

Expanding Your Self-Awareness to Enhance Freedom & Personal Power

To overcome feeling stuck and move forward, it is essential to know three things:

1. Where we have been
2. Where we are now
3. Where we want to go

Sounds simple but each part of this equation can be quite tricky and requires skills. They are essentially all skills that could be described as self-awareness. They require an honest appraisal of the self – one's strengths, limitations, mistakes and successes. There is always more about ourselves that we can know, that we can learn and that we can understand – so we need to have a capacity for honest self-appraisal. From this self-analysis we can formulate a goal, a vision, a sense of where we would like to be – usually it is our own personal “theory” of happiness – what we believe will make us happy either now or in the future.

It helps to have a good therapist or someone else to work this through with – if not keep a journal – see if you can map out some key aspects of the forces that have shaped you up to this point – these will include the large forces like beliefs and assumptions from your family of origin, your culture, current society and friends.

Then look inside to see the story you are creating out of all this – see if you can get a sense of your personal “narrative” – imagine you are the main character in a story – a book that you – the author – is writing: What is the plot? What are the main themes? Who are the main characters? Is the book an adventure story, a tragedy, or a thriller?

Your experiences are your greatest teacher and can be the real basis of what works to ensure satisfaction and happiness. Adjust your approach to get a better result. You know things are going in the right direction if you feel happier, lighter, have a greater sense of freedom and a greater sense of meaning in your life.

The greatest skill is the desire to inquire.

Question everything. Below are seven key questions for aiding inquiry

1. What are your main motives?

Before acting on a decision, ask yourself “why?” Follow up your response with a second “why?”, and then a third. If you can find three good reasons to pursue something, you’ll have clarity and be more confident in your actions. Being self-aware means [knowing your motives](#) and determining whether they’re reasonable.

2. What are you feeling?

If you’re unable to articulate how you feel, that can create stress. Putting your feelings into words has a [therapeutic effect](#) on your brain, and this effect is amplified when we write down our feelings (by hand is better than typing, because far greater brain activation happens when we write with our hand). See the attached list of “feeling words” to help with [labelling](#) your emotions. Increase your emotional vocabulary with one new word each day. You can also experiment with journaling by imagining how you will feel when you achieve your goals. This is a visualization exercise: Identifying the positive feelings we seek through our goals increases our connection to them and through this enhances our motivation to achieve them. It is much more powerful to focus on the feelings that your goals will bring you rather than just on the goals themselves.

3. Does what you are doing “work” for you?

Much of what we do is habit, and many of these habits do not produce happiness. Does reading the newspaper “work” for you? Do any of your addictions really help you? Try getting rid of behaviours that add to your load rather than lighten it.

4. Do you choose how you behave?

If you react and do things you regret, you can bring more awareness into your world by slowing things down, owning your behaviour and committing to only doing what you truly want to. The point of action is your point of control.

5. How helpful is the way you think?

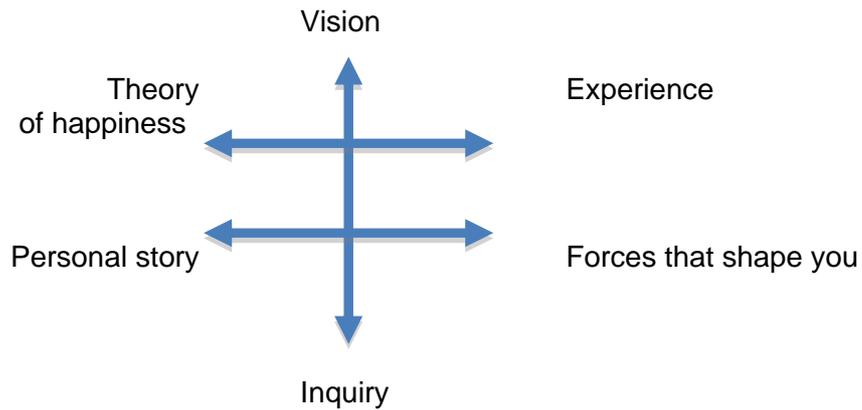
Thinking tends to be like a dialogue. Listen to this talk: Is it kind, respectful, helpful or is it bullying and hysterical? Choose to adopt an inner dialogue that you would like to see on the outside and it is bound to emerge. If you notice critical self-talk, stop for a moment and counter this by reminding yourself that you’re not perfect, but that you are trying to get better, which is more important anyway. Stop and think of three things that you like about yourself. Say: “I’m grateful that I ...” The more your ratio of positive self-talk to negative self-talk is equal or better, the less prone you will be to critical self-talk and the less control those thoughts will have.

6. What are your preferences and how do they differ from significant others around you?

Knowing your personality type allows you to maximize your strengths and manage your weaknesses. Understanding your “strengths” and “talents” can be the difference between a good choice, and a *great* choice. (Strengths are skills and knowledge that can be acquired, while [talents](#) are innate). Start with understanding where you fall on the [introvert/extrovert spectrum](#); know your [Myers-Briggs](#) type; and then conduct a personal [SWOT](#) analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats).

7. Do you know where you are?

Keep a [journal](#) and track your progress. How would you rate your current level of self-awareness out of ten? Think about how often you say regretful things; repeat bad habits; make absent-minded decisions; and have erratic thoughts. Set regular goals, break big goals down into smaller milestones. Ask yourself at the end of each day “what did I do well today?” and “how can I improve on this tomorrow?”



LIST OF FEELING WORDS

Happy	Angry	Caring	Depressed	Fearful
Aglow	Affronted	Accepted	Alienated	Afraid
Amused	Aggravated	Admired	Ashamed	Alarmed
Animated	Agitated	Adoring	Awful	Anxious
Aroused	Annoyed	Affectionate	Barren	Appalled
Bold	Antagonistic	Appreciated	Beaten	Apprehensive
Brotherly	Intelligent	Appreciative	Beaten	Awkward
Buoyant	Bitter	Attached	Blah	Careful
Calm	Bugged	Attentive	Cowardly	Wary
Celebratory	Cranky	Befriended	Crestfallen	Cautious
Charmed	Critical	Blessed	Crushed	Defensive
Cheerful	Disgusted	Cherished	Dejected	Desperate
Confident	Dismayed	Cherishing	Demoralized	Disquieted
Content	Enraged	Commended	Depressed	Distressed
Cool	Exasperated	Compassionate	Desolate	Fearful
Delighted	Fed up	Considerate	Despondent	Fidgety
Ecstatic	Fuming	Devoted	Devalued	Forced
Elated	Galled	Doting	Disappointed	Fretful
Elevated	Grim	Empathetic	Dismal	Frightened
Felicitous	Grouchy	Esteemed	Dispirited	Horrorified
Jocular	Resentful	Fervent	Distressed	Nervous