



Self Inquiry Exercises

The six self-examination exercises listed below are a good way to get started with self-reflection. They're simple and easy to do, but they can familiarize you with the process for more in-depth reflection in the future.

1. The Three Why's.

Before acting on a decision, ask yourself "Why?" Follow up your response with another "Why?" And then a third. If you can find three good reasons to pursue something, you'll have clarity and be more confident in your actions.

Being self-aware means knowing your motives and determining whether they're reasonable.

2. Expand your emotional vocabulary.

The philosopher Wittgenstein said, "The limits of my language means the limits of my world."

Emotions create powerful physical and behavioral responses that are more complex than "happy" or "sad." Putting your feelings into words has a therapeutic effect on your brain; if you're unable to articulate how you feel, that can create stress. Comparing emotional reactions is also much easier if you are able to concisely express them with words, even if they only make sense to you. Take time to choose words that mean something to you. For example, I use the word "sinewy" to describe emotions and thoughts that make me feel ready and poised for action, even though it has little to do with the definition of the word.

3. Perception vs. Reality

The purpose of this exercise is to compare your self-image with what others think of you.

List the top five words that describe who you are. Then ask ten people — a mix of friends, family and work colleagues — to provide their list (the five words that best describe you).

It's critical that people agree to be candid. I suggest they send their words via email or text versus doing it in person. Compare their responses to your own list.

- *What are the similarities? What are the differences?*

- *What surprised you about people's feedback? Why?*

- *How do opinions from family and co-workers differ from each other? What does that tell you about how you behave in different environments?*



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4. Your Best and Worst Self

The purpose of this exercise is to help you acknowledge what drives you (or not) by getting input from other people. They just have to answer two questions:

- When did you see me the most excited?
- When did you see me the most frustrated?

It's important that people choose one event per question. And that they provide a "Why?" Invite people that know you really well — either personally or professionally. Get five to six answers at least. Compare findings and reflect on what motivates you and what gets you stuck.

- *What surprised you about people's feedback? Why?*
- *Is there any particular theme, either in what frustrated or excited you?*
- *Are there any specific tasks, topics, people, or moments associated with frustrating or exciting moments?*

5. Break Visceral Reactions

A person without self-awareness runs on auto-pilot, and responds with knee-jerk reactions. Self-awareness allows you to assess situations objectively and rationally, without acting on biases and stereotypes.

Take a deep breath before you act, especially when a situation triggers anger or frustration. This gives you time to re-assess whether your response will be the best one.

6. Be Accountable to your Flaws

Nobody is perfect. Being aware of your flaws, but failing to accept accountability, is leaving the job half-done. We're often critical of others, while ignorant of our own flaws. Self-awareness helps turn the mirror on ourselves and prevents hypocritical behavior.

Iteration and self-improvement only happens once you recognize a flaw. Create a habit of acknowledging your mistakes, rather than making excuses.