

## Know Yourself

*To thine own self be true.*

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, HAMLET

**You want to make an impact.** You're motivated to make positive change, brimming with energy and eager to get started. But just what do you want to do? What cause do you want to advance? And what skills will help you along the way?

To answer these questions, you'll need to spend some time getting to know yourself. Who you are as a person—what you value, what you enjoy, and what you're good at—is critical to determining both how you fit into the world and how you might change it for the better. In particular, the more you know yourself, the easier it will be for you to identify the causes that really resonate with you, as well as the ways you might use your unique skills and talents to contribute in the most meaningful, effective ways. Moreover, the better the fit is between you and your cause, the more fulfilling you'll find the work, the more energy you'll devote to it, and the more change you'll be able to make.

Getting to know yourself isn't something that happens overnight. It isn't a to-do item you can scratch off in a weekend. It's a process—one that will continue throughout the course of your life. And while this chapter won't be able to chart your entire course of self-discovery (nor should it!), it will help you begin to think through the questions of greatest relevance to a life of meaning and purpose.

**Note** To be true to yourself, you must first know yourself.

## Who Are You?



This is a pretty big question. In fact, you could argue that the entire chapter is devoted to answering this question. But for a moment, take a step back and do a quick assessment of how you see yourself and how others see you. Exercise 1.1 facilitates this self-reflection.

### How Do You See Yourself?

If you had to choose just 10 words to describe yourself, what would they be? These words can be nouns (for example, roles you fill: *sister, lawyer, mentor*) or adjectives (for example, personal characteristics: *adventurous, intelligent, loyal*).

Above all, be honest! If something is an important part of who you are, don't be shy about writing it down, even if it seems silly or not quite as serious as some of your other descriptors.

Write down these 10 words in the first column of Exercise 1.1.

### How Do Others See You?

Recruit a friend, family member, or anyone who knows you well to help with this task. Ask them to make a list of the ten words that best describe you.

Copy these 10 words into the last column of Exercise 1.1.



Once you've filled out Exercise 1.1 with your own descriptors and your friend's descriptors of you, compare the two sets of words. If one of your words also appears in your friend's list, put a checkmark in the "overlap" column. Place extra weight on these descriptors because they match both your own self-assessment and others' perceptions of you. Words that differ from your own can also be informative because they may hint at qualities or roles you've overlooked or underemphasized.

If you can get additional lists of 10 descriptors from more friends and family, all the better! Just replace the third column with a new list and repeat the exercise. Tally up the times each of your own descriptors is repeated in others' lists to get a sense of what words come up the most. You may also wish to compile a single list of all the words from your friends and family to determine what words come up most frequently among those who know you best. This will give you the best sense of how others see you. As you do so, your own list of descriptors may change to reflect the insights you've gained.

## What Do You Care About?

Understanding what you care about is the key to knowing what motivates you. And the things that motivate you are ultimately the causes and ideas that will drive you to take action, happily sacrificing your weekends or piling more responsibility onto an already full plate. They're the things you want to do because you find them deeply fulfilling.

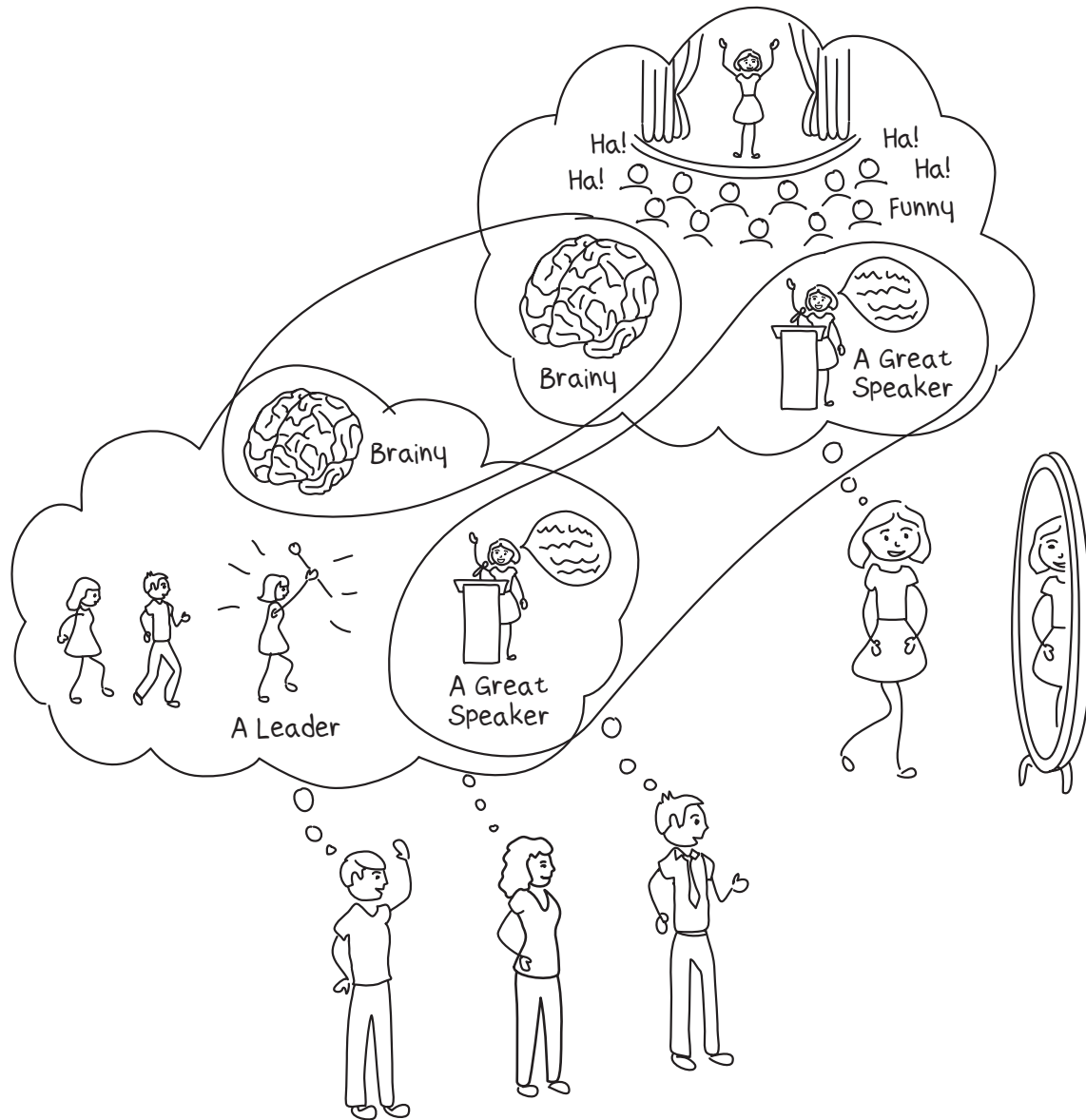
When you have a good grasp of what makes you tick, life gets a whole lot easier. That's because if you can find the courage to be true to what you love and find personally rewarding, you'll find that the choice of not only the cause you devote yourself to, but also your college major, career path, even life partner, isn't so much a calculated choice as it is a natural gravitation toward the attributes you value most, the features you find most enriching.

This section will help you begin to identify some of the ideas and qualities that matter to you and your leadership.

## What Are You Grateful For?

Start by identifying the things and experiences that you're grateful for. These can be objects (like your home), people (like your family), or ideas (like freedom of speech). Use Exercise 1.2 to help you organize your thoughts.

**Figure 1.1.** Who Are You?



### Exercise 1.2 What I'm Grateful For

List 10 things you feel lucky to have in your life. Then jot down a few specific reasons you're grateful for each of them, as well as what your life might be like if they disappeared tomorrow. An example has been provided for you.

I'm grateful for ...	Why?	Without it, I ...
my home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel safe at night.</li> <li>• It keeps me warm and dry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't know who I'd stay with or where I'd stay. I might not feel (or actually be) safe.</li> <li>• I might get sick from the heat, cold, or rain.</li> </ul>

The things you're most grateful for are likely things that most other people would also feel grateful for, but might not have. Taking the time to reflect on why these parts of your life are important to you and what your life might be like without them will help you better appreciate what it's like for someone without the same good fortune. Perhaps you'll find that the thought of other people going without what you consider so essential (stable housing, for example) motivates you to help others achieve the same ends.

### What Do You Value?

Think in the abstract on this one: What qualities, ideas, or perspectives do you hold most dear? Do you hold honesty in high esteem? The freedom to disagree with the government and publicly voice your dissent? What about racial and religious diversity? These may be things you've come to value because you've had a lot of experience with them, or that you value all the more because they've been in short supply in your life.

You'll probably find overlap between the things you're grateful for and the things you value. However, to include them in Exercise 1.3, you'll need to extract exactly what it is about them you find so valuable. For example, if "friends" and "family" appear on the list of things you're grateful for (see Exercise 1.2), the overarching thing you value might be "close, supportive relationships" or "feeling understood by people I trust."





The things we value are the things we seek to preserve and protect, hope to magnify both within ourselves and others, and wish to spread far and wide throughout the world. Determining what you value is essential to understanding who you are as a person and what type of mark you hope to make on the world.

### What Makes You Emotional?

Anything that moves you enough to stir up an emotion—any emotion—is a powerful experience that you shouldn't ignore. Pay attention to these experiences because they signal much deeper processes at work. An emotional reaction is just the tip of the iceberg; closely held convictions and our most basic human instincts lie well below the surface. This means that if you strike an emotion, you've also stumbled across all the underlying beliefs that make that emotional response possible. And if you can identify these beliefs, these core principles, you can harness your emotions in a productive way. What makes you angry will drive you to seek justice. What makes you happy will motivate you to bring that same joy to others.

Think about incidents that either bothered you or elated you when they happened. These might be the result of your own firsthand experiences or simply stories you heard on the news. What emotions did you feel? Were you sad? Angry? Disappointed? Or maybe you were proud? Overjoyed? Relieved? Consider what it was about the occasion that triggered this reaction. What specifically did you find upsetting or pleasing? Reflect on these instances in Exercise 1.4.

### Exercise 1.4 What Affects Me Emotionally

Reflect on five occasions when you felt deeply moved by an experience, story, or situation. In the table, write down a brief description of the incident, the emotion you felt, and what specific aspects of the scenario triggered your response. If you can think of more than five instances, by all means, add additional lines.

The Incident	The Emotion	The Triggers
In a lecture about disparate pay in the workforce, my high school economics teacher revealed to the class that women in the US routinely receive less money than men for the same job.	Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and fairness are incredibly important to me.</li> <li>• This new knowledge was at complete odds with my naïve vision of the modern-day world. I was stunned that such an unfair practice could persist.</li> </ul>

Bookmark the list of triggers you identified in Exercise 1.4 because these are key issues you care a great deal about. Examine your list of triggers for key commonalities. Is injustice the thread that runs through the things that upset you most? Does careless behavior make you disappointed? Do you find that when you see communities working together to enact change, that tends to make you the most hopeful, the most excited? When you're aware of the things that move you, you can more readily identify the causes you care about. For example, if you find that a lot of your emotional triggers center around equality and fairness, you might find great personal fulfillment working to eliminate socioeconomic, gender, or racial disparities.

### **Who Do You Admire?**

The ancient Greeks had a saying, "Tell me who you admire and I'll tell you who you are." Our role models say a lot about who we are. We revere and seek to emulate them because their actions inspire us or they embody the qualities we seek to cultivate within ourselves. Exercise 1.5 will help you home in on these people.



Now examine the lists of qualities and actions in Exercise 1.5. Do you find that certain qualities are repeated again and again? Do particular types of actions command your respect? Do you tend to admire tenacity in the face of adversity? Do people who dare to innovate inspire you? Identifying the qualities and types of actions you hold in high regard will help guide your personal development.

### What Are Your Strengths and Weaknesses?



Another essential component of getting to know yourself is recognizing your strengths. Once you identify the things you're good at, you can make a special effort to continue to nurture those strengths and develop them further. You'll also be better equipped to recognize opportunities where your talents may be of particular use.

On the flip side, it's equally important to come to terms with your weaknesses because they're as much a part of you as your strengths. We all have flaws, and the sooner you can acknowledge yours, the sooner you can begin working to improve them.

Exercise 1.6 will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses.

### Exercise 1.6 My Strengths and Weaknesses

List your 10 top strengths and weaknesses. These can be qualities, skills, or past experiences (or lack thereof). If you're having trouble getting to 10, ask others for some help.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Excellent relating to people of all backgrounds	Not much business experience

What can you learn from this careful accounting of your gifts and deficiencies? Your strengths are assets that you should keep in mind when thinking about how to solve problems you identify. If you have a unique talent or perspective, apply it; no one else may have examined the problem in that light. Things you're good at are also likely things you enjoy, as you've probably poured considerable time and energy into developing those talents. Keep an eye out for problems that would make use of your unique skill set and that you'd enjoy.

In addition, acknowledging areas that aren't your strong suit will simultaneously highlight the talents and strengths you should seek out in potential team members and partners. These individuals will help compensate for deficiencies in your own skill set and serve as teachers from whom you can learn much.

After completing these exercises, you should have a little more insight into who you are as a person, what you care about, and what your strengths and weaknesses are. Armed with this critical self-knowledge, you'll be better equipped to evaluate and impact the world around you.