



MAKING SPACE FOR EVERYDAY AWE

A Reflection Guide to Help You Notice, Cultivate,
and Leverage Moments of Awe at Work

Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast or profound that leads you to see the world in a different way.

We often associate awe with breathtaking natural landscapes or inspiring architecture, but we can also experience it in the context of our daily lives, including at work.

Awe is a powerful emotion that calls us to adjust our understanding of the world. It can open us up to new ways of thinking, feelings of connection to others, increased motivation, inspiration, affirmation, and belonging.

In the natural world:

“Seeing so much nature in one view made me feel the real size of myself in this greater system that I’m a part of. I understood that there are things that I can do to affect that system for nurturing or for destruction, and that it’s all so much greater than just me.”

In the classroom:

“Seeing another teacher so gracefully and apparently effortlessly guide the class through such a complex task, while also using humor and making the students laugh and enjoy themselves, I was really in awe. Until then I didn’t know that such a thing was possible. It really led me to think about teaching differently.”

In the organization:

“This past quarter has been very difficult with budget reductions and layoffs, with the workloads of most staff doubling. However, I have seen tremendous courage and fortitude under the circumstances from many of my colleagues. Each day I come to work I can think about how well they are holding up under pressure and get strong feelings of awe. I know I’m in the right place and this work matters more than ever now.”

Regularly experiencing and reflecting on moments of awe can be very beneficial to our mental and physical wellbeing. The more that we reflect, the more open and aware we become to awe and its effects.

The practice of reflecting on learning in the workplace has powerful effects on how learners adapt, apply, use, and refine knowledge and skills. Experiences of awe lead us to all kinds of new learning, and this awe tool is designed to give us time and space to reflect on these moments. Here's how to use it:

FOR INDIVIDUALS

This tool is designed to guide you through four weeks of reflection. You can:

- **Set a timeframe** – Aim for four weeks, though you can shorten or extend it.
- **Capture your thoughts** – Use a phone note, journal, or these reflection sheets.
- **Schedule reflection time** – Add it to your to-do list, set a calendar reminder, or check in with an “awe partner.”
- **Bring one awe moment each week** – Come prepared with at least one experience in mind.

FOR LEADERS/MANAGERS

This guide works best when awe reflection is shared and supported. You can:

- **Form an “awe group”** – Teams meet periodically to share their experiences.
- **Share stories widely** – Use staff newsletters, PD sessions, bulletin boards, or team meetings.
- **Use flexible formats** – Print sheets, send weekly prompts, or reformat as a survey.
- **Close the cycle** – Hold a wrap-up event (e.g., brown bag lunch) to celebrate stories and ideas.

“AWE PRACTICES” SHARED BY OTHERS

“As part of our new Rewards & Recognition program, we’re launching the Awe Awards to celebrate moments of awe and encourage staff to create awe for those we serve.”

“We use practices like gathering powerful testimonials and inviting staff to graduation ceremonies, so the life-changing outcomes of our work remain deeply felt and shared by all who contribute to it.”

This first week is about setting yourself up to be open and ready to notice moments of awe in your work life. Awe can take many forms — it might arise from something big and striking, or from a small, everyday detail that catches your attention. Before you begin actively noticing, take a moment to reflect on the questions below:

1. When you've experienced awe in the past, what did it feel like, and how did you recognize it? For example, does it manifest as a sense of wonder, calm, perspective, inspiration, or connection? Do you have a physical reaction?
2. Where do you think awe might most likely show up in your work, if at all?

You don't need long answers here — just jot down a few words, images, or examples that come to mind for each. The goal is to begin tuning your attention so that when awe moments do arise, you'll recognize them instead of letting them pass unnoticed.

Tip: What Awe Might Feel Like

Awe doesn't always look like gasping, goosebumps, or a dramatic “wow” moment. It can be subtle. Here are a few signals that may help you notice when awe is happening:

A pause — feeling momentarily stopped in your tracks

A shift in perspective — suddenly seeing something in a new way

A sense of connection — feeling part of something bigger than yourself

A feeling of admiration — being impressed or inspired by someone or something

A quiet calm — an inner stillness or spaciousness

Energy or uplift — feeling recharged or motivated

You may not experience all of these, or you may notice awe in ways unique to you. The important part is paying attention when something feels meaningful, surprising, or expansive.

Think of one moment of awe from this week (or from the past if needed). Use the prompts below to reflect on its impact.

1. What best describes the moment you experienced? (Select all that apply)

- I witnessed someone go above and beyond in their effort or ability
- I saw the impact of my work on others
- I solved or overcame a challenging problem
- I had a surprising insight or idea
- I realized I had achieved something noteworthy or unexpected
- I experienced a moment of extraordinary collaboration
- I observed a work task or process that made me say “wow!”
- I don’t think I’ve ever experienced awe at work
- Other: _____

2. How did the moment affect you afterward? (Select all that apply)

- It revealed something vast or complex to me
- It shifted or reinforced my perspective
- I felt connected to something meaningful
- I was reminded of my purpose
- I was inspired, energized, or motivated in my work
- I felt part of something larger than myself
- I approached a task with fresh thinking
- I felt more connected to my team
- I felt affirmed in my work, choices, and career
- It didn’t affect me much
- N/A – I haven’t experienced awe at work
- Other: _____

3. Record more details about your awe experience here, if you wish:

4. Are there things that make it harder for you to experience awe at work? (Select all that resonate with you)

- My work feels too routine or mundane
- My workload is too heavy to pause and reflect
- I don't think my work lends itself to awe
- I don't often see the impact of my work
- The work environment doesn't encourage this kind of reflection
- I'm too stressed or burned out
- I'm not sure what awe at work would even look like
- Nothing gets in the way—I regularly experience awe
- Other: _____

5. Are there any changes you could make to help you notice or create more moments of awe at work? (Select all that resonate with you)

- Set aside time to reflect on why my work is meaningful
- Look for more direct evidence of my work's impact
- Spend time with colleagues who inspire me
- Celebrate milestones and progress in my work
- Bring more beauty or nature into my workspace
- Take awe-inspiring breaks (e.g., walks, quiet moments)
- Keep a journal to reflect on meaningful moments
- Ask for support or opportunities that bring me closer to the mission
- I'm not sure yet, but I'm open to the idea
- Other: _____

Think of one moment of awe from this week (or from the past if needed). Use the prompts below to reflect on its impact. You'll notice that these are the same prompts from last week; this is intended as an opportunity to revisit some of your thinking and notice patterns.

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The purpose of this awe tool has been to aid you in noticing awe when and where it arises in your work life. Hopefully you've recognized the emotion of awe and have had some space to explore the effects and implications of experiencing it. Take this last stage to explore your overall impressions. You can see some examples of other people's final reflections on the next page.

⇒ **How has bringing attention to and reflecting on your awe experiences affected how you view your work?**

⇒ **Which strategies that you've tried for slowing down and noticing will you carry forward, and what is something else you want to try?**

Here are some examples of other people's final reflections:

"At first I was pretty intrigued, but a little averse. Like, how am I going to make room for yet another thing in my schedule? But having a colleague to meet with and a meeting on the calendar were both pretty helpful ways to make room for reflection. And I'm glad I did! I had multiple moments where I was really struck by just how much good was happening throughout our building at [organization]. I started noticing how everyone holds the door for each other, the smiles that greeted me each day at the office, and how quickly my colleagues jump to help out if I get stuck with a problem. The actual meeting with my awe partner was an awe moment in itself, because we both shared wonderful experiences we had had each week. I'd like to continue this practice either as a standalone meeting or as a regular intro to team meetings, because it's awesome!"

"I found that there was a lot more to work than the usual busy schedule of classes and meetings. Taking this time for reflection has me thinking about the impact our work has on people, and the sheer number of people that we've been able to help at [organization], it's really quite amazing. I've been thinking of the jobs that folks have gotten as a result of the skills they've learned, the families they support, and on and on. I wouldn't really have the time to reflect and realize all this unless I sat down and intentionally did it, so the thoughts that came up were all due to using that strategy. In the future, I'll keep taking space for reflection, and see if I can convince other colleagues to do the same."



This reflection tool was written by Megan Cuzzolino and Jeff Bachman with design support from Arushi Kumar. It was developed through the Next Level Lab, a research group situated within Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE).

For more information about the Next Level Lab, visit <https://nextlevellab.gse.harvard.edu/>.



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