

# Reflection

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*Your perception of me is a reflection of you; my reaction to you is an awareness of me.*

—Bobbi Chegwyn, Self-Empowerment Coach

Step 4 of the evolution helix is Reflection (Figure 1), and this is where the magic happens! Through open and curious reflection, we can gain new insights into ourselves, our teams, our organization, the industry—even the future. These insights shift our awareness and are our evolution.



**Figure 1.** Reflection, step 4 of the evolution helix

Taking time out of our week to reflect can be a challenge. For some of us, it can feel unproductive to “stop working” and reflect on our performance and gain perspectives on the future.

The chapters in Part V explore the different reflection mechanisms and approaches we can use to overcome the challenges faced when doing deep reflection work. A key challenge most of us face is that of judgment—the judgment of ourselves and the judgment from others as we reflect on their feedback.

Judgment allows us to understand the world by categorizing our experiences. We use it to label experiences as “good” or “bad,” “successful” or “unsuccessful,” and we do so without much conscious thought at all. While this works in some situations (such as identifying danger), judgment can create unnecessarily painful states that limit our growth.

I’d like to frame the reflection process by retelling an old Chinese folk story that has been told many times (and in many different ways) about a father and son who experienced some “good” and “bad” luck.

## A Blessing in Disguise

A long time ago, a wise old man and his son lived on the plains of China. They enjoyed many a day indulging in their passion for horses and riding. Over the years they had acquired a collection of rare breed horses that included a magnificent, prized stallion. The old man and his son would ride their horses across the plains to trade goods, meet new people, and celebrate their good fortune.

Then, one day, a stable hand accidentally left the stable door open and the stallion bolted, galloping off into the distance and out of sight. After days of searching, the old man and his son declared the stallion lost. All of their neighbors came to console them. As the old man’s friends expressed sympathy and shared how sorry they were that he’d had such “bad” luck, the old man replied “Is this bad luck? How do you know?”

The wise old man knew that judging the situation as “bad” would create more pain for himself, and he knew from experience that there was no way of knowing if losing the stallion was bad luck or not. The reality of the situation was that the horse had escaped.

A few weeks later, the old man was tending to his horses when the stallion returned home, bringing with him a mare. It wasn't just any mare; it was a rare and valuable white mare. When his neighbors heard the news, they rushed over to congratulate him on his good fortune, to which the old man replied, "Is this good luck? How do you know?" Yet again, the old man made no judgment of his situation, and merely accepted the return of his stallion (and the new mare). As he explained that there was no reason to be excited, his neighbors became even more confused than before.

Weeks later, his son was enjoying riding the beautiful white mare when she slipped and fell onto the son's leg, breaking it badly. The neighbors rushed to help take the son to the hospital, where the doctors managed to save his leg. Unfortunately, though, he would walk with a limp for the rest of his life. Angry at the horse, the neighbors insisted the old man either sell or shoot the horse and be rid of the bad luck that it had brought. The old man refused, again responding with, "Is this bad luck? How do you know?" He explained that they should not feel anger for the mare or sadness for his son—it was an accident that could not have been predicted and there was nothing that anyone could do to change what had happened. Finally, the frustrated neighbors gave up on the old man, assuming that he was crazy.

A few years later, the country was invaded and all of the old man's neighbors were drafted to fight and defend their land. It was a bloody war and most of them were killed in battle. Because of his lame leg, the old man's son was unable to fight and was not drafted. Instead, he stayed home safe with his father—saved from war by the accident with the mare that had happened two years earlier.

All too often, we judge scenarios in order to make sense of them—it's a programmed response that keeps us safe from danger. Most scenarios that we encounter in our life aren't life-threatening, and so sometimes when we jump to judge a person or a situation, we create pain and suffering for ourselves. The wise old man had achieved a level of awareness that allowed him to hold a perspective of time that was significantly longer than most of us can see. He was able to view each scenario in the broader context of life, without judgment.

Our responses (positive, negative, or neutral) are driven by the meaning we make of the situation, our beliefs of what reality "should" be (our expectations), and our internal emotional state. Reality happens; it's how we respond to reality that is important.