

TEACHING TOOL SERIES

Reflected Best Self Exercise: Assignment and Instructions to Participants

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ABSTRACT

The Reflected Best Self exercise provides feedback to participants about who they are when they are at their best. Participants request positive feedback from significant people in their lives, which they then synthesize into a cumulative portrait of their “best self.” The exercise can be used as a tool for personal development because it provides valuable insights into the ways a person adds value and makes a contribution.

Reflected Best Self Exercise: Assignment and Instructions to Participants

All of us can recall our own extraordinary moments, those moments when we felt that our best self was brought to light, affirmed by others and put into practice in the world. These memories are seared into our minds as moments or situations in which we have felt alive, true to our deepest selves and pursuing our full potential as human beings. Over time, we collect these experiences into a portrait of who we are when we are at our personal best. To help compose a best-self portrait, it is important to draw on the perceptions of significant others who have unique and valuable insights into the ways we add value and makes a contribution. The Reflected Best Self (RBS) exercise creates an opportunity for participants to receive feedback regarding who they are when they are at their best.

In this exercise, you will obtain data from other people to create a more extensive reflected best-self portrait. You will obtain short descriptions of who you are and what you do when you are at your very best from a diverse array of significant people in your life. From this feedback, you will learn important things about yourself that you never realized before.

The goal of this feedback exercise is four-fold:

- To generate awareness of how others see you when you are at your best
- To enhance understanding about what kinds of work situations bring out the best in you
- To create personal and career development plans and actions, based upon the reflections that your reflected best-self feedback generates
- To provide a tool for future times when you may be discouraged and need to get back on track.

DIRECTIONS

In this exercise, you will develop a reflected best-self portrait based on feedback from an array of significant others. There are several steps to follow.

Step 1: Identify Respondents

Identify 10-20 people who know you well. These may be colleagues (former or current), friends (old or recent), family members, customers, or anyone who has had extended contact with you. Think about who will give you their honest opinion. The more diverse the group is, the better. Also, realize that due to time constraints, everyone will not be able to respond. Ideally, you need at least 10 responses to complete this part of the assignment, so ask enough people to ensure at least 10 responses.

Step 2: Compose a Feedback Request Form

Compose a feedback request (see example request below) and email it to the 10-20 people you identified in Step 1. Although this request may seem awkward or difficult for you, participants have found this assessment to be a profound learning activity, and that significant others are quite willing to assist with this exercise. Over time, we have found that 10-20 is the desired number of respondents to collect sufficient data.

Sample Email Request for Feedback

As part of my MBA program, I am taking a course that requires me to construct a profile of the ways that I add value and make a contribution. I have been asked to contact twenty people who know me well. I am to request that each person provides me with three stories of when I was at my best. I would like to invite you to help me with this exercise.

I appreciate your taking time to do this for me. This will require you to think about your interactions with me and to identify those incidents/behaviors when I was at my very best in your eyes. In writing, please be sure to provide examples so I can understand the situation and the characteristics you are describing. I have included an example of what these stories could look like. Please use this only as a guide.

Feedback Example

1. One of the ways that you add value and make important contributions is:

The ability to get people to work together and give all they have to a task.

For example, I think of the time that:

We were doing the Alpha project. We were getting behind and the stress was building. We started to close down and get very focused on just meeting our deadline. You noticed that we were not doing our best work and stopped the group to rethink our approach. You asked whether we wanted to just satisfy the requirements or whether we wanted to really do good and important work. You reminded us of what we were capable of doing and how each of us could contribute to a better outcome. No one else in that room would have thought to

do that. As a result, we did meet the deadline and created a result we all feel proud of.

2. One of the ways that you add value and make important contributions is:

Helping others to focus on global issues.

For example, I think of the time that:

We were working on the strategic plan. You introduced information on trends in the European market. None of us had seen this information or considered the non-U.S. implications. You kept pushing us to think in global terms.

3. One of the ways that you add value and make important contributions is:

The capacity to persist in the face of adversity.

For example, I think of the time that:

We were past our deadline on a major report. Frank quit and we were left short-handed. Instead of getting discouraged, you became more focused than I have ever seen anyone get. I think you went 48 hours without sleep. I was amazed that you could produce such a quality product under those conditions.

Your feedback to me:

Please provide me with three examples of how I add value by completing the following statements.

1. One of the ways that you add value and make important contributions is:

For example, I think of the time that:

2. One of the ways that you add value and make important contributions is:

For example, I think of the time that:

3. One of the ways that you add value and make important contributions is:

For example, I think of the time that:

Please e-mail your responses to me by [*insert date*]. Thank you very much for your cooperation. I will be sure to tell you what I learn.

Step 3: Analyze Feedback

Read all of your feedback and take notes on the key insights. Look for commonalities across the responses. Create themes where you find a commonality and link the several examples to it. You may find it useful to use a table like the following.

Commonality/Theme	Examples Given	My Interpretation
1.Creative	1. Innovative builder of new projects for education. 2. Find new solutions for old problems in department relationships with my boss. 3. Guided company in transforming itself.	My ideas tend to be bold and creative. I am an innovative builder of the new. I tend to bring a new vision to the old.
2.	1.	
	2.	
3.	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	5.	

Step 4: Compose the Reflected Best-Self Portrait

Create a portrait of your best self that captures the wisdom in your data. Here is an illustration of a reflected best-self portrait:

When I am at my best, I tend to be creative. I am enthusiastic about ideas and I craft bold visions. I am an innovative builder who perseveres in the pursuit of the new. I do not waste energy thinking about missed opportunities or past failures nor do I take on the negative energy of the insecure or worry about critics. I stay centered and to focus on what is possible and important.

I use frameworks to help me make sense of complex issues. I can see disparate ideas and integrate them through “yes and” thinking. So I make points others do not readily see. In doing so, I frame experiences in compelling and engaging ways. I paint visions and provide new ways for people to see. I use metaphors and stories to do this. I find the stories in everyday experiences, and people find it easy to understand them. The new images that follow help people to take action.

In helping others, I try to empathize with them and understand their needs. I give them my attention and energy but I allow them to be in charge. In exercising influence, I try to enroll people, not force them, in new directions. I invite people to work with me. I use dialog to help people surface their ideas, and then I weave them together with others until we create knowledge in real time. I ignore symptoms and focus on the deep causes. I help people and groups surface the darkest realities and the most painful conflicts. From these emergent tensions comes the energy for transformation. I liberate people from their fears and help them embrace new paths. In all of this I try to model the message of integrity, growth and transformation.