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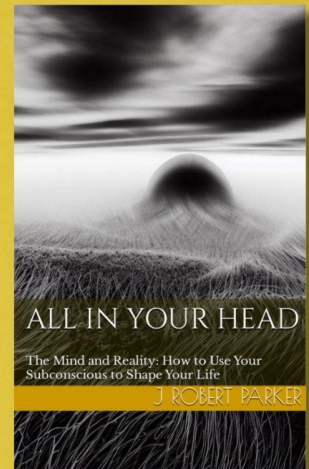
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from the Mind of

J. Robert Parker, C.Ht

AWARD-WINNING HYPNOTHERAPIST
SMALL BUSINESS CONSULTANT
DIRECTOR-TWIN RAVENS HYPNOTHERAPY



SAMPLE

All In Your Head

The Mind and Reality: How to Use Your Subconscious to Shape Your Life

by J. Robert Parker, C.Ht

Introduction

“Everything human is mentionable and everything mentionable is manageable” -Fred Rogers

I don't use this title as the statement ‘it's all in your head’ is normally used. In its usual application, it is a deeply negative, antagonistic statement. It's a way to tell someone that their perception is a delusion and to make them question the authenticity of their thoughts. Gaslighting, as it's said today. That is the exact opposite of the purpose of this book. In the way that gaslighting attempts to impose artificial barriers of perception, this text intends to remove them.

When I say it's all in your head, it is a statement of objective reality, a simple fact of existence. We will only ever exist in our own heads. Our thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and memories are all isolated in our own minds; we will only ever be able to fully understand a single person: ourselves. Know thyself, as the old saying goes. The mind is a complex thing, however. We are taught a great deal many things when we grow up, but we're never taught how to use our minds. What even is the mind, after all? It is only a placeholder term for something we all know clearly exists, yet its definition and understanding are evasive.

I am not claiming that I will be defining what the mind is here, only giving some direction on its use and function. Because sure, we are taught math and science and how to learn and all of that, how to use our brain to reason and understand, but I'm not speaking about that. I'm talking about understanding the neuroscience behind how we perceive ourselves in the world around us, how to understand our subconscious and teach effective practices for change. We are shown how to use our brains but not our minds; it is that gap in knowledge that I hope to fill with this book. The mind is no physical thing like the brain, but a thing of pure perception working off the mechanics of the brain. It is the visual operating system, your GUI (General User Interface) for the computer in your skull.

Your mind can be used, when its mechanics are understood, to facilitate tangible and sometimes life-altering change. I know this as a fact as it is the basis for my work. You see, I am a hypnotherapist and much of the content of this book will be through that lens. If you do not understand what hypnosis is, don't worry. I will clear that up quickly as a basic understanding of the modality is needed to fully comprehend many of the things that I speak about. To put it briefly, my work is in using the natural process of trance to facilitate change in behavior, and habits

and improve the Self. Through that experience, I have learned lessons and techniques that have not only changed the lives of others for the better but my own in a profound way.

So when I say it's all in your head, I'm not reducing your experience. If anything, I am both acknowledging its validity and proposing the route needed to address whatever it is to you. To be human is to, in a sense, be alone. We can be with others, sometimes even very closely, and feel a high degree of understanding from them, but the contents of our mind will only ever be our own. Even a memory fully shared does not communicate the totality of the experience. There is no way to fully communicate the feeling of the moment, the life experience that colored it, or all the factors involved. We will both see the same thing, but we will **see** different things. For much of it, our language lacks a way to describe the qualia of those experiences. How does one describe the color blue?

It is my hope that by the time you finish this book, you have a better understanding of how your mind works and how to use it to grow and change. More importantly, how to grow and change as you will it. Do you wish to be more motivated? This book will show you how. Do you wish to feel less anxious and more confident? This book will show you how. Do you want a pony?

This book will not give you a pony, but it will show you how to attain such a thing if it is truly what you want.

Though this book has all the appearances and likely categorization of a 'self-help' book, I strive to make it different. I want to explain the why, not just the how. I can tell you all the secrets of self-improvement and mindset that I know, but

until you understand them on a subconscious level and see the connections in your own life, it will be of little value. The human mind requires more than just simple direction, it yearns to understand. This book serves to offer more facts than beliefs, lessons, and ideas based on research, observation, and the work of great men and women before me.

I suffered a lot in my own life because I did not understand myself, my experiences, the way they impacted me, or how to change, nor did I really want to at that time. For decades I lived my life under a shell of negativity, inauthenticity, and poor perception of myself and the world around me. I thought the world was a bad place because it seemed to me that I only saw bad things and that confirmed the way I felt. I mistook arrogance for self-worth.

What if I told you that the very reason I noticed bad in the world was not because of objective reality but because my neurology was preventing me from seeing anything else? That I thought the world was bad and that's the reason I only noticed the bad? It would seem like an unusual perspective, but this is the reality of the way the mind perceives. A function of the Reticular Activating System, an actual physical part of the brain. This is a topic that will be discussed at length in its own chapter, but it is the reason we see what we see. Our proverbial lens, so to speak; it's very, very real. More on that later.

I don't wish to go on and on with a preface to this book, so I won't. I thank you for taking the time to read this, truly. Come with me as a tour guide of sorts as we explore the hidden, unspoken aspects of the human mind and learn how to create your own reality, to a point. There is no Secret, only science; like any

science, its understanding will allow you to shape the world around you. If it is all in your head, then so is the answer.

Let's find that out together.

Chapter 1- What is Hypnosis?

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.” - C. Jung

One of the first things I learned in my career as a hypnotherapist is that few people have a realistic understanding of what hypnosis actually is, even me when I started. What do you think when you hear the word hypnosis? Likely swinging pocket watches and clucking chickens, of a very severe man standing on a stage and making people do things that they appear to have no control over. Perhaps it even goes beyond that and you know that sometimes people go to a hypnotherapist to lose weight or stop smoking but not much beyond that. Perhaps you have some education or are even an expert yourself. Whatever your level of understanding, that's fine. All I ask is that you put any preconceived notions aside for a moment and just let me explain in my own words and understanding.

Let's get the basics out of the way; more importantly, let me clarify what hypnosis is not. Hypnosis is not mind control, it is gaining control over your own mind if anything. It is not magic or metaphysics, but a natural function of the human mind. Most importantly, learning about all of this won't make you cluck like a chicken. You have my word on that. Hypnosis is not 'fringe' (it is categorized by the US National Institute of Health as an Evidence-Based Practice) and there is no such thing as someone that cannot be hypnotized. There are libraries worth of research studies that verify not only its existence but also its clinical uses.

So what is it, then? I can explain this on several levels, so I will. The blandest way I can describe it is the presence of the Theta brainwave pattern. Your

brain operates at different observable frequencies in different situations, as you may know. Alpha is in a relaxed, calm state while Beta is tense and attentive and Delta is asleep, etc. There also exists another; Theta stands apart from the others as its function is not as readily apparent as some of the others. It pops up in the oddest times, though: in deep meditation or prayer, in active hypnosis, and at prescribed periods during our sleep/wake cycles to name a few.

Theta is special. As said, its function is not as immediately obvious as the others. It is the frequency of change; it is the metaphorical source code that we can access to create new perceptions and ways of thinking. Through Theta we can address our memories, our prejudices, and biases and quite literally change them according to our will. Not just that, however. Theta allows us to also affect physical change in our bodies to accelerate healing, decrease bleeding or alleviate pain. If much of your mind and body is on autopilot, Theta is the manual control feature. It is the frequency that allows you to take hold of the wheel and guide your own path.

That doesn't really fully explain hypnosis, though. To do that I would like to use something referred to as the Theory of Mind. The Theory of Mind is an explanation of the mechanics of the reactions and interactions in the mind and the way hypnosis affects that interaction. I will explain it briefly as follows; the whole of the concept known as the mind is divided into a few different parts:

Primitive Mind

Your Primitive Mind, also called your sympathetic nervous system, lies at the foundation and controls your fight/flight response. You can consider it your 'lizard brain'. Its function is basic, instinctual, and keyed to animalistic survival.

For simplicity's sake, it is not important to our current topic and it only needs to be understood that it exists at the foundation. I feel safe in assuming that we are all, as human beings, intimately aware of the fight or flight response!

Subconscious Mind

Above that is the subconscious mind which is the vast majority of what takes up real estate in your mind. It is of most interest to me as a hypnotherapist, of course. I've come to think of it as my proverbial 'office'; depending on your source, it is between 80-90 percent of what's going on up there in your head.

Besides controlling automatic processes like breathing, heart rate, and temperature control, it also houses our emotions and memories as well as the associations around them. For example, if you burn your hand on a hot pan, you now have the association that pans on the stove are hot and not to touch them. It's what makes you think of childhood when you smell baking cookies or hear a certain song. It is 'you', so to speak. The culmination of your subconscious mind is that thing you identify as your Self, something we will speak about at length in later chapters.

Conscious Mind

In the remaining 10-20 percent (which is where you get that bothersome idea that we only use 10 percent of our minds, so common in popular culture) we have the conscious mind. Its function is surprisingly basic: it controls logic, willpower, and decision-making based upon the 'script' provided by your subconscious. It is part of your mind reading and parsing the information I'm providing at this very

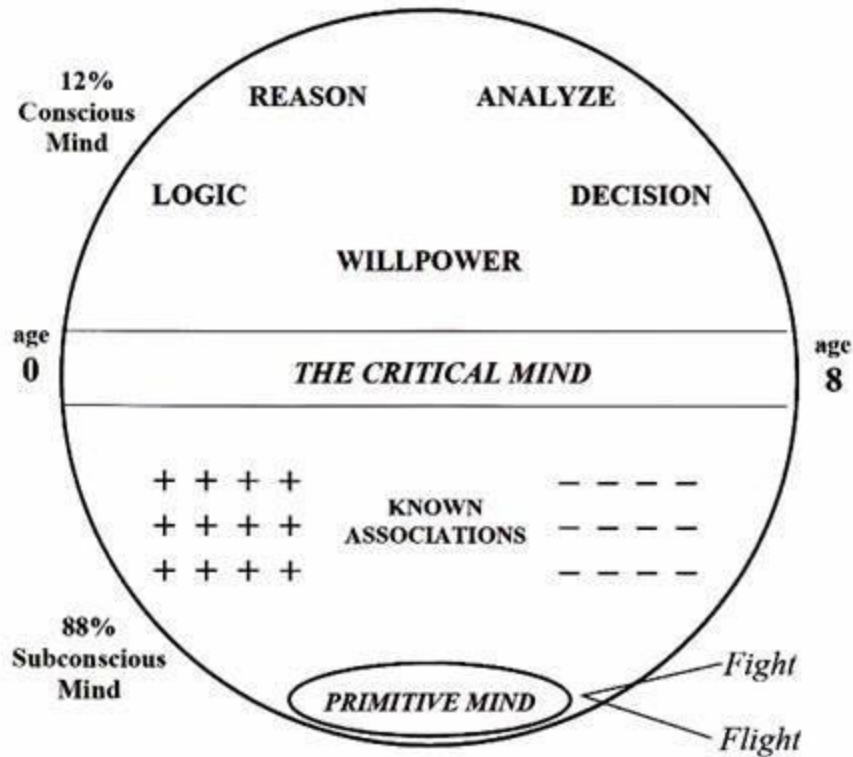
moment. Many times we falsely make the assumption that this part of our minds is the true Self, but that is farthest from the truth. You can think of the conscious mind as the pilot, fully reliant upon their instruments and instructions to fly their aircraft safely.

Critical Filter

Separating the conscious and subconscious mind is the Critical Filter mentioned before. This exists to filter the information around you, either to be accepted or rejected from entry into the subconscious based upon a variety of factors. For example, if I were to tell you that the ground is made of delicious cheese you would immediately reject that notion based upon the information that is stored in that subconscious 'script'. The cessation of such basic assumptions can be observed in the antics of stage hypnosis, something I'll touch on in a bit.

THE THEORY OF MIND

"How Hypnosis Works with the Conscious and Subconscious Mind"



Hypnosis is the removal of that Filter. It allows one to access the subconscious mind directly and reexamine or outright change the past associations it holds. This is how hypnotherapy is able to help someone stop smoking, overcome a negative memory or even become a more positive, successful person. It can allow you to choose how you want to act, react and think. Reality is plastic as many of my peers like to say; that is, in many cases, true. There is no concrete certainty of Self and you can always grow, change and improve through a safe and natural process. You can absolutely teach an old dog new tricks!

Now, why the labeling of the diagram with ages 0-8 at the critical mind? That is the period of our development where we form what makes up that filter, the aspects of the world around us that are accepted and rejected or, more accurately, the screen in our mind that sieves those aspects. We spend this part of our lives learning the very basics of how to be people and in my professional experience, this is where a lot of our problems come from.

We go through life with a damaged or skewed filter and that deeply affects the way we integrate and interpret information from the world around us. A good example of this would be if during this time your creativity was discouraged by your parents and how, later in life, it may cause you to discourage creativity in others or reject creative works in general, potentially never even knowing why. Your filter was built to reject those things when you were growing up and so it is perceived second nature for you to reject those things in adulthood.

So that's all the boring, nerdy explanations of hypnosis, but what is it in simple terms? Dr. Richard Feynman, a hero of mine, once said that to truly understand a topic means that one can explain the topic to a child, free of jargon. So let's do that.

If I were to define it simply, I would say it is using the part of you that dreams and feels to change the way you think and behave. You can look at it as the manual method to have an open mind, to accept ideas and associations that your conscious mind was closed off to. When done voluntarily for the purpose of creating change, it's highly effective. When experienced in daily life without an understanding of what's going on it is distraction at best, confusion at worst.

Through the understanding of its basic principles, something that I hope to achieve in this book; I hope that you will be able to take control of that state of distraction and confusion and make it a vehicle for affirmation and positive change. Oftentimes it is simply the lack of understanding or misunderstanding that allows something to have control over us and through understanding, we can take control.

Think of it like driving a car. When you first learned to drive, that car was an unwieldy beast. It felt scary and out of your control a little bit, didn't it? Now, years later, it is almost second nature. Your vehicle, once something difficult to understand and control, is now just another part of you. All things, from driving to writing to hypnosis and mastery of the subconscious mind, are just skills to be learned.

Why is there a need to go into this topic at the start of this book? It is because many if not all of the topics of this text will be based upon the notion of trance states, the subconscious, and the use of those things to change your mindset and perspective. While everything will not involve hypnosis directly, I would like you to expand your understanding of that word beyond just the performative and begin to see the world through the eyes of your subconscious mind and communication with it. To understand your thoughts and Self and choose the change based upon your own wants. To be the You that you want to be using resources that are all in your head.

That's really the crux of it. Hypnosis is simply a method of access to something that is part of your daily life regardless of your level of awareness of it. When I speak about hypnosis it would, in a way, be more accurate for me to speak

of subconscious influence and understanding. To put it another way, hypnosis is the process that we use to create desired change, not the thing that creates the change itself.

For ease of that understanding, I will use the word hypnosis as a stand-in for a concept that defies easy phrasing. I use it to represent the totality of the subconscious influences in yourself and the world around you, not just the act of hypnosis as it is classically understood. Your daily interactions with your subconscious mind are many, after all.

So, I promised to discuss stage hypnosis a bit, so let's get into that. First of all, I need to make it known that I have a bit of a bias in that I do not like stage hypnosis. To me, hypnosis is a healing tool and method of understanding the world around us; displaying that for entertainment on stage is the equivalent of throwing an MRI on a stage and oohing and ahing at the way it spins and makes stuff stick to it. It is a gross misuse of such a thing and enough to make me dislike its practice.

Why, you might ask, does that matter? Surely it's just harmless entertainment. Well, here's where the issue I have really begun to take shape. In my experience, stage hypnosis gives a misunderstanding of the modality at absolute best. Many times in my career, I have encountered people actively afraid of hypnosis because of what they saw on stage. To those people, stage shows represent only humiliation and a loss of control. Obviously not the opinion I would like people walking away with. It goes beyond the simple vulgarity of exploitation and actively skews opinions of something that can and does truly help people.

So what's going on? Is that real hypnosis up there? Usually, yes. The reason it is able to work is that a good stage hypnotist is an expert in one thing: picking their 'mark'. Being able to pick the most highly suggestible people from a crowd is primary in the success of a stage show and understanding how to do so determines success or failure. The methods of doing this are not something I'll get into, this isn't that kind of book. The whole idea begins with someone who is naturally very easily hypnotically influenced. Do you think you are?

Let's examine some of the things commonly associated with performative hypnosis. Can hypnosis make you cluck like a chicken? No. It cannot. You still see it, however. It's in the popular understanding for a reason, after all. To explain why you see this and other such less-than-dignified acts on stage requires the introduction of a fascinating concept: social pain.

You see, it has been observed that we react to such negative social feelings as rejection, ridicule, and awkwardness in the brain the same way as actual, physical pain. It quite literally hurts. Think of a time you felt, say... rejection. It is easy to recall the very real pain you felt. So when you have someone on stage who is already very suggestible, you are giving them a choice, though implied more than spoken: comply or suffer. It is easier on a mental level to just play along than to endure the awkwardness and literal pain of not doing so. Speaking for myself, I'm just not a fan of that whole concept.

Finally, I want to clarify the difference between the title of hypnotist and hypnotherapist. They are very different things in practice. A hypnotist is, off of a stage, someone that gives subconscious suggestions. For example, going to a hypnotist to stop smoking would result in being given suggestions not to smoke as

well as, sometimes, negative reinforcement against the act like altering the perception of taste or smell. This can be effective, but many times this results in a temporary change.

A hypnotherapist, on the other hand, is different. Normally (ideally) these are people with a degree of training in therapeutic modalities who use hypnosis as a way to facilitate rapid change. Going to a hypnotherapist to stop smoking involves searching for and resolving the root causes of why you smoke, to begin with on a subconscious level. The changes that come from hypnotherapy are generally permanent as they address the core reason for a behavior, the very origin of the desire or habit to begin with.

This is all a simplification of a very complex topic, I need to make clear. The purpose was not to give you a full scientific understanding of hypnosis, but rather a primer for understanding. The meat and potatoes, as it's often said, are language and lens that you don't need to have a background or interest in hypnosis to understand. Anyone who is interested in learning more about the research behind and history of this fascinating topic is encouraged to expand upon that interest. It is among the most interesting things you can learn about, the structure of the human mind.

Hypnosis is part of being human. It is the influence we exert upon others and the influence upon ourselves. It is daydreams and fantasy, images of success and failure within the mind that shape our reality. It is a book we love or a movie that fascinates us and it is the words we speak to ourselves, about ourselves. It is how we define ourselves in the world around us as well as how we define that world as a whole. Through the understanding of this, you can take control of your thoughts.

I said at the start that hypnosis wasn't mind control, it was gaining control over your own mind; perhaps that statement has more clarity now.

Exercise One

By whatever means you prefer (scrap paper, phone, notebook, kitchen wall, etc) I would like you to write down 3-5 limiting beliefs that you feel are preventing you from achieving your goals. For example, I always put off practice, I can't learn fast enough, I don't have the time, etc.

Now besides each of these, I would like you to write down on a scale of 1 to 5 how based on the reality of truth these are with 5 being an absolute fact and 1 being an outright fabrication of perception. Take a good, long moment and consider your rating of each of these factors. How many of your limiting beliefs are objective reality? How many are simply a matter of your perception? Hold onto this list and, at the end of this book, reevaluate how you feel about them.

Example

Let's look at an imaginary subject, Steve. He will be joining us for these illustrations; here's an example of how Steve might complete this exercise:

Limiting beliefs:

- 1. I'm not smart enough to advance in my career.*
- 2. I'm too old to learn new technologies.*
- 3. I'm not outgoing enough to be a successful leader.*
- 4. I don't have enough money to start my own business.*

5. *I don't have enough time to pursue my hobbies.*

Rating of reality:

1. *I'm not smart enough to advance in my career. (Rating: 3)*
2. *I'm too old to learn new technologies. (Rating: 2)*
3. *I'm not outgoing enough to be a successful leader. (Rating: 4)*
4. *I don't have enough money to start my own business. (Rating: 3)*
5. *I don't have enough time to pursue my hobbies. (Rating: 5)*

Reflection:

After considering the reality of these beliefs, Steve realizes that some of them are based more on perception than actual facts. For example, he might have some self-doubt about his intelligence, but he knows he has the necessary experience and skills to advance in his career. He also recognizes that age is not a barrier to learning new technologies and that he can take courses or workshops to update his skills. By reevaluating these beliefs at a later point in time, Steve can track his progress and see if he has been able to overcome these limiting beliefs and achieve his goals.

Chapter 2- Labeling Yourself Into a Corner

“Once you label me, you negate me.” -S. Kierkegaard

Labels are the way we categorize the world around us. It is only natural that we assign labels to ourselves, others, and everything in our life as a way of sorting and understanding our reality. This has been well and fine up to now, but I'd like to offer you a different perspective. Those already familiar with existential philosophy will recognize this perspective, but for those that don't have that familiarity this will create it.

What happens subconsciously when we label something? For example, let's say you feel depressed, what do you say? I am depressed. Simple, right? What does that say, though? I don't just mean the words, but what is behind them? It is a statement of identity and of totality. When you say I am depressed, you accept it as your state of being through your language. You are telling your subconscious, 'This is who we are, adjust our perception accordingly,' and it does. Through its phrasing, it becomes a label of identity and can be very harmful.

The same can even be said about the opposite statement, I am happy. Are you? Like all the time to the point that it's the very, single-word definition of yourself? My, I hope not. That would be a very odd person. The act of being human defies labeling in its complexity.

Why does that even matter, though? Why not gaslight yourself a little bit into being happy? All jokes aside, there is a reason that even when it's in a positive light I discourage such labels. If you walk around telling yourself that you're

happy, what happens when you aren't? What happens when you stop adhering to what your subconscious understands as its identity? The answer is all manner of issues with the Self and our perception of it can arise at that point when we fail to live up to what our subconscious perceives as the model of our reality.

The same applies to others as well. I would like you to examine the quote at the start of this chapter if you have not already. Once you label me, you negate me. What does he mean by that? It means that when we label another human being (ourselves, for that matter) we reduce them down to that singular label. We, on a subconscious level, ignore the complexity of their being and boil them down to something one-dimensional like a character in a bad TV show.

For example, let's say you call someone else stupid. Objectively and realistically, is that the totality of that person? Likely not, they just may have done a stupid thing; that doesn't translate to that is the whole of them. Regardless of any single moment of our lives, we are not a singular label. To be human is, again, nothing so simple.

That brings us to the point of this idea and why placing labels is a bad thing: reductionism. Think about if you were the one who got called stupid, what goes through your head? At best, it's defiance. You know that you're not stupid, that you've done plenty of smart, capable things before and you want to challenge that person for placing that assumption upon you. At worst, it's confirmation of something that's been said to you before or a label you've placed upon yourself. This option is a very dark rabbit hole to go down and will be discussed at length in its own chapter, such as its importance.

The point of both those things is the same: Human beings are very, very complex things and the human experience is as broad as it is universal in many cases. No person can be reduced to a single label, thought, or idea. The most intelligent among us do just as many unintelligent things as the rest of us over the course of their lives, they just refuse to be labeled by their mistakes. The same can be said about every perception. Even a shy person is outgoing sometimes, a sad person will get a ray of happiness and everyone gets their turn as the villain in someone's story.

What's the alternative? Rather than assigning a simple label, we must define our reality; it's just as much a part of being human as that personal complexity. It's the whole concept of nouns in the English language, after all, and it would be intensely difficult to communicate if we didn't have them. Go ahead, try. Say something to a person you know without using any nouns or pronouns. The experience is incredibly frustrating as you will immediately discover that the communication, if any at all is made, incredibly poor. I'm not asking you to develop a new form of communication, though everyone needs a hobby so knock yourself out if this makes you inclined to do so.

It's all in the wording. You aren't depressed, you feel depressed. You aren't stupid, you did a silly thing. You are not defining your Self with your words, but rather you are describing your experience. That's the rule: description vs definition. When you describe the experience to someone, you do not place a defining label upon it and therefore avoid the trap of subconscious association. The alternative is all in the phrasing and its subtleties. Let's look at an example of how wording matters, this time in another language.

In Irish Gaelic, if you want to say that you are sad, you say *tá brón orm* or ‘the sadness is upon me’. They do not define themselves as sad, only acknowledge that they carry a sadness right now, in this passing moment. The phrasing alone implies the transitory nature of the feeling. You don’t own the sadness, it is only upon you. The Celts understood that human experience was so complex that it could not be penned in with definition, so their language itself was never made to do so; language paints our perception of the world around us to such an extreme it seems unreal when we actually examine and begins to understand it.

How extreme does that perception of the world through language get? To show how extreme, I want to discuss one of my favorite topics: I would like to tell you about the Piraha people of the Amazonia. Small and insular, they have a unique and very beautiful language that has an interesting abnormality: it doesn’t have numbers. Because their language lacks the ability to assign numerical labels to things, they not only don’t count but can’t. The notion of tallying things in conceptual groups just does not exist. It is truly difficult to wrap one’s mind around this idea because numbers, counting, and tallying are such a natural part of nearly every language. Not the Piraha, to them there is only ‘this’ and ‘many’.

It is, in my opinion, one of the most incredible examples of how our words and language shape our concept of reality and our understanding of the world around and within us.

Our words are part and parcel with the lens through which we are able to perceive our reality. They define our very understanding of the internal and external world and whole concepts can be ignored just through our use of language. Words matter to such a degree that many of us don’t fully comprehend. Your words and how you choose to use them literally shape your conscious and

subconscious reality and perception. It cannot be understated how much the words you speak or think matter. Do you, like the Piraha, limit your perception of the world around you by your language? Do you limit the very of your Self by your language?

Now with these examples in mind, let us revisit the concept of labeling our speech. The goal is always to describe your experience and never to define it. Speak on what you feel, think, and believe, not what you are and that is. Not only does it begin to change the impact of words on yourself and others, but it changes the clarity of your communication. If you are at a party that you don't enjoy and you simply say to your friend 'This sucks' you are telling someone you don't like where you are. However, were you to say to them 'It's way too loud in here for me and I am not having a good time' then you communicate why you don't like where you are and you are more clearly understood. Now whether or not your friend cares that you think the party sucks isn't something I can really comment on. That's between you and Bob.

Finally, on the topic of labels I would like to clarify something I've done in this book several times now, the capital S Self. It is not a typo, it is like that for a reason. When I say Self versus self, I am referring to the whole of you. Your identity, personality, meaning, memory, and more. Your gestalt, as the Germans put it. Your Self is the totality of you rather than a word to indicate your person. The concept of the Self is of great importance when it comes to understanding labels as it is the thing that defines the complexity of the human condition and rejects the reduction of that Self or the Self of others to a one-dimensional label. I am getting ahead of myself here, however.

By changing the way we use our words to communicate our perception and experience, we change the brush with which we paint the world. No longer do we accept the broad tradesman's brush that we glop our generalization onto reality with but instead take up the fine brush of the artist and paint our perception of the world and others with all the nuance and beauty that it deserves. Rembrandt didn't paint with a roller and neither should you. You and you alone are the architects of your perception of reality and of Self, so use the appropriate tools to build that perception with a strong foundation.

Exercise Two

We all have used labels in the past to understand our reality and in this exercise, I would like to illustrate that. Using whatever means or method at your disposal I would like you to write down some examples of labels that you have placed upon yourself, others, or the world around you in the form of statements. Again, about 3-5 will serve for this exercise.

Now next to each of these statements I would like you to use the ideas discussed in this chapter to alter their phrasing. Remember, we are avoiding defining our reality and experience and we are instead describing our perception. Use words like feel and think versus is and are. For example:

- *I am lazy **becomes** I find it difficult to find motivation when I'm comfortable*
- *I am happy **becomes** I feel happiness in my current situation*
- *I can't _____ **becomes** I feel like I need more _____ to _____*
- *Gary is dumb **becomes** Gary made a mistake. Don't be mean to Gary.*

Do you begin to understand the difference the impact of describing versus defining has on the way you feel about your perceptions? Don't stop at this exercise and continue this practice every day. Catch yourself when you are labeling the world around you and remember: describe, not define. Through this practice, you will begin to shape your perception in a way far more aligned with growth and understanding of the world both around and inside you.

Example

Looking at our friend again, here's an example of how Steve might complete this exercise:

Labels:

- 1. I am not good at public speaking.*
- 2. He is a terrible boss.*
- 3. She is so selfish.*
- 4. I can't seem to stay organized.*
- 5. They are always causing drama.*

Perception-based phrasing:

- 1. I feel nervous when speaking in front of others.*
- 2. I find his management style difficult to work with.*
- 3. I feel like her actions prioritize her own needs over others.*
- 4. I feel like I struggle with staying on top of tasks and staying organized.*
- 5. I feel like they have been involved in situations that have caused conflict.*

Reflection:

By altering the phrasing of these labels to a more perception-based approach, Steve is able to recognize that he is describing his own feelings and experiences rather than defining others or himself. Using words like "feel" and "think" helps him to gain a better understanding of his own perceptions without making generalizations or judgments. Through this exercise, he is able to catch himself when labeling the world around him and strive for a more descriptive approach that is more aligned with growth and understanding.

Chapter 3- Authenticity and Eccentricity

“..everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way” - V. Frankl

Let me ask you what may sound like a strange question. I'm full of those. Why are you, you? What I mean by that is how were you, your Self as discussed, created? I don't speak about birds and bees but rather how you as a person were formed. What lessons, structures, and prejudices were put together to form that which is insert your name here? This, like many other questions I ask, is one that is not normally given voice; it is an assumption at best, most times.

The Self is something you have seen me mention many times in this book; the capitalization of the word is intentional. When I write Self versus self, I am making an intentional division. The self refers to many things: your body, your actions, and that which is related to the form you currently inhabit. These are all the lowercase self.

When it is proper, when I say the Self, it is so much more. That 'more' is what I intend to make clear in this chapter. The Self is how we experience and interpret the world, the ebb and flow of our personality in day-to-day interaction with the world around us. It is both the mask that we wear and the armor we forge for ourselves, be it intentionally or not.

There will be an exercise at the end of this chapter like most of the others; for the purposes of discussion, I must spoil the contents of that exercise early. You will be asked to make a list of your personal beliefs, ideals, and identifiers. Aspects

of your Self; don't worry if this is confusing for the moment, it will be explained. After that, you will be asked to evaluate each of those aspects and determine if it was placed upon you by culture, religion, or family. Is this aspect of your Self something you own or was it given to or forced upon you?

Though we don't realize it, much of that Self is often not our own thoughts and beliefs. External influences such as upbringing, the nation we live in, or the faith we were brought into as a small child all influence our identity, plus many more factors that would take a whole other book to elaborate on. There is a question, then, that must be asked when we observe these parts of our Selves: is this what I truly feel and think, or is it simply just expected of me? What exactly does this influence change greatly from culture to culture and person to person?

That doesn't fully make clear what is meant, though. The Self is not a singular thing, though it may be rigidly constrained by the things mentioned above. The Self as we discuss it here is an ever-changing thing. Now, that's not to say that who you are is fundamentally changing but rather that the aspects of Self that you choose to display will change. It sounds somewhat confusing, but it's quite simple in its own way. Allow me to explain a different way.

There is a saying in Gestalt theory, a model of psychotherapy based upon the concept of the wholeness of Self, 'Self exists in the space between I and Other'. The I in that statement is, of course, the individual; the Other being whoever or whatever we are currently interacting with. This space between is something that you can think of like the shoreline of a beach: it is ever-changing, rising and falling, ebbing and flowing. The Self is a fluid thing that is constantly flowing as we move from interaction to interaction, like a cup full of water in various

containers. You, like the water, form and mold your Self to the container that is the Other.

Let's expand further on that with a simple question: do you act the same with your best friend or romantic partner as you do with your boss or the cashier at the store? Why not? That is a simple illustration of the fluidity of the Self. Each person we interact with requires a different Self. We are still us, but what we show, say, and do drastically changes from interaction to interaction. This fluid, amorphous form is the Self and like water can be difficult to handle until we put it in a container of the Other to examine.

Much like that fluid in the container, our examination of the Self in this chapter won't be the full picture, but rather a sampling to give you a better understanding of the ocean that is your Self. I often say that one of the quirks of being human is that you will never understand another human being and you will never be understood by anyone else, at least never fully. It is impossible to fully comprehend the thoughts and experiences of another person entirely, but we can strive to understand our own Self. Know Thyself, as the well-known saying goes.

I mentioned culture, but how does that contribute to this Self? That answer is readily apparent in that our culture is our world or at least our social understanding of it. Culture also imposes expectations of behavior based on class, gender, religion, and many other factors. Sometimes these factors can influence us to act in a way that is not authentic to ourselves in an effort to fit into that culture, whatever it may be. This can take the appearance of anything from having to alter one's dress or speech all the way to practice a religion and a gulf of experience in between and beyond.

With that said, let me give an example; I'll throw myself under the bus again. I both live currently and grew up in the Southern United States and I am male, for those who are unaware. As anyone who grew up in this country knows, there are things expected of a little boy back in the 80s and 90s. You're supposed to get messy and pick on girls, scream on the playground, and be rowdy. I hated all of these things. I didn't want to get messy and girls were nice, why would I be mean to them? I didn't want to make noise and just wanted to hang out and play pretend or swing. However, I did all of these things because to do otherwise would mean to be considered an Outsider and likely be degraded for it. So I screamed and pushed and fit in, regardless of how much I disliked it because, hey, at least it was better than being the Outsider.

Perhaps the opposite is true for you. Maybe you grew up in a culture or country where being reserved was the social norm and you just wanted to sing and have fun and be loud. The choice you'd face would be much the same: conform or be an Outsider. What's that old saying? The nail that sticks out gets hammered down. I remember being taught that as a child and maybe you do too. My goal in this chapter is to convince you to pull that nail back out!

This chapter is about being authentic and how important that truly is. Being yourself as you truly wish to be. I want to help you identify who you really are and be that person as hard as you can; in doing so improve your well-being. Ask yourself honestly, how many times in your life have you pretended to be something or someone you weren't to get what you wanted? I know I often did in the past and, speaking personally, it never felt right in an uncanny way, a way I could not yet define.

Let me tell you about something called the existential hero. The existential hero is a character, usually fictional, who is popular in movies and storytelling. He (or she) represents the ability to be authentic in an inauthentic world, to be yourself in defiance of social standards and expectations. There are some common traits among these characters:

- They strive to overcome the meaninglessness of existence by creating their own systems of meaning, purpose, and value.
- Their thought and behavior are not confined by the limits imposed upon them by society and other people.
- They are aware of their own freedom to choose and take responsibility for choosing how they want to live.
- They have a heroic attitude toward their situation.

Can you think of any existential heroes in stories you like based on these characteristics? Can you even see some of these traits in yourself already? Let me provide two examples from popular movies that will better illustrate the concepts of this persona.

Truman Burbank, The Truman Show

If you are familiar with this movie you know that it's about Jim Carrey's character, Truman Burbank, living his life in the constructed reality of a TV show that he is and always has been the main character in but has lived unaware of its existence. His reality and interactions are crafted around him, the most extreme

definition of inauthenticity. All around him are actors performing in set pieces made to mimic a life for entertainment.

Much of the movie is about his struggles against the reality that the cast of the show is imposing upon him. He struggles with his own feelings, wants, and desires. If you recall the movie, he wants to go to Fiji and this represents to him freedom from the constraints of his world. I will not provide any spoilers in case you haven't watched it, but it is a movie about a man searching for his authentic Self in an inauthentic world.

The Dude, The Big Lebowski.

The Dude abides and the Dude also represents a type of existential hero. While he is not the most dignified example I'll grant you, he is authentic. He does not care for social standards of 'cool' and 'uncool'. People call him a loser and he rejects that label and all of the consumer-materialist thinking that supports it.

The Dude takes pleasure in the small things in life that make him happy, even if it's drinking milk out of a carton in a market. Don't do that. Please. The Dude is his authentic Self in the face of a society that rejects that Self and thinking; doing so against that is what makes the existential hero a hero.

There are just a couple of examples of this archetype, but our entertainment media is filled with them. We love the story of a person finding their authentic Self and meaning or knowing it and living in the face of that adversity. Now it's time to be that hero yourself. Admiration is fine, but you can be that authentic hero in your

own life. You face the same struggle, living in a society that expects conformity and you can break free of that. You can find your Fiji.

Why do we conform, though? Why do we deny our authentic Selves and suffer for it? There are many reasons, actually: romantic pursuit, career progression, social conformity, familial acceptance, etc. The list could truly go on and to see it in totality one may think that part of being human is bending over backward to fit in; for many, it is. Have you acted like someone or something you're not when going on a date? How'd that work out for you? It certainly never worked out for me! Conformity is easy, after all. All you have to do is what everyone tells you to do.

Perhaps it is a job that made you put on an inauthentic mask in the name of progression or financial security. I did this for years, struggling against myself in the name of profit and suffering for it. Is it worth wearing an ill-fitting mask to work a job that slowly grates against you? In my opinion, no. Would you not prefer to work a career that allows you to be and express your true Self? Speaking from experience, doing so will bring you far, far more success than the alternative.

Another fine example of society interfering with authenticity is gender. I'm not speaking of gender identity, but rather of what could be called gender expectations. In the United States, it was considered unbecoming for a man to express their emotions, leading any man who naturally wished to express themselves to a bit of an existential crisis. Do you defy those norms and face ridicule? Much the same can be said for women. Look back to the toys we played with growing up. There were boys toys and there were girls toys and they were

very clear on who they were for. Heaven helps you if you were a girl caught playing with a GI Joe or a boy daring to touch a doll.

My partner is who made me really consider the impact of something so basic on our identity as children. She told me a story about how when she was a very little girl, she owned a pair of blue panties. Whenever she had to wear them, she felt deeply uncomfortable because she thought that she was being made to wear boy's underwear based upon nothing more than the color. How insane is that to hear? That something as simple as a color is enough to give a little girl a crisis simply because that's what her culture mandated. Blue is for boys, pink is for girls. Anyone who grew up in the US is undoubtedly familiar with the trope.

For many years this was the expectation; for years before that, it was swapped. In the 19th century, blue was for girls and pink was for boys. That should say something to you about cultural and social expectations and norms: they shift and morph and have little to do most times with any kind of reality. Looking at any kind of fashion over the decades and centuries illustrates this quite clearly. Many cultural and social standards exist only for a moment yet so many choose to focus on those transient standards.

Take a moment and think about how people dressed in your part of the world 300 years ago. If you aren't sure, look it up. Now do you think that you could move in public dressed as such without drawing a huge amount of attention? Unlikely in most cases, yet there was a time this was standard; you can even reverse the experiment. Looking at how you're dressed right now, how do you believe someone in 1723 would react to you? Poorly, especially if you happen to be a woman and you happen to be wearing pants. Remember, there was a time not

far removed when women would literally be arrested for wearing something as simple as pants. How do you feel about this standard? At the time, few even questioned it.

When you begin to examine the world around you, spotting these imposed standards and expectations becomes easy. Being able to identify these things in your own world is vital to establishing your own authenticity as they allow us to examine the systems at play and ask a simple question: is this me? I want to encourage you to examine all of your values and ideals and ask yourself that question. Do you truly feel these ways or do you feel obligated by some external force to adhere to its standards? Is it a belief or is it simply an assumption that you have never questioned or examined?

This brings us to the primary thing I would like for you to begin examining: external influences. What in you is a product of your external environment and your attempts to conform to it? What parts of yourself exist simply to avoid conflict within that environment? By defining ourselves by external values and expectations, we begin to create the foundation for an existential crisis. I'm sure you've heard that term before, but what is it? It's in the name... it is a crisis you experience over your very existence, your role within reality, and the world around you; when we force ourselves into an inauthentic mold, it is inevitable. While the existential crisis is something that is difficult to give a simple explanation of, it is of use for me to give some of the qualities of one so you can see the way this crisis' seed is planted. So, an existential crisis....

- ...is a time in which individuals question whether their lives have meaning, purpose, or value.

- ...often manifests in relation to significant life choices.
- ...is a time when individuals cannot process existential givens: death, meaninglessness, isolation, and freedom.
- ...is a crisis of being and/or 'how to be' [in the world]
- ...may also refer to ontological issues around identity (e.g. feeling trapped in an inauthentic role)
- ...always implies an emotional component (e.g. angst, sadness, fear)

Observing these qualities, we see a unifying factor: a lack of certainty. While there is little in life we can be certain of, it's not an external certainty that's being discussed, though an increased uncertainty in our external world is absolutely a crisis in itself. It is a certainty of Self that we're discussing; when we are unsure that who we are is who we really are, these issues will often appear. We lack a stable foundation of Self, in other words; a foundation that is based upon authentic internal values.

A notion that I speak about often is the idea that being an adult means unlearning half the things you thought you knew and that kind of applies here. As children, we have no choice but to conform to the expectations and rules placed upon us by our parents, society, and culture. A child lacks an authentic identity and thus must assemble one from the secondhand parts they are allowed access to or directed towards. There comes a time when we grow that it becomes important to reevaluate all of these secondhand parts; usually, we do so in our teen years.

Consider these secondhand parts like the training wheels of your personality. You needed those parts to put together something that could let you move forward as a person and you came a long way with them. Now, like riding a bike, there

comes a time to remove the training wheels, when they are just extra weight and parts holding you back. The time comes to take everything you've been taught and put it into practice. You could consider that time to be high school and, I don't know about you, but I fell off that bike a lot. It's the first time we get to really take our piecemeal, prototype personality for a spin in the real world.

Now, answer honestly: were you authentic as a teenager? Likely not. Likely your existence was defined by the expectations of your peer group now as well as your family and culture. You were learning who you are, though. We are all exploring our identity and seeing who we were as people in these moments. Unfortunately, this is also the time that we are made to feel most ashamed for attempting to establish our own identity and values. We are often told our legitimate attempts to discover our identity as humans are a negative thing. If you have never been told so before, let me tell you this now: the teenage you is nothing to be ashamed of, goofy as our interests and personalities may have been. Accepting that part of yourself as valid is a huge step.

After this, we reach adulthood, or at least the early form of it, and move towards defining ourselves as independent people. This is the time when we should step back and evaluate and experiment with what our authentic Self truly is; it's usually a struggle. We still want to define ourselves by what is most accepted by the society we live in and by the people who are close to us. Speaking for myself, this was a really hard period in my life. As I have mentioned before, I had created a very negative worldview because of the remnants of what I retained from my upbringing and culture and it very much affected my outcomes and place in the world around me.

Eventually, we reach adulthood. True adulthood with bills, back pain, and responsibility. Who are we now? We have (hopefully) by this point shed a great deal of our youthful ignorance but retained our youthful fascination with the world. The issue with this point in life is a massive burden upon our authenticity: conformity. Get a normal job, buy a Polo shirt, and stop listening to that awful music. Grow up or something along those lines. This is the time in life that we make a choice: conform to the world and keep our heads down or express our authenticity and risk whatever social pain may come.

So here we find ourselves, faced with a choice. We can continue to go along with the systems that have directed our collective Selves and weather any crisis that comes or we can take this knowledge and grow. Of course, it is a scary notion, there is indeed a lot of comfort in remaining as we are, even if it's harmful. Don't worry, it's not a sign of fault. Part of this resistance to change is your brain's obsession with conserving fuel, odd as that sounds.

What is fuel to your brain, though? Glucose. Whenever we perform an action, mentally or physically, we must burn glucose in our brain; our brain will stubbornly conserve that fuel any way it can. This is part of the reason that eating well is essential to healthy living! This resistance can be overcome and it is these experiments in authenticity that will help you. This, however, is a whole topic in itself and perhaps the subject of a future book. Just know that your resistance to change is no shortcoming in yourself, it is simply your stubborn brain being human.

It is not so easy as simply making the choice to toss aside all you've learned and start over, I absolutely understand this and it's only natural. When I propose

evaluating and pursuing your authenticity, it is a process; often a process of discovery and that's legitimately fun! To help begin to break that mold and move towards discovery, I've thought to include a few small things you can do to shake up the foundation of conformity in you:

- Wear a pink tie or shirt- For men. Pink is for girls, right? Absolutely not. Discover how good a color can look on you if given the chance.
- Get some clunky boots- For the ladies, if you haven't already. go get a pair of old work or combat boots. They're comfortable, I promise.
- Listen to music you thought was 'dumb' as a teenager.
- Think of a food you were discouraged from eating as a child and go eat it.
- For men, go out of your way to show empathy and compassion.
- For women, say no. Establish your authority in a world that often denies it.
- Go do a (safe) thing that scares you.

These are just a few of the ways you can challenge your own personal status quo in day-to-day life and I encourage you to do so. I want each and every one of you reading this to challenge all of your conceptions of value and self! Perhaps you will find that those truly are your authentic Self and be emboldened by that confirmation. Perhaps you will discover the joy of being You and move forward in life as the truest, most authentic version of you. Whatever it may be, it is very important that we make sure that who we put forward into the world is who we really are; when you step into that role, nothing ever feels the same.

I used the word eccentric next to authentic in this chapter for good reason and I want to discuss that a bit. Sometimes being yourself is a little weird; I want you to take this as permission to embrace those parts of you. Perhaps you sing in

the shower too loud, maybe you really, really like garden gnomes or maybe you want to pretend like you live in the 1950s sometimes. Whatever it may be, it doesn't matter and at the same time, it matters more than anything. What I mean by that is that you have to spend more time with yourself than anyone else in the world and that only your opinion, your mind, and your perception matter. We all exist only in our own heads and believe me when I say, that cashier at the store on the corner? He has far too much on his mind to be overly concerned with a silly hat you wear. Be you, be weird.

Embracing your eccentricities is an empowering act of self-love and acceptance. It's a declaration that you refuse to conform to societal expectations or suppress the unique aspects of your personality. It's liberating to let go of the fear of judgment and fully embrace the quirks that make you who you are. Whether it's dancing like nobody's watching, geeking out over a niche hobby, or dressing in a way that expresses your individuality, these are the things that make you authentically you. Remember, the opinions of others are fleeting, but the relationship you have with yourself is lifelong. So, don't be afraid to let your freak flag fly and celebrate your eccentricities with pride. Life is too short to be anything but true to yourself. Embrace your weirdness and revel in the joy of being authentically, unapologetically you.

To be authentic is to be free at a level that no one and nothing can change. To inspire those around you with the genuine glory of you. People want to see it, I want to see it. If you get nothing else from this book but the desire to discover who you authentically are, I would consider it a joy to have written this. Be you, you deserve it.

Exercise Three

You should know the drill by now, get whatever thing you use to take notes. Sharpen the pencil, click the pen, or scrub the kitchen wall, we're going to take some personal inventory. Unlike before, you are encouraged to go beyond 3-5 points and write down as many as you can think of.

What I want you to do is this: write down every value and ideal you have and can think of. Being kind to animals, always repaying debts, never going out without your makeup on... I want you to really think about the rules and expectations you place upon yourself and the world around you. No belief is too small, and no expectation too broad. Even if it seems obvious like 'don't kill people', write it down.

Now when you are satisfied with your list or simply tired of writing it, I want you to examine each individual point. Next to each point, I would like you to note if this is something that is an internal belief you have created yourself or an external belief that was put upon you. Sometimes the answer is not so obvious and I would encourage you to take your time on each one.

*Once completed, I would like you to examine those influences in your list that were labeled as external. Over the coming days, reevaluate these, and examine whether or not they truly represent your values. Perhaps they do, but it is important that who we are is truly a product of our choice. Now for the interesting part. Now I would like you to write out the values and ideals that you **wished** you had. Perhaps you wish you were more outgoing, perhaps you wish that you were more compassionate. Who/what do you wish you*

were more? For this 3-5 will do once more. After these are done, return to your list of external influences and ask yourself a single question:

Does this thinking hold me back from who I wish I was?

Example

We're going to do some personal inventory with Steve. Unlike before, Steve is encouraged to go beyond 3-5 points and write down as many as he can think of. First, Steve needs to write down every value and ideal he has. Being honest in all his dealings, being punctual, being generous with his time... Steve needs to think about the rules and expectations he places upon himself and the world around him. No belief is too small, and no expectation too broad.

Now, when Steve is satisfied with his list, he needs to examine each individual point. Next to each point, he should note if this is something that is an internal belief he has created himself or an external belief that was put upon him. Sometimes the answer is not so obvious and he should take his time on each one. Once completed, Steve needs to examine those influences in his list that were labeled as external. Over the coming days, he should reevaluate these, and examine whether or not they truly represent his values. Perhaps they do, but it is important that Steve is truly a product of his choice.

Now for the interesting part. Steve needs to write out the values and ideals that he wishes he had. Perhaps he wishes he was more confident, perhaps he wishes he was more adventurous. Who/what does he wish he was more? For this 3-5 will do once more.

Here are Steve's lists:

Values and Ideals:

- 1. Always being honest*
- 2. Treating others with respect*
- 3. Being on time for appointments*
- 4. Eating healthy and staying active*
- 5. Putting family first*
- 6. Being a hard worker*
- 7. Being independent*
- 8. Being responsible with money*
- 9. Being environmentally conscious*

Internal vs. External Beliefs:

- 1. Internal*
- 2. Internal*
- 3. Internal*
- 4. Internal*
- 5. External*
- 6. Internal*
- 7. External*
- 8. Internal*
- 9. External*

Reevaluation:

After examining the external influences in their list, Steve realizes that some of those values and ideals may not truly represent their own beliefs. For example, they may have written down being environmentally conscious because they feel like they should, but in reality, it is not a personal value. This exercise prompts them to reevaluate their beliefs and determine what truly resonates with them.

Wished Values and Ideals:

- 1. Being more confident in social situations*
- 2. Having more patience with others*
- 3. Being more open-minded*

Questioning External Beliefs:

Steve looks back at their list of external influences and asks themselves if any of these beliefs are holding them back from becoming the person they wish to be. For example, if they wish to be more confident in social situations, they may examine a belief they listed as external, such as "always being polite and never speaking out of turn", and realize that this belief is actually holding them back from being more confident and assertive in social situations. By examining their values and ideals, Steve is able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and make changes to align their beliefs with who they truly are and who they wish to become.

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