

An abstract graphic in shades of blue. A large, dark blue circle is positioned in the upper half. Below it, a stylized hand with five fingers is shown, holding the bottom of the circle. The hand and fingers are composed of several parallel, curved lines of varying lengths, creating a sense of depth and movement. The background is a lighter blue gradient.

From the Leadership Mastery Suite SELF-ENQUIRY EXERCISE

This technique is reprinted from chapter 11 of **The Three Levels of Leadership: *How to Develop Your Leadership Presence, Knowhow and Skill*** (2nd ed.) by James Scouller.



THE LEADERSHIP MASTERY SUITE

Self-Enquiry Exercise

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Stage 1: Seed Thoughts

Choose no more than one seed thought per month. Reflect on the seed thought questions for 10-15 minutes per day for about three weeks (or longer if you choose) and write down any answers that come to you.

1. **Leadership.** Note: ask yourself these questions without referring back to the first three chapters. What does the word "leadership" evoke in me – what ideas or feelings immediately spring to mind? And what does being a leader mean to me? What do I believe the leader has to bring to his group, organisation or nation? How do I feel about myself in comparison with those standards? How would I summarise my beliefs around leadership and being a leader? Which of them are limiting beliefs?
2. **Turning points.** What have been the main turning points in my life? What special significance do they have for me? What effect did they have on me? How do they live on in my life today? How do they show in my thoughts, feelings and behaviour? What are the beliefs I still hold following these turning points? Which of these are limiting beliefs?
3. **Key work issues.** What, in my opinion, are the top three issues facing my organisation? How do they affect me personally in my role as a leader? (Note: not just any person facing the same issues in your role, but *you*, how do they affect *you*?) What is it I believe about myself, other people or the world that causes these issues to affect me this way? Which of these beliefs limit my effectiveness?
4. **Difficulties.** What aspects of my role as a leader do I find most difficult? What are the greatest frustrations I experience in my role? What is it I believe about myself, others and life that lies at the heart of my difficulties and frustrations? Which of these are limiting beliefs?
5. **Relationships.** Who are the people with whom I have my key working relationships? Having listed them, consider them one by one and ask, in what ways could my relationship with each of them be improved? What is stopping these improvements? What is it I believe about myself or the other person that is blocking my progress? Are these limiting beliefs?
6. **Fulfilment.** What is missing in my life? What would make it more fulfilling? What would that bring me? What is it I believe about life, myself or other people that's stopping me from living a more fulfilling life?
7. **Resistance.** Considering what I have read so far in this book, what resistance have I noticed in myself? What subjects, explanations or suggestions have I found myself criticising, rejecting or ignoring? Why am I resisting, criticising, rejecting or ignoring what I'm reading? Is my reaction well-founded or is it the sign of a deeper limiting belief or set of beliefs? If so, what are those beliefs?
8. **Love.** Do I feel worthy of another person's love or affection? If the people I work with and those I am close to knew what I know (or rather, believe) about myself, would they love me or like me? So what do I believe about my lovability? And what do I believe about love itself? How do these beliefs affect my leadership?

9. **Anger.** How often do I get angry? When I do get angry, is it usually in public or when I'm alone? How do I express my anger? What events, circumstances or behaviour from other people do I tend to get angry about? What are the results of my anger for me and for other people? How does anger affect my leadership? What beliefs are the source of my anger? What do I believe about anger itself? How easy is it for me to forgive myself or other people? If I find it hard to forgive myself or other people, what is it I believe that makes it hard?
10. **Irritation.** What part does irritation play in my life? What circumstances trigger irritation in me? What behaviours from other people irritate me? How does my irritation show – what am I aware of inside my psyche as it develops? And how does it show in my behaviour? What effects does my irritation have on other people? In what way is irritation limiting my effectiveness as a leader? In those moments when I'm feeling irritated, what is it I believe about myself, the other person or the event that's causing the irritation?
11. **Living in the past.** To what extent do I live in the past and allow old (perhaps painful) private memories and the meaning I have given to them to dominate me in the present. What are the consequences for me of being trapped in the past? How does it affect me as a leader? How does it affect my working relationships? What is it I believe about myself, other people or life in general that is causing this?
12. **Living in the future.** To what extent do I live in the future, allowing targets, future possibilities and desires to keep me on a treadmill and not enjoy the moment? To what extent is my happiness – even my self-image – dependent on what happens in the future? What are the consequences for me and my organisation? How does this affect my ability to set the atmosphere as leader? What is it I believe about myself, other people or life in general that is causing this?
13. **Comparison.** How important is a sense of comparison and competition with others in my life, especially colleagues? Have I been subtly comparing myself to others, whether in terms of accomplishments, possessions or appearances? Do I subtly put others down, either verbally or in my mind? In carrying out my work or pursuing my career, to what extent have I been doing what I've been doing to win and keep someone else's approval? By what standard do I measure myself? Given these answers, what is it I believe about myself, others or life in general that is driving my attitude?
14. **Superiority.** Note: you may wish to review the section on pride earlier in this chapter. To what extent do I view the world through a filter of pride or superiority, perhaps stemming from feelings about my nation, my organisation, my family background, my position in society or at work, my knowledge or perhaps my wealth? In what situations and with which people do I notice feelings of superiority in myself? Am I using the idea of pursuing self-mastery to reinforce my sense of superiority? What is it I believe about life, myself or others that underpins any feelings of superiority?
15. **Inferiority.** How have I reacted to the material in this book? Have I told myself that becoming a more effective leader is beyond me? Do I perhaps feel unable or unworthy to pursue self-mastery? If so, what is it I believe about myself that causes these feelings? Do I fear failure or do I ever feel a need to be perfect? Despite my achievements and career so far, do I sometimes wonder if I will be exposed as not being good enough to be the leader? If the answer to one or more of these questions was yes, what are the controlling beliefs lurking in the background?
16. **Contact with others.** What am I like around people I don't know well? Do I hang back or avoid them or do I make contact with them, include myself or include them in my world? How easily could I adopt a different form of behaviour with people – how easy would it be to include myself (or them) significantly more or less than I usually do? If I notice that it would be hard for me to behave differently, what is it I believe about myself or other people that's causing some rigidity in my behaviour?
17. **Power and responsibility.** How easy is it for me to take close control of a situation and dominate when circumstances demand it? And how easy is it for me to back off and allow others to have control over me when they are better qualified to deal with the situation? Am I able to take responsibility for decisions, projects or initiatives that may go wrong without blaming others? Do I delegate responsibility and give others room to do their jobs their way? Do I notice a habit of avoiding or postponing decisions even when that serves the organisation poorly? Wherever I've noticed that I have difficulty in flexing my behaviour, what is it I believe about myself or others that's causing it?
18. **Openness.** How easy is it for me to be fully honest with my colleagues? What is it I avoid telling them? In working one-to-one with colleagues, what do I find it difficult to say and with whom? What am I like in a group; am I consistently prepared to tell others what I am really thinking and feeling while respecting their right to hold other views? Am I prepared to disagree with others? What feelings does the idea of conflict evoke in me? If my answers suggest that I find

it hard to be open in some or perhaps many situations, what is it I fear? And what is it I believe about myself or other people that's holding me back, that's creating the fear?

Stage 2: Motivation for Change

Reflect on the following questions for 10-15 minutes and then write down your answers.

1. What will it be like for me if nothing changes, if this limiting belief continues to hold me in its grip?
2. How has this belief helped me in the past? And how useful is it to me now?
3. What would life be like if I let go of this belief?
4. How important is it for me to be free of this belief?

Stage 3: Undermining Questions

Reflect on these questions for 10-15 minutes per day for 3-5 days and write down your answers.

Is it really true...

1. Can you know for sure that it is true? What is the evidence that it is true?
2. What evidence could you point to or what arguments could you offer to suggest that the belief is false?
3. How does it always follow that if X happens, Y will be the inevitable result?
4. Who says you "must"? (*Some limiting beliefs include the word "must".*)
5. Does this belief always hold true? What instances can you think of when it wasn't true?
6. Have you ever believed it but overcome it – if so, what was different or what did you do differently?
7. Thinking about the [problem situation], what alternative interpretations might also be true?
8. Now ask yourself: am I still sure this belief is true? Can I let it go?

Are the consequences really so dire...

9. If that happens, how does it mean that... [terrible consequences]?
10. What makes that terrible, is there perhaps a more realistic evaluation of the consequences?
11. Is this something you absolutely need or something you want? (*Some limiting beliefs assume that what is at stake is something you must have, but in fact, it is only something you prefer to have, which is less serious.*)

Stage 4: Defining a New Belief

Your aim is to write a brief new belief statement. First, reflect on the following questions for 10-15 minutes per day for 3-5 days and write down your answers. Then write down a replacement belief meeting the nine criteria.

Reflective questions

1. What would and could I rather believe?
2. Can I think of a more realistic, helpful belief?
3. Or can I restate the old belief to serve me better?

New belief criteria

1. It must be something you feel you *could* believe even though you may not fully believe it yet.
2. It must be as short and as specific as possible.
3. The new belief must involve change on your part alone. It must not require other people or outer conditions to change. Thus, it must centre on the only thing you can control: *you*.
4. It must have emotional content. Thus, the formula is NEW TRUTH + POSITIVE FEELING.
5. It must be something you can verify. In other words, you must be able to see if change is happening.
6. The belief must not involve comparisons with others. (If it does, it will weaken your focus on you which, to repeat, is the only thing you can control.)
7. It must be stated in the positive. Thus, it must focus on what you are or are becoming, *not* what you are not or do not want to be. Thus, "*I will be less irritable...*" is not positively stated whereas "*I will be calm...*" fits the bill.

8. Wherever possible, state it in the present tense – as though it is happening, as though the change is underway. This gives it extra power (see the first example below). However, you can use the future tense e.g., “I will...,” if you practise mental rehearsal (explained in my book) as that gives it a present tense feel.
9. Remember: it must be a belief, not a statement of desire. “*I want to be calm*” is not a belief.

Examples:

“I am becoming more expressive as a public speaker and am enjoying the feeling of progress.”

“I assert myself powerfully yet respectfully and feel a sense of satisfaction as I do so.”

“The more I practise mindfulness, the more I gain control over my irritation and feel a greater sense of peace.”

Notes on Self-Enquiry Exercise

Take one seed thought per month. Thus, your full self-enquiry project will take at least eighteen months. It will, of course, take longer if you need to do mental rehearsal and affirmation work on any of the beliefs.

As a guide, spend 19-21 days on stage 1 (seed thought questions).

- Once you have chosen a seed thought for the month – and by the way, you don’t have to do them in the sequence shown here – read it over a few times and hold all or part of it in your mind. So for example, in seed thought #2, you hold the question, “*What have been the main turning points in my life?*” in your mind and you explore it as deeply as you can. As you reflect, have a note pad with you and write down any thoughts or insights you have there and then without analysing, criticising or censoring them. It’s important to write them down because you will find many of your insights have a curiously short life and if you don’t capture them quickly, it’s hard to recall them with the clarity they had when they first appeared. Then you move on to the next sentence or question and ponder that. And so on until the end of the seed thought.
- Towards the end of stage 1, review your notes and write down any limiting beliefs you have detected, using the two-part formula explained at the beginning of the section on self-enquiry in chapter 9. To remind you, this is: **LIMITING BELIEF = FALSE TRUTH + JUDGEMENT**. Try to keep the belief statement as short as you can. Reflect, redraft and redraft again until it feels right to you. If you find that a seed thought leads you to several limiting beliefs, try to distil them down to one or two so you can see the root belief or beliefs.

Then spend the rest of the month on stages 2-4. Stage 2 may take only a day but take longer if you want. I suggest you spend 3-5 days on stage 3 and the rest of the month on stage 4.

Regarding stage 3 (undermining the limiting belief), the judgemental part of the belief is normally harder to undermine, but you will usually find that testing the belief’s validity with the first eight questions so weakens it that the judgement no longer makes sense. Sometimes you will so undermine the belief that you can now let it go. Other times you weaken its ability to control you, but it still remains. The key is to ensure that by the end of the third stage you are, at the very least, open to doubting the belief.

After spending nearly a month uncovering and undermining an old limiting idea, defining a new belief (stage 4) is sometimes enough to help you feel and act differently. But not always. If you are to embed a new belief that replaces something decades old, you may have to call on the power of sustained attention. This is where you may find it helpful to reread the section in chapter 11 headed *Key 7: Understand the psychological laws governing habits and change*. There I explained how we break old habits and create new ones. The main message was this: repeated, conscious, willed attention is crucial. This means using the technique of mental rehearsal and affirmation, which is also explained in chapter 9.

If you do need to work with mental rehearsal and affirmations, I suggest you don’t move on to another seed thought for another two or three months to avoid losing your focus.

