WORKBOOK

Finding the Story You Are Standing Inside

A four-part exercise in Awareness, the first domain of spiritual emotional intelligence.

Awareness is not the same as self-awareness. Self-awareness asks what you are feeling. Awareness asks what the feeling is pointing at and what it is protecting — and it begins from an uncomfortable premise: that you are not a reliable narrator of yourself. Not because you are dishonest. Because the instrument you would use to check is the same instrument that generated the story.

This workbook is built to get around that. It does not ask you to introspect harder. It asks you to look for a pattern across several incidents, and then to get one piece of evidence from outside yourself. Expect it to take an hour across a week, not a sitting.

PART ONE — The inventory

Bring to mind four times in the last year when something went wrong between you and another person at work, or when you judged someone quickly and decisively. Not your worst moments — ordinary ones. For each, write three lines and only three:

1. What was happening.
2. The explanation I had ready at the time. Write it in the words you would have used then, not the words you would use now.
3. What the other person would say was happening, if they were being honest and were not worried about my reaction.

Do all four before you read on. The exercise does not work one at a time, because any single incident can be explained away. The pattern is what you are after.

PART TWO — The direction of the bend

Now read your four explanations side by side and answer one question.

Which way do they bend?

Mine all bent the same way: every explanation made me the reasonable person in the story. Discipline. Accountability. Discernment. High standards. Yours will bend too, but possibly in a different direction — toward being the one who was wronged, or the one who was only trying to help, or the one nobody appreciated.

1. Write the direction in one sentence: “My explanations tend to make me the one who _____.”

2. Where did that explanation first become useful to you? Most of them were protecting something real at some point.
3. What does it cost the people around you now?

PART THREE — Ask a narrower question

This is the part that actually produces new information, and it is the part most people skip. You cannot find your own gap by thinking about it harder. Someone has to tell you.

The question is not "how am I doing?" — nobody answers that honestly. Ask this instead:

What is it like to be on the other side of me when I am under pressure?

How to run it:

1. Choose two people: one who works with you now, and one who did years ago and no longer has anything to lose by answering.
2. Ask in person or on a call, not in writing. Writing gives them time to soften it.
3. Say plainly that you are not looking for reassurance, and that you will not argue with the answer.
4. Then do not argue with the answer. Not that day and not the following week. The urge to add context is the same machinery that produced the explanations in Part One.
5. Write down what they said in their words, within an hour, before you have improved it.

If you cannot bring yourself to ask yet, that reluctance is data. Write one line about what you are afraid they will say. More often than not, you already know.

PART FOUR — The examen, turned sideways

A daily practice to keep this from being a one-time exercise. Two questions at the end of the day, written somewhere you will keep them:

1. Where today did I feel most like myself?
2. Where today was I performing?

Do not try to fix anything for the first two weeks. Only collect. What you are looking for is not a bad day — it is the discovery that the gap between those two answers appears in the same place, with the same people, under the same conditions. That location is the thing worth working on, and you will not find it in any single day's entry.

A note on the Enneagram

If you know your number, use it as a prediction rather than a label. It will not tell you who you are. It will tell you, in advance, which story you reach for when you are squeezed — which buys you a few seconds of warning. Mine always reaches for the competent one. Knowing that does not stop it. It does mean I catch it sooner than I used to.

What to do with what you find

Nothing, for a while. The instinct will be to act on it immediately, and acting immediately is usually the old machinery finding a new assignment. Sit with the pattern long enough that you can describe it without defending it. That is the whole of Awareness, and it is the foundation the other two domains — Belonging and Insight — are built on.

“You cannot see your own face. You can only see what it does to the room.” — The Last One to Know

Peace and every good. · spiritofeq.com