



REFLECTIVE CONSIDERATION:

A Daily Method for Leadership in Business Decision-making

**Stephen B. Young
Global Executive Director
Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism**

In business, we are often caught in seeming conflicts between virtue and self-interest; between doing good and doing well for ourselves; between profit and what feels right; between what we are told to do and what we want to do.

The Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism (CRT) believes that reflective thinking on its principles empowers us to resolve such conflicts for the general good and for our own sense of just accomplishment. Moral visions give us the power of courage.

Everyone is born to make a difference, to be a creative presence in the human community and the whole community of life. Often, our way is obscured and hindered by hardships that destroy hope or sometimes by successes that can make us indifferent to others.

Then, and at all times, we have access to a powerful inner resource. We can use the practical tool of reflective thinking to keep us on the pathway of what we most truly want to be within the framework of our moral communities.

Reflective thinking is both an “open sesame” doorway to rich inner resources of insight and courage and an underused, action-oriented discipline. Developing our responsive and creative reflective thinking will increase our ability to make the most of opportunities, circumstances and decisions.

How many times have we all said, hours or even minutes after a conversation, “I wish I had spoken up. It might have made a difference?” One goal of reflective thinking is to eliminate such self-imposed silences and to help us give the best response at the time it is needed.

Creative Reflective Thinking

All take or make time to listen inwardly. It may be when on a walk in nature or when in the shower. Many dialogue within, others just think. Sometimes, in an unexpected instant, an intuition comes. These insights or intuitions often point to great truths. So, usually, such creative reflective thinking is very helpful but, sadly, we do not normally make an effort to develop a regular practice of cultivating them.

Practice disciplined listening to oneself

- Make time for reflection. Start with 10-15 uninterrupted minutes a day. As you continue, you can lengthen it.
- Try to take these moments at the start of the day or at a time when you feel fresh and can best free yourself for a while from the pressures of life's demands.
- As well as giving dedicated time, try finding a special place for these moments of quiet concentration.

Prepare yourself properly

- Spend a few minutes with a book or article that inspires your thinking.
- Some people meditate, pray or do breathing exercises or physical exercise to prepare.
- Take a hot drink to a comfortable place to sit and think.
- If your mind presents you with a list of things you need to do, write them down to free your thinking.
- Be open to unexpected thoughts.
- Be patient until you find a method that works for you. Remain flexible to make adjustments as needed and for the different seasons of our life.

Use this practice of reflective listening at points in your day when extra thoughtfulness is most needed and helpful, regardless of time and location, such as:

- ✓ when you face a decision
- ✓ when you are starting a task
- ✓ when you read or hear something that challenges or inspires you

- ✓ when you recognize a crisis
- ✓ when you want to create something
- ✓ before meetings and important phone calls

Keep at it until reflective thinking, which accesses our inner resources, is part of your normal thinking, all the time.

The daily, disciplined time of reflective thinking, once learned, will never lose its value for you. With practice, it will also develop in you the ability to listen inwardly all the time, even while you are interacting with others:

- while you are speaking on the phone
- in the midst of conversation at home, school or in the office
- during an argument
- at a meeting discussing an important issue

In business, we will engage customers with more creativity. They will be more satisfied. We will enjoy our work. Our employees will be more productive and more eager to see our business succeed. Our investors will have more confidence in our strategies and decisions. The communities that limit our growth with their political regulations will trust us more.

As we become more alert to differing facets of the same truth, as interpreted through the lenses of different cultural, regional and historical perspectives, we will find ourselves able to explore, without prejudice, fear or superficiality, the wisdom of the great religious and spiritual traditions. As we discover that we not only learn from history -- its legacy of thoughts, feelings and behaviors -- we will also become shapers of history, building a better legacy for those who come after.

The Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism Approach to Reflective Consideration in Business Decision-making

The CRT builds on the practice of reflective thinking with suggestions to empower yourself with a more general pause for meditation, followed by reflecting on how the CRT Principles for Business can give us insight and courage in our daily work.

Leadership Meditation

In a meditative reflection, thoughts arise seemingly spontaneously. Note them and let them pass. After a few minutes, begin consideration about whether the thoughts arising are connected to two aspects of decision-making: self or group, thought or action.

Self or group?

Consider if the thoughts, remembrances or persons who come to mind reveal decisions that were focused on yourself – your creativity, your engagement, your success – or more on yourself as part of the team, the company, the organization.

Awareness of what your goals were, your motivations, of where your loyalties lay when different decisions were made, transforms your decision-making. You become alert to better matching your frame of reference to your circumstances, becoming more in line with possibilities.

Thought or action?

Consider which of the thoughts, images, remembrances or persons who come to your mind link you to thought and planning and which to action, implementation and to getting the job done without much concern as to why or what difference your work will make in the long run.

Sometimes, we find comfort in analysis, gathering facts, working on spreadsheets or coming up with the “next big thing.” Other times, we are more secure when we have earned praise for an accomplishment, clocked out of our shift, built a bridge or sent a bill. The action alone gives us a stronger sense of purpose.

Once we have opened up for reflection on our personal tendencies, we can turn to an examination of how our day went yesterday and then to reflection on what today might bring. We can turn such prospects to our advantage with professional responsibility.

The CRT recommends an examination of how each one of the our Principles for Business can guide us to better decision-making. The questions to ask yourself each day are:

Reflective Examination

Yesterday

- 1) Which stakeholder was most important to me yesterday – customers, employees, owners, creditors, suppliers, competitors, environment or the community?
- 2) What did I do to create economic growth and wealth? Did I do anything to detract from economic growth?
- 3) Who did I trust? Did I give grounds for others to trust in me?
- 4) Rules and regulation, compliance and reporting – how were they helpful? Was I annoyed?
- 5) How did I touch a wider world? How did that wider world touch me?
- 6) Did we overuse nature’s capital? Did we put back at least as much as we took out?

7) Did we seek or pay for any unfair advantage or play up to illicit greed to get a better deal?

Today

- 1) Which stakeholder deserves my full attention today? Must I make trade-offs between stakeholders or can I invoke the genius of the “and” to avoid the tyranny of the “or?”
- 2) How can I maximize win/win economic growth opportunities? What worthy difference can I make today?
- 3) What will I do to promote goodwill and better relationships? To whom should I listen carefully? Whom should I forgive?
- 4) What’s around the corner that takes me too close to skirting rules and regulations?
- 5) If I were President, what would I do to promote global prosperity?
- 6) What should I do to nurture nature?
- 7) Can we do something to reduce corruption and abuse of law? Should I blow a whistle?

When answers to these questions come into focus, it is handy to write them down succinctly to ease execution of the path illuminated by our reflective mind.

When our minds lead us to other questions, they should be noted so as not to be forgotten. Many times, this gift of insight is the most important outcome of our meditative reflection and examination.