

THE BASICS:

The Hero's Guide to Personal Transformation

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First Exploration:

Self-Discovery

It's a common misperception that most of us know who we are, what we're about, and what we're capable of. The truth is you could work on finding out who you are for the rest of your life and still find that there is much more to discover. It is often the case that people who begin this journey of self-discovery are led into an amazing Quest for personal transformation, a Quest that inevitably leads to self-actualization and a more rewarding and fulfilling life.

Your understanding of who you are has a tremendous affect on the quality of your life. It determines the type of friends you have, what goals you will pursue, your outlook on life and relationships, what you believe you are capable of, how you spend your time, how much effort you will put into achieving your goals, and much,

much more. In essence, your sense of self determines the kind of world you live in and what you are capable of accomplishing in that world. That's some powerful mojo, so if you are interested in improving the quality of your life, overcoming personal issues, improving your relationships, or tapping into your highest potential, then self-discovery is a great place to begin your journey.

Before we get into discovering just who you are let's take a moment to look at who you are not and common misperceptions .

EXERCISE

Think of the question, Who am I? Then fill-in the spaces below.

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

When answering the "I am" questions many people fill-in the blanks with historical facts, their emotional temperament, and the roles they assume in their daily lives. For example: I am Irish; I am thirty-eight years old; I am a sensitive person; I am a son; I am a friend. Most of us learn to identify our sense of self with these aspects of our lives.

When you think of who you are you may believe that these facts reflect your true nature, but in reality they only make-up a tiny fraction of who you are. In fact, overidentifying with the answers you gave above will bind you to outdated patterns of behaving, thinking, and feeling - patterns that are no longer, or never were, an accurate representation of who you are. Using outdated patterns is a major source of pain and suffering in all our lives, and it undermines all our efforts to lead more productive lives.

Let's take a closer look at the significance roles play in our lives. If I am identified with the role of friend I am confined to the thought patterns and behaviors that I believe reflect how a friend should think and behave. I don't allow myself to respond to situations or people truthfully. Instead I try to live up to my idea of what a good friend is supposed to do, and this cuts me off from my core self. We all do this, but when it becomes our main way of relating to life we pay a heavy price.

So where does this idea of what a friend, or any other role you identify with, come from? The culture you grew up in, your parents beliefs, your peers, your past experiences, and the media you have been exposed to all play major parts in creating the roles you identify with. So instead of responding to life in ways that reflect how you truly feel you react in ways that reflect the influences just named.

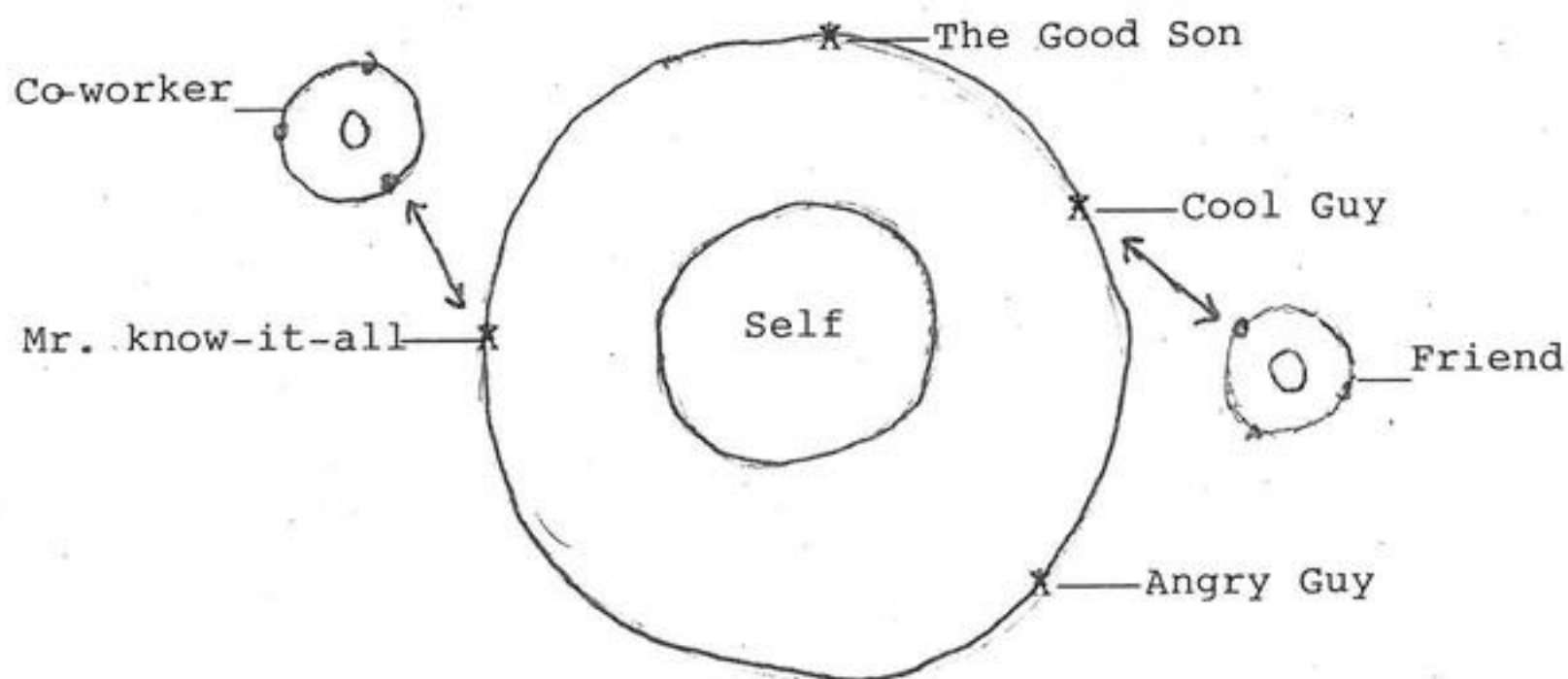
When interacting with a friend is it your past conditioning that actually interacting with him or your true self? The difference is critical.

Of course it is a good idea to know what your culture expects of you in the various roles of your life, but overidentifying with them comes with a heavy price. Each situation is unique and requires you to be aware of the differences so you can respond accordingly. When you are overidentified with your roles this type of tailored response is not a choice leaving you to act out old, conditioned patterns of behavior. This is an ineffective way to live. Not only that, living through your roles is like always wearing a mask - you're never able to engage life as your true self.

In her book Houses of Healing Robin Casarjian explains why these roles come so easily to us. She points out that when we were young we learned how to get our needs met through various patterns of behavior. Some of these patterns were created by us as responses to highly stressful or traumatic situations. Due to the intensity of the painful emotions of such situations we tried to find ways to reduce the pain we experienced or to get our needs met in whatever ways we could.

The problem is that most of us are still using these patterns today. These patterns, otherwise known as scripts, are attached to the various roles we play. For example, when someone disrespects me I might react with the "angry-guy" role. If I am cheated or treated unfairly I may react with my "victim" role. If I am trying to get something from you I might play the "manipulator" role. And if I am hanging out with friends I might use the "cool-guy" role. The problem is that none of these roles reflect my true thoughts and feelings, but because I am so identified with them I believe that they actually do represent my true thoughts and feelings. Most people fall into this category.

Take a look at the illustration below.



Typical interaction when using roles

As you can see being identified with our roles can keep people at a distance and keep us from directly interacting with life. This can explain much of the emptiness, loneliness, and pointlessness many of us have felt in our lives.

Some people believe that their lives would be better if they could just get rid of the major problems they are facing. Then they would be able to lead the kind of lives they want, but this is an illusion. If someone could make all your problems disappear it wouldn't be long before you would recreate a life with identical problems. Why? Because if you were still identified with your roles

you would play out all the old patterns of behavior and as a result you would create a life that resembled your old one. This is how powerful roles and scripts are in your life.

The first step in stepping out of your roles is to identify what they are. To do this start paying attention to how you react to negative situations. See if there are any patterns of behavior or emotions that keep repeating themselves. Also, notice how you act differently around different people. This can help you see the roles you play with others. Finally, look at your answers from the I am exercise. These will help you get started.

While you are exploring the impact that roles have on your life experience it is a good idea to take stock of yourself. In the following pages you will find a series of questions designed to help you get back in touch with aspects of yourself that you may not be familiar with or you have lost touch with. These questions will help you step out of your roles so you can live life from a place of authenticity, clarity, and purpose. The work you do here will have profound effects on your life. Please take your time.

Personal Exploration

Part One

Let's assume that your goals for doing this work include the hope to tap into your highest potential and to become the best person you can be. Keep these goals, and any other goals you may have, in mind while answering these questions.

Think back to when you were young. Try to think of a time when your life was relatively simple, a time when you had the least problems and life held promise.

1. As this child, what did you want to do when you grew up?_____

2. What did you most enjoy about life then?_____

3. What were your interests or hobbies?_____

4. Who were your heroes? Who did you look up to? _____
5. What did you daydream about? _____
6. Was there something you wished was a part of your life but it wasn't? What was it? _____
7. What was your best quality that you possessed as a child? _____
8. Was there ever a time when you believed that the world was full of goodness or love? When was that? _____

Now take a moment to remember how you viewed the world back then and how that felt.

Review your answers and see if you can find the "innocent child" in them. Reconnect to this part of yourself. Consider how this part of yourself is still there, even if you have covered it up with anger, disappointment, or the roles you play.

The above exercise is designed to help you reconnect with your inner core. Oftentimes that core gets buried when we are hurt by others or let down by the world in general. We feel silly or cheated for having such naive ideas about the world, so we do our best to push that part of ourselves away. But this reaction robs us of our greatest gift, a gift that can't be damaged, diminished or tainted by anything that happens to us or by anything we do. It is always there in its full strength waiting to be recovered.

Ask yourself if any of the qualities of this innocent self still show up in your life today? Do your childhood hobbies or dreams still interest you? Would you like to see the world through the eyes of that innocent child again knowing that today you are stronger, wiser, and more experienced now?

Recovering this aspect of yourself is important because it can help you get in touch with who you were before the "masks" and roles took over.

In this section you will gain a deeper understanding of who you are today. By understanding more about yourself today you will be better able to map out the future you would like for yourself.

1. What are your greatest strengths? _____
2. Which of your personal weaknesses cause you the most problems? _____
3. What do you like most about yourself? _____
4. Imagine you are elderly and on your deathbed. Looking back at your life, what will you think is most important about how you lived, or should have lived, your life? _____
5. What are your most treasured memories? Why? _____
6. What hobbies would you pick up if time or money were not issue? _____
7. What talents or skills do you have?(If you can't think of anything think of what other people have said you are good at.) _____
8. Who has had the most positive influence in your life recently? _____
9. What qualities do you admire in other people? _____
10. What motivated you to read this book and to do the work involved? _____

Take a moment to review your answers. Are you surprised by anything? Are there any new insights into who you are and what kind of life you want for yourself?

Personal Exploration

Part Three

Everyone holds an ideal of what he or she thinks makes a great person. You have an idea of what you think your highest potential is, but of course you fall short of it just like everyone

else does. The gap between who you are today and your ideal may be vast, but that doesn't mean you can't make progress toward your ideal. No one will ever attain perfection, we were never meant to. The point isn't to fulfill your ideal but to use up your life in growing toward your full potential. Everyday doing what you can to get a little closer. This is the work of a true Hero, someone who is brave enough to push him or herself just a bit more each day, facing the obstacles and challenges that will inevitably come up with determination. Such work infuses life with deep purpose and brings a certain vibrancy and magic back into the ordinary. This is the way to make life rewarding. Every culture in every age has written myths and stories regarding this Quest, the Hero's Quest. From the Greek myths of long ago to Star Wars and The Matrix, and Lord of the Rings.

To embark on the Hero's Quest you need to have some direction, an idea of where you are heading and what you want to achieve, though this plan may change. The next series of questions are designed to help you explore your deepest values, beliefs, and dreams. These questions will help you determine what direction your Quest for personal growth will take you. So aim high, shoot for the stars you just may be surprised where you'll end up.

Imagine that you are watching an inspirational movie. This movie focuses on the journey one man (or woman) took to overcome the odds and fulfill his highest potential. He has faced unbelievable obstacles and set-backs, but he never gives up and he gets through it all and is able to fulfill his dreams. By the end of the movie the star has fulfilled his potential and is now an amazingly strong, caring, and inspirational man. This movie is the movie of your life, you are the star...the Hero.

Imagine living as this version of yourself and answer the following questions as if you were that Hero already.

1. What do you value most about life? (Remember to answer as the Hero.) _____

2. If you could change anything about the world, what would it be and why? _____

3. What are you most passionate about? _____
4. What social causes mean a lot to you? _____
5. Are there any deep wishes in your heart that you know you should fulfill? What are they? _____
6. What would you like your family, friends and neighbors remember about you after you die? _____
7. In terms of a career, is there anything you would enjoy doing so much that you would be willing to do it for free? _____
8. If you could give one positive message to the whole world what would it be? _____
9. What challenging experiences have you had that give you an insider's knowledge and wisdom into a certain area of life, and how could you use that knowledge to help others? _____
10. Name the top five values you prize most in life: (For example, Love, Integrity, Confidence, Strength, Peace, Compassion, Honor, Kindness, and so on.)
1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 5. _____

Review your answers before answering the next question.

11. What would you do with your life if you knew you couldn't fail?
- _____
- _____

The above answers give you a glimpse into your highest potential. Imagine living a life that reflected these answers. How would that feel? What kind of life would you have? What kind of friends would you have?