, online learning should have happened a long time ago already, the crisis has now forced us to accelerate certain projects that are long overdue. Even government started to do things during the lockdown that were overdue such as the provision of water, accommodation for the homeless, social support and other much needed programmes.

The reality of life is that it consists of ups and downs, of good times and bad times, and of risks and opportunities. The lockdown was instituted to protect us from being infected by the Covid-19 virus, and to curb the spread of the virus. While it disrupted our lives in a major way, it also provided us with an opportunity to reflect on our lives. In fact, it challenged us to consider our priorities and to live from day to day. It also forced us to think about our short-term needs and survival as human beings. But most importantly, the lockdown challenged our very existence as a people by making us think about ourselves, our purpose, the meaning of our lives, our activities and our relationships. One day, when all of this is over, we will stand back and say: I was there in 2020. I was part of it. I made a difference. I protected myself and my family. I protected other people. And together we all conquered the virus.

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