



(know how powerful you are)

Where Are You Right Now?

We begin with a simple conscious assessment (what you are aware of right now) of your Story. The process I describe here will help you understand:

- The major twists and turns of your life, how they've had an impact on you, how you've reacted to them, and the extent to which they've confined or liberated you.
- How well you've fared so far relative to your expectations.
- The major themes threading through your experience and what they imply about who you are and where you're going.

We'll use an effective "broad brush" approach to conducting our conscious assessment, similar to what a therapist does during the first session or two with a new client. We're going to keep it simple, using a qualitative approach that relies on short narrative accounts, a brief series of self-rating scales, and answers to a few short questions. All you'll need is a pad of paper or a computer and some time set aside to consider the texture of your life. Then answer the following questions with as much honesty as you can muster and at a pace you find comfortable. You can always return to one or more questions after you've finished the assessment.

1. Who are the five people who've had the biggest influence on you?

Go back as far as you can remember. List each name and write a sentence or two explaining why you've chosen this person. Don't stop at five if you can think of more, but remember, these are the people who have had the biggest influence on your life. Be sure to list people who've had a negative influence, not just the mentors and saviors.

2. What are the five major events that have shaped your life?

The key here is to identify the events that have had the greatest impact on you, pro and con. Again, go back in time as far as you can remember. Write down each event and a sentence about why it was important. Don't overlook subtle but powerful events like falling in love for the first time or the birth of a child. And be sure to consider events that have had an impact on you from a cultural or world perspective, like Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the emergence of the internet, etc. If you can think of more than five life-changing events, write them down.

3. What really jazzes you in life?

Give this careful thought and write detailed answers. Has a particular passion had an important place in your world for as long as you can remember? Do you love dancing, sports, travel, or community service? Is there a cause that moves you or a specific philosophical, political, or religious theme that underscores your outlook on life? Can you notice repetitive patterns of attachment to a cause or a particular way of being? How might your interests have changed over time, and why? For example, you may have had a long-standing love of medicine and entered nursing school, but dropped out to have children and never went back.

Try to synthesize the aspects of your history as they relate to "the things in life that really jazz you" and then sum them up as a metaphor (or metaphors) for who you really are. For example, at heart you may be a healer, a warrior, a lover, a sage, a statesman, a mother, a caregiver, a musician, an artist, a writer, a public servant, an entrepreneur, a saint, or something else.

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4. Write down your life script.

Write down your story in two or three pages, as if you were writing the synopsis to the Hollywood screenplay of your life. Do it in chronological order: birthplace, family of origin, schools, moves, jobs, important relationships, important accomplishments, important setbacks, love loss, birth of children, etc. Chronicle the five major people and five major events at the point they occurred, along with important events relating to Question 3 (the things that jazz you). Be sure to write down approximate dates for the onset of your illness, changes in your health over time, and relevant medical information regarding diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis for your medical condition(s).

5. Rate yourself according to each of the following scales.

What follows is a series of highly personal and subjective self-rating scales. I've designed them to provide you with a snapshot of where you are. These will help you develop a plan for growth and provide a baseline against which you can measure your future progress. These scales are not quantitative, scientifically validated psychometric testing methods – on purpose. What that means is that I'm not scoring you, you are. The intent of these scores is not to compare them with anyone else's. For example, one of the scales asks you to rate how successful you've been in your major life role. A successful mother of three may rate herself at 1 (the best score) on a scale of 1 to 7. A successful NASA rocket scientist may also rate herself at 1. But the results would be strictly non-comparable.

Now score yourself using the following twelve scales. Rate yourself based on your own attitudes, expectations, thoughts and feelings. These are seven-point scales – **a rating of 1 is the best outcome and a 7 the worst. We used ten-point scales to assess your physical pain in previous chapters because that is the standard in use among most hospitals and health care settings in the U.S. We're using seven-point scales in this chapter because they are simpler and just as effective for self assessment purposes.**

Rate yourself by circling the number that best represents your self-assessment. Be sure to read the guidelines provided for each scale.

5a. How aware are you?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7

How present are you to what is going on in your environment, your body, and mind? A rating of 1 would indicate you are immediately aware of changes in your health, your mental state, and the world around you. A rating of 7 would indicate a profound lack of awareness regarding all three. You'll want to consider your general level of awareness as you move through the remaining scales.

5b. How serious are your healthcare concerns?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7

Rate how serious your problem is, with 1 being the least serious and 7 being a major life-threatening condition like cancer.

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