

## **SELF-AWARENESS EXERCISES**

**A complement to the book “GAME CHANGERS AT THE CIRCUS “  
by Jean-François Cousin**

### **Be wise: know yourself, become confident and humble**

You have noticed that great persons and great leaders embody that blend of authenticity and vulnerability which generates trust from others. They know who they are, act in congruence with their values, and don't let fears thwart their progress.

I invite you to follow a few steps that deliver such strength of character and wisdom:

- Foundational self awareness:
  - update yourself about who you are, your positive traits<sup>1</sup>, negative traits, strengths, talents<sup>2</sup>, over-used strengths and weaknesses, through self-reflection and guided conversations ('mini-360°') with trustworthy people close to you
  - identify your 10 core-values<sup>3</sup>
- Cleanse or/and reframe your insecurities and fears, to unleash your courage
- Reframe your limiting beliefs into more empowering beliefs

As a result, those around you will trust you more, become more confident and genuine with you, and more courageous too. And you will be ready to ignite more of your greatness potential.

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<sup>1</sup> a distinguishing quality or characteristic

<sup>2</sup> innate / natural endowment or ability that support you when you deliver 'peak performance'

<sup>3</sup> your judgment of what is important in life, your principles or standards of behaviour



### Foundational self-awareness

Lao Tzu<sup>4</sup> remarked that “at the centre of your being, you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.”

Indeed, the source of your greatness runs deep inside of you. And to uncover it, you must first let your guard down and take a good, honest look at who you are, as a person and as a leader.

You may not like all of what you shall discover... but you will be enchanted to see some diamonds shining in the dark.

From the onset, keep in mind that no one is perfect. Remember also that each strength becomes a weakness when over used anyway<sup>5</sup>. As examples: too strong a determination yields pushiness, an over-dose courage brings in recklessness, excess of consistency leads to dogmatism. Really the search for greatness in you couldn't be more opposite to the illusory quest for perfection.

We are going to look inward at your strengths and your weaknesses, your dreams and your hopes, your beliefs and your values, your concerns and your fears.

It would help you a lot throughout the exercises if you could find one confidante or more, willing to act as a sounding-board and keep you grounded in reality. How about inviting your partner, your best friend, a trustworthy colleague who knows you very well and/or a mentor to play such role(s)?

Let's start smoothly, with an easy, yet powerful exercise, about you as a person and as a leader. Please fill-in this table (ideally go at it several times over the next few days), where who you are will gradually appear in the right-column:

What I <b>like</b> the most about...	What that is telling me about who I am:
<u>myself</u>	
as a person:	as a person:
as a leader:	as a leader:
<u>what I do</u>	
as a person:	as a person:
as a leader:	as a leader:
<u>my behaviours</u>	
as a person:	as a person:
as a leader:	as a leader:
<u>my choices</u> <sup>6</sup>	
as a person:	as a person:
as a leader:	as a leader:

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<sup>4</sup> [Philosopher](#) and poet of [ancient China](#) (604-531 BC), best known as the founder of philosophical [Taoism](#)

<sup>5</sup> Reference: “Core Qualities and the core Quadrant®” by Daniel D. Ofman, 2013

<sup>6</sup> You make your choices and your choices make you, that's why we examine them here



Please also complete this chart:

My answers

What that is telling me about who I am:

The difficult activities I perform with great ease<sup>7</sup>

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

The activities that provide me with the greatest sense of accomplishment

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

The activities that motivate me the most

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

My dreams

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

My hopes

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

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<sup>7</sup> That particular question aims at collecting insights about 'talents' you may have (talent meaning here an innate / natural endowment or ability) that you use when you deliver 'peak performance'



Now let's up our game one notch and repeat the first exercise... with just one twist! After all, one could say greatness is a ladder you can't climb with hands in your pockets.

What I **dis-like** the most about...  
myself

What that is telling me about who I am

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

what I do

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

my behaviours

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

my choices

as a person:

as a person:

as a leader:

as a leader:

I invite you to summarize 'who you say you are' before you move on:

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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



### Mini-360° feedback survey

Time to raise the bar further with a “mini-360° feedback survey”.

I recommend that you take this book to your parents, your partner, your children -at or above teenage-, your trusted friends, your colleagues, your boss(es), a mentor, anyone who matters to you -not just who you like the most!-, and invite them to answer the few questions below.

If it makes it more comfortable for you and/or them, you may tell them that you are “going through this self-development exercise and that ‘feedback is the breakfast of champions’”. Their feedback matters much to you, and you would be deeply grateful if they could offer you their most candid opinion, even more so about the ‘sensitive’ questions.”

1. What are 3 things<sup>8</sup> you appreciate the most (and the reasons why) about...

- me

as a person:

as a leader:

- what I do (my actions)

as a person:

as a leader:

- my behaviours

as a person:

as a leader:

- my choices

as a person:

as a leader:

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<sup>8</sup> Asking “3 things” focuses the respondent on quantity rather than quality of feedback; it makes it easier and quicker for them to come with ideas. Then, as they elaborate, they enhance the quality of their insights.

2. Should there be one or two difficult things you have seen me do with particular ease, what would they be?<sup>9</sup>

as a person:

as a leader:

3. What are 3 things you would like me to start doing, do more of or improve...

- about me

as a person:

as a leader:

- with what I do (my actions)

as a person:

as a leader:

- with my behaviours

as a person:

as a leader:

- with my choices

as a person:

as a leader:

Once your 'respondents' have answered, just thank them and say their insights are very important to you. Abstain from entering into any discussion –let alone justifications or

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<sup>9</sup> That particular question aims at collecting insights about 'talents' you may have (talent meaning here an innate / natural endowment or ability that support you when you deliver 'peak performance')



controversy!- about what they said, even if you wish they would provide you with more explanations. That could turn the experience into an awkward moment and a bad memory for both.

Should you decide -later on- to improve something about you based on one of their insights, I encourage you to let them know and invite them to hold you accountable for walking the talk.

As a parent of young children, you may venture into seeking their feedback as well, through drawings, along the lines of 'would you like to draw a picture of our family and then tell me the story?' You may ask soft, open-ended questions about you in the picture and the story, the colours chosen in the drawing ('why is Dad in grey?'), the size of the different elements in it ('the house is quite big, isn't it? why?') or the distances between people in the picture for example.

You may also ask "what is it that [you] is the best at?" and "what is it that [you] is not always so good at?"

Then again, just say thank you, congratulate for the great drawing and story, and give a big hug. Don't discuss further –as hard as it may be-.

Once you get all of your respondents' answers, leave them to rest until the next day, when you can answer - with less emotion - this question: "who others say I am, throughout their insights?"

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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Now you have a wealth of information and assumptions about who you are. Hopefully the picture is far from perfect, therefore real!

At this stage, all I recommend you do is:

- list the commonalities between who you say you are and who others say you are

Positive traits

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Negative traits

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- write down the main differences between who you say you are and who others say you are

**Who I said I am**

Positive traits

1. ....  
...
2. ....  
...
3. ....  
...
4. ....  
...
5. ....  
...

**who others said I am**

1. ....  
...
2. ....  
...
3. ....  
...
4. ....  
...
5. ....  
...

Negative traits

- A. ....  
...
- B. ....  
...
- C. ....  
...
- D. ....  
...
- E. ....  
...

- A. ....  
...
- B. ....  
...
- C. ....  
...
- D. ....  
...
- E. ....  
...

Please highlight those traits that you honestly believe are true.



- and finally –based on your honest choice amongst your findings and others’- write down your

core strengths

1. ....  
...
2. ....  
...
3. ....  
...
4. ....  
...
5. ....  
...

Talents<sup>10</sup>-maximum 5-

1. ....  
...
2. ....  
...
3. ....  
...
4. ....  
...
5. ....  
...

over-used strengths (becoming a liability)

- A. ....  
...
- B. ....  
...
- C. ....  
...
- D. ....  
...
- E. ....  
...

weaknesses -maximum 5-

- A. ....  
...
- B. ....  
...
- C. ....  
...
- D. ....  
...
- E. ....  
...

You gained some awareness your “good” Dr. Jekyll side, and your “bad” Mr. Hyde side, in your own eyes and those of others who matter to you. Unleashing more of your inner greatness won’t just happen from a decision to further leverage your strengths and talents, and reduce some of your weaknesses. It is a bit more complicated... because you are a bit more complicated than what the eyes meet! Your results stem from your behaviours, which are determined by your values, beliefs and fears. Therefore, should you wish to evolve some of your behaviours sustainably, you need to evolve your values and beliefs platform and let go of some of your fears.

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<sup>10</sup> innate / natural endowment or ability that support you when you deliver ‘peak performance’

### Identify your 10 core-values

With that in mind, let's dive deeper, into what is at the core of your being: your values and virtues (what is continuously important to you) and your beliefs. Combined, they are the foundation of your character, and determine a lot of the choices you make and behaviours you adopt.

How about you read through this (long) list of values<sup>11</sup> or virtues (next page), and tick those which are dearest to you? Choose maximum 10... Yes I know, it's not fair because more than 10 are important to you, but it's effective for zooming-in on the essence of your character. Feel free to add other values to the list.

<u>My 10 core-values</u>
1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....
9. ....
10. ....

Are those values / virtues congruent with all the characteristics of "who you are" you have summarized before? For example, let's imagine you chose 'challenge' as a value, and you and others noticed you 'thrive in adversity': that's congruent.

Should you notice some discrepancy between the traits and behaviours of "who you are" and some of your values, some of your beliefs, insecurities or fears may overpower your values, and prevent you from fully living in alignment with them. We will examine that next.

As an illustration, let's say you chose 'openness' as a value, yet you or others observed that you 'don't listen' and 'interrupt' others... There is a mismatch. You may be acting out of fear (such as 'he [the speaker] always discredits my opinion, and I will lose face if I let him speak') or a limiting belief ('he doesn't know what he is talking about').

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<sup>11</sup> Partly based on lists from Brian Tracy, Anthony Robbins and Joshua Ehrlich

**Values<sup>12</sup>**

Achievement	Intimacy	Resourcefulness
Action focus	Joy	Respect
Adaptability	Kindness	Responsibility
Adventure	Knowledge	Risk taking
Ambition	Leadership	Security
Assertiveness	Learning	Self-control
Authenticity	Love / affection	Sensibility
Autonomy	Loyalty	Service
Balance	Method	Simplicity
Beauty	Meticulousness	Sincerity
Boldness	Modesty	Sociability
Broad-mindedness	Nurturing others'	Social responsibility
Calmness	growth	Spirituality
Career	Open-mindedness	Status
Caring	Optimism	Strength
Challenge	Organization	Structure / clarity
Clarity	Originality	Success
Comfort	Patience	Talent
Compassion	Passion	Teamwork
Competence	Peace	Tolerance
Competition	Perseverance	Trustworthiness
Confidence	Personal growth	Truthfulness
Conscientiousness	Politeness	Understanding
Consideration	Power	Uniqueness
Contentment	Practicality	Value
Contribution	Precision	Variety
Cooperation	Productivity	Versatility
Courage	Professionalism	Victory
Creativity	Progress	Vigour
Curiosity	Prosperity / wealth	Warmth
Customer service	Punctuality	Willpower
Dependability	Purposefulness	Wisdom
Determination	Quality	Wit
Diligence	Quickness	Work-life balance
Discipline	Recognition	.....

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<sup>12</sup> Partly based on lists from Brian Tracy, Anthony Robbins and Joshua Ehrlich



## **Cleanse / reframe your insecurities and your fears, to unleash your courage**

*"You cannot manage other people - unless you manage yourself first." Peter Drucker*

"It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles, then the victory is yours" said Buddha. Worthwhile as it is, 'conquering yourself' is quite *the* battle! It is mostly about facing your insecurities<sup>13</sup>, your fears<sup>14</sup> and your limiting beliefs, and then letting go of them. Amongst the benefits for the victors are further clarity about who they truly are, higher self-esteem and level-headedness.

"Whether you believe you can, or you can't, you are right" asserted Henry Ford. Let's choose to believe we can wage that crusade for you and win it all over!

The first assault is to confront major fears, and consider what impact they may have on you, as well as ways to reframe them.

- **failure**

Fear of failure influences a lot of what we do. It can have us just avoid doing some things or procrastinate. We may blame others when they fail and we are impacted—in the hope they won't do that again-. We may also micro-manage our subordinates to avoid that they do a mistake and we fail as a result. At the core of it is our concern about "being good enough". Then we should remember that nobody is perfect, and being 'good enough' is just... 'good enough'.

I have observed that many successful leaders share their mistakes readily, sometimes almost boasting about them -obviously unafraid of failure-. We all know the famous quotes of Thomas Edison "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work" or of Henry Ford "failure is only the opportunity to begin again, only this time more wisely" or of Sir Winston Churchill "success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm".

So shall you choose –within reason- to reframe failure as an opportunity to learn, get stronger and ultimately become a greater person and a greater leader?

- **death, physical harm or pain**

Fear of death, physical harm or pain can be a healthy one to hold on to, for as long as it supports safe, healthy and quality living. Alternatively, inspired by [Saji Ijiyemi](#)<sup>15</sup> who wrote "I am not worried about dying, what I am worried about is not living", you may choose to reframe parts of that fear as "a fear of not living" and use it to live –safely- the greatest Life you can!

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<sup>13</sup> Insecurity is a lack of self-confidence, a state of mind characterized by self-doubt & uncontrolled vulnerability

<sup>14</sup> *Fear is an unpleasant feeling of anxiety or apprehension, caused by the presence of danger or our anticipation of some threatening event or experience*

<sup>15</sup> Author of "[Don't Die Sitting](#)"

- **rejection**

At a deep level, we all need to be loved, to be respected, and to belong. Yet being loved, respected or accepted for who we aren't is unlikely to be worthwhile and sustainable. Maya Angelou wrote "we all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour".

It matters to draw the line before you have to compromise about your deeply held values and your respectable claim to bring originality to the table. Next time you are afraid of rejection, pause for a while and ask yourself two questions: "do the consequences of rejection -should it happen- outweigh the benefits of going ahead as I wish to?" "Do those who may reject me matter that much to me that I may take heed their position?"

Keep in mind that there are millions of people out there ready to completely appreciate you for who you are and are ready to support your growth. You won't walk alone if you don't mean to!

- **losing status or 'losing face'**

The more fragile our self-esteem is, the more prone we are to that fear. In reverse, that fear subsides as you continue to grow your sense of self-worth<sup>16</sup>, and develop a leadership quality that needs no title. Joyfully reminisce what Margaret Thatcher said: "being powerful is like being a lady; if you have to tell people you are, you aren't."

Should people 'attack' you personally when you are delivering a presentation, just say 'thank you for sharing your view, can you please elaborate?' or 'can you tell us about where you are coming from with this view?'. Your 'thank you' will surprise the 'attacker' and your subsequent question will take her/him off-balance, feeling cornered into disclosing her/his (hostile?) intentions and at risk of looking bad. Meanwhile, you will have a few seconds to develop your response. Remember, it's not always the biggest sumo who wins the game!

- **losing necessary means of subsistence or lifestyle**

As long as that fear energizes us to secure the resources we need to fulfil our human needs, that's one to keep on the road. Socrates hinted to a limit though: "he who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have." The moment we fear to lose our life-style, we'd better question ourselves about where we draw the line between need and greed. For "greed is a fat demon with a small mouth and whatever you feed it is never enough<sup>17</sup>", and "growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell<sup>18</sup>". Food for thoughts...

- **the unknown**

Uncertainty scares us mostly because we have no or less control when it unfolds. It is the main reason why most people are so hostile to changes –including becoming successful-. Yet some others choose to be excited about what they will learn from it, such as Antoine de

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<sup>16</sup> we will come to that just after we are done with self-awareness and self-acceptance

<sup>17</sup> as Jan Willem van de Wetering put it

<sup>18</sup> as Edward Abbey asserted



Saint-Exupéry, who wrote: “a single event can awaken within us a stranger totally unknown to us. To live is to be slowly born.” Puerto Rican author Esmeralda Santiago concurred: “How can you know what you're capable of, if you don't embrace the unknown?” How will you answer the question?

- **losing your freedom or autonomy**

Neuroscience has shown that fighting for more freedom or autonomy energizes us tremendously. That partly explains why the Mandela’s and Gandhi’s of our World tirelessly advance their causes.

Conversely, micromanagement decreases subordinates’ motivation as they lose autonomy. That fear may be a worthy companion, so long as it doesn’t turn into a blinding obsession.

Mark Twain famously said "*Courage is not absence of fear. It is control of fear, mastery of fear.*"

*It helps a lot to reframe our fears.* Which fears will you choose to reframe? How?

<b>My fears</b>	<b>How I reframe them</b>
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

In case you experience ‘phobias’ –paralyzing fears-, please note that our approach will not alleviate them and you should require assistance from a professional.

Also, some deep-rooted insecurities –notably those related to your ego- may be too difficult to recognize and remedy by yourself. Conversations with trusted friends or a mentor or a professional coach shall support you to uncover them and initiate a process of change. That really matters, for deeply insecure leaders are like walking time-bombs<sup>19</sup> and usually toxic. Most of those who don’t find a way to deal with their insecurities are ultimately removed from their position.

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<sup>19</sup> On this topic, you may like to read Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries’ article on “Coaching the toxic leader” in Harvard Business Review April 2014 issue. The author aptly depicts how to help narcissistic or manic depressive or passive aggressive or emotionally disconnected leaders.

## **Reframe your limiting beliefs into empowering beliefs**

Besides fears, other things in our lives may hold us back from moving forward towards greatness. They often stem from limiting beliefs we harbour about ourselves and others.

Before 1954, doctors and scientists agreed it was impossible to run a mile under 4 minutes, and many actually believed you would die trying. Yet Roger Bannister did not believe so, and was the first athlete to run a mile under 4 minutes. Most interestingly, in the next twelve months, dozens of athletes decided to try as well and did run the mile in under 4 minutes. What we think and believe will affect how we behave and perform. In that regard, D.H. Lawrence<sup>20</sup> rightly asserted "the mind can assert anything and pretend it has proven it."

Your limiting beliefs could be:

- excuses ("I have put on so much weight that it's too late to start doing something about it")
- negative thinking ("it's too risky to trust others; I have been disappointed enough times")
- justifications ("the economy is down; it's not the time to look for a career change")
- perfectionism ("whatever I do, it's never good enough" or "no need to try if I can't do it to perfection")
- past failures ("I have tried that already, it did not work out")
- beliefs inherited from family or education (James Redfield<sup>21</sup> interestingly refers to childhood scars, and notably how 'interrogator' parents may generate 'aloof' behaviours in a child, or how 'intimidating' parents can bring about 'victim' beliefs in their offspring, such as "I am not good enough", "I am not worthy of love" or "I am not worthy of belonging")
- general assumptions or beliefs ("people will never support such a change to their routine")

Can you do something about them? [Lewis Carroll](#)<sup>22</sup> [challenged us to try:](#)

"Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said. 'One can't believe impossible things.' 'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'"

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<sup>20</sup> English novelist (1885–1930)

<sup>21</sup> in 'The Celestine Prophecy'

<sup>22</sup> In "Alice in Wonderland"



What I invite you to do now is to identify which beliefs may hold you back by answering the questions below, going out to discuss your findings with a trusted friend or mentor and explore together

- where they come from,
- how / when they may limit you, and
- whether you could... 'thank them' for whatever good they may have done for you, and then let them go, and
- adopt more empowering beliefs and ideas, which shall propel you along your journey to greatness

1. What **excuses am I making time and again that stop me from doing more good to myself and others?**

2. What **pessimistic thoughts often** come to my mind and are self-defeating? What is my 'inner-critic' frequently telling me? Would I talk to anyone else like my inner-critic does to me? If not, why listen to it?

3. What justifications do I make up for not doing 'the right things'?

4. **When am I being a perfectionist although it does not matter? Why?**

5. **Which past failures stop me from trying again or moving ahead? How useful is it?**

6. **What assumptions** or beliefs or pre-conceived ideas about how things should be or will happen am I allowing to hold me back<sup>23</sup>?

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<sup>23</sup> They may be quotes or catchy slogans, religious or cultural beliefs, black and white philosophies, etc...





Keep in mind Bertrand<sup>24</sup> Russel's aphorism "I would never die for my beliefs because I might be wrong"... Now please reframe your limiting beliefs into empowering ones, and move forward!

My limiting beliefs

How I reframe them into empowering beliefs

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<sup>24</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> century Welsh philosopher, historian and mathematician