

13. Effort Activity: Looking Under the Rocks, aka Four Steps Forward

Sometimes facing the reality of a situation can seem daunting. We all hide from the facts sometimes – we know something needs changing but it can seem easier just not to make the change. Here's a good metaphor for exploring this further. Have you ever wandered down a beach and lifted up some rocks? It can be quite scary but good fun.

You never quite know what you are going to find. To begin with there seems to be no sign of life. Then you lift a rock and all sorts of squidgy creatures come out – little worms, crabs, snails, sea anemones or even the odd fish. More often than not people put the rock back down and move on, preferring not to spend too much time looking at what's underneath. But sometimes in life we have to look under the rocks to make progress.

This technique is used a lot in business. A researcher and writer called Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, found that all successful companies face the brutal facts of reality, looking under the rocks for problems, even when they don't want to!

This activity is going to feel uncomfortable but by the end of it you will have a plan to make things better.

The first step is to identify any issues you think are under the rocks. This means taking some time and being really, brutally honest with yourself.

Things I need to change to improve my study at school ...

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The second step requires a group of four friends. Position yourself so that you are facing the group. You are then going to share your issue for change and the rest of the group are going to ask you questions and maybe offer some solutions. Listen carefully during this feedback. We quite often think that we can't change something simply because we have run out of ideas.

Now you've had a long, critical look at your progress you might be feeling pretty bruised. Take a break, go for a walk, watch TV, treat yourself to ice cream.

Once you have, it's time for the third step: time to start considering some action. What exactly can you do to improve matters?

Four Steps Forward

You might know all about origami, the Japanese art of paper folding. Those who do it can make beautiful and complex 3D models, many of which look incredible and even have moving parts. Despite these amazing constructions, the process is just a series of simple steps repeated over and over again. Every origami masterpiece begins with a single fold in a piece of paper, followed by another and another and another.

It's the same with academic learning. Sometimes we might look at a pupil who's way ahead of us and think they've achieved something impossible. But remember: all that pupil has done is execute a repeated series of steps over and over again.

November Activities

For now, forget the big picture and instead concentrate on the immediate. We've found that deciding on your *next four steps* is the best way to do this.

What could you do next? Consider some of the following:

- 1. Calling in a favour from a friend or peer.
- 2. Starting a big project you've been putting off for a while.
- 3. Handing a piece of homework in early.
- 4. Rescuing a project that's behind schedule.
- 5. Asking five questions of a teacher to clarify a problem you've been trying to ignore.
- 6. Seeking a book/study guide recommendation.
- 7. Completing a one-hour reread and reorganise of notes on any topic.
- 8. Sending five emails asking for support, help, advice or an opportunity.
- 9. Seeing another pupil and asking them to talk you through a topic.
- 10. Borrowing someone else's notes.
- 11. Attending a support class or revision session.
- 12. Handing in a redone piece of work.
- 13. Reviewing your feedback to look for patterns.
- 14. Tidying your resources and summarising a topic on one sheet of A4.

OK, you've looked under the rocks and admitted a few things you aren't proud of. You've asked for extra feedback and suggestions from helpful friends. And you've considered our list of fourteen possible actions.

Now, choose the four things you're going to do and write them in the table below. Put a date next to each. And choose a reward for yourself – something you're going to do to celebrate getting your improvements underway. Make it a motivating one!

1	2	3	4	Jackpot! Reward:
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Final Thoughts

This can be a tricky activity. It's not easy looking under the rocks, but once you've done it and taken action you'll feel much better about things.