

Reflective Leadership
a message from Diane M. Magrane, MD
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ELAM staff are preparing materials for the 54 new Fellows who will come together in late September. Among these materials are journals with attractive, distinct covers for each Learning Community. Soon enough, the blank pages of the journals will reflect each fellows' ELAM journey in thoughts about strategy, personal growth, pearls from leadership interviews, and approaches to both pay back colleagues and mentors and pay forward to their organization and future leaders. It is this reflective leadership that ELAM encourages through the use of case analysis, event debriefing, and personal journaling that was the subject of graduation remarks to the class of 2010.

Our graduation speaker was Dr. Lois Nora, newly emeritus dean and president of NEOUCOM. We know her as an accomplished leader with degrees in medicine, law, and business. She is a great leader, mother, friend, and a member of the ELAM class of 1997. While she may not walk on water, she has carried many through the turbulent seas of academic health care and education. It is from Lois that many of us learned to cherish our "one life, our only life" - both personal and professional.

Dr. Nora titled her remarks to the class of 2010 "Reflections on Reflection." She emphasized deliberate reflection—establishing time and tools to periodically evaluate goals, projects, and relationships. She encouraged us to mark anniversaries of events with deep reflection and to process immediate encounters with a "reflective minute" in which to note observations, thoughts, and feelings about meetings, interactions, and readings.



I will not paraphrase this wonderful advice. Rather I wish for you to [read her words as she spoke them](#) to the class in April 2010, and consider how the wisdom falls into your own leadership development. She describes tools for recording reflection, times when the opportunity is strongest, and both solitary and shared approaches. She also suggests questions that provoke good reflection independent of content, citing Collins's statement that "one of the most important jobs of a leader is to ask good questions" (1). Her words come from her heart, her experience, her knowledge of the literature on the subject, and her own reflection on leadership and her ELAM experience both as a Fellow and as a mentor to Fellows.

[Read Dr. Margaret Nora's 2010 Graduation Remarks](#)

The [Center for Creative Leadership](#) (CCL®), which is a well known and well-researched organization that provides programming and resources for leadership development, also brought attention to reflection through journaling in one of its online publications last year (2). Drawing upon work by Pulley and Wakefield (3), CCL describes "reflection journals" as a tried and true practice that builds self awareness and promotes adaptability.

The November 2009 newsletter describes three typical parts to a reflective journal entry:

1. The experience (the observed facts)
2. The reaction (thoughts and feelings about the process and outcomes)
3. The lessons learned (analysis, interpretation and intentions for application to practice)

These three steps, in the order described, mirror Argyris's description of the Ladder of Inference (4), which is used to understand issues ranging from conflict management to meeting event summarizing. These same three steps form the foundation of the Liberating Structure, "The Debriefing Party" (5), which guides groups through a systematic approach to processing events and dialogue. Beginning with recognizing the facts and outcomes of the process, groups then progress to interpreting the meaning of the events, and conclude with postulating what else might follow and how the outcomes might be applied to existing challenges and opportunities. Both the Debriefing Party and CCL's reflective journaling method are based upon a fundamental processing of leadership experiences and validated by a variety of experts.

My own journaling is a somewhat eclectic blend of this type of debriefing reflection, of diagrams and charts that help me make sense of complex topics such as organizational relationships and curricular elements, an occasional draft of an original poem or a snippet of someone else's, and periodic renewal and resetting of my personal and professional goals. On a very practical level, I have found this a great way to track my varied experiences, achievements, and presentations. Each year, I then use a set of monthly journal entries labeled "Achievements" to update my curriculum vitae and measure success towards my goals. For the most part, I am usually very pleased and amazed at how much has happened in the course of the year. Of course, you can decide which tools and approaches work best for you—that's the great thing about reflection and journaling—no one sets the rules but you!

Of course, this From the Director column is a form of very public journaling. It is set up to highlight ELAM activities and to bring you a message that might promote your own leadership development. My wish is that this column keeps you in tune with current ELAM activities and that you will find within each column a few pearls of wisdom that you can try out on your own professional journey. I am certain Dr. Nora would be pleased to know that her words to the 54 graduates of the ELAM class of 2010 are being carried to over 600 alumnae and their colleagues.

In the spirit of enticing our alumnae into the world of social networking, this column often links to the ELAM [LinkedIn site](#), which many of you are viewing as voyeurs and some as active participants. However, there is no formal question posted for this particular column. Rather, I decided to leave the postings to you. If you have experience with reflective journaling that you would like to share with the ELUM community, if you have a reflection based upon the reading of this column or Dr. Nora's remarks, or if you have a question to post, please use the site. I look forward to reading your own reflections on leadership, and pledge to respond early to your contributions.