

Aligned Thinking

Jim Steffen

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By applying the principles of aligned thinking, readers can “overcome the frustration of too much to do, increase accomplishment and satisfaction, and reduce stress and interruptions,” writes the author.

Part of the Ken Blanchard Series, this book is written in the storytelling style of Blanchard's bestsellers *The One Minute Manager* and *Full Steam Ahead*. In the Foreword, Blanchard credits the author's aligned thinking seminar as “a turning point” for him. Steffen, recognized as an expert on the topic, has worked with more than 150 Fortune 500 companies as a speaker, consultant, and trainer, and has served as director of the University of Massachusetts Leadership Lab.

The book illustrates how the personal and business lives of the two main characters, Ray and Carol, were changed after they applied the author's strategy for prioritizing life tasks. The fundamental concept is to concentrate on one's MIN, or what's “Most Important Now.” It proposes three key questions to help readers discover the MIN Secret, or how their MIN is related to what they desire. Through various scenarios, the characters apply the Now question to get the most control of their current actions, the Focus question to hone in on what they ultimately want, and the Purpose question to clarify what they want from work and life. For example, Ray determined that to achieve his MIN of keeping his job, he needed to accommodate his boss's request to work late.

A chapter devoted to the concept of freedom insight and attitude illustrates how people can choose between “primary objects desired” and “necessary conditions.” One's attitude toward the value of an interruption in the bigger scheme of things allows one to better tolerate the interruption without stress. Ray was upset because a last-minute business trip caused him to miss his son's championship softball game. By accepting the necessary conditions as a prerequisite to achieving his primary desire and maintaining his focus on the ultimate goal (his MIN), he avoided feeling like a victim.

The book also offers an alternative to “to-do lists” that readers may want to consider. To better focus on and prioritize key tasks in just minutes a day for more progress and less frustration than traditional to-do lists, it recommends creating a “priority list with a holding pen.” The priority list is for tasks that can be completed today. The holding section is a separate list of tasks to be done over an extended period of time. “During your focus period at the beginning of the day or week,” writes Steffen, “you'll get your priorities for that time from the holding pen, after you review what you really want.”

Aligned Thinking, which is succinct enough to be read in a single sitting, is insightful and has concepts to consider for a less stressful and more focused, satisfying life.

CINDY KRYSAK (August 18, 2009)

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