

18.



Finding your fingerprint

The activities that follow are designed to help you explore facets of your being that distinguish you as unique. You can also use these exercises when you are coaching or mentoring others. It is important that you are clear about who you are, who you are not, and what you are ultimately about in order to live your life to the fullest and be able to offer all you are capable of. Once you have thought through and identified 'who you are', you can translate this knowledge to the frames you have in your life, and explore whether they are enabling you or impeding your growth.

Spend some time exploring the authentic you. And always remember: there has only ever been, and will always only be, one you. Would you dare deprive the world of that gift?

ACTIVITY 2

THREE WORDS

According to the most recent edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, there are a quarter of a million distinct English words, of which half are nouns, one-quarter adjectives and one-seventh verbs. Any of these words may serve to paint a picture of who you are. Of the thousands of possible choices of words to describe yourself, let's see if you can narrow it down to three.

WHY ONLY THREE?

This 'three words' exercise is important for three reasons. First, it makes you consciously aware that you play a vital role in shaping how others perceive you — whether that be a narrow slice or a broad purview of you, the person. You only get one chance to make a first (and often lasting) impression, so you will want to be more deliberate about how you want other people to experience you. Taking yourself through a deliberate process of finding three words that best define 'you' will be both challenging and revealing.

Secondly, you get a chance to see if there is a correlation between the three words you use to define yourself and the energy you derive from 'being' those words. When you consider the sum effect across the three words that you choose, does the composite energise or drain you? For example, defining your work role as 'manager' might make you feel the weight of responsibility, whereas 'leader' might make you feel inspired and strong.

Lastly, this exercise gives you an opportunity to assess how comfortable you are with being unique. If authenticity is about embracing what makes you unique, you have to have a starting point. This might mean dragging yourself out of the shadows or seeking to be more precise — adopting 'free-thinker' rather than 'liberal', for instance.

STEP 1: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Before choosing words that describe who you are, it will be important to scroll through memories of important and defining moments in your life, through people and experiences that have stretched and tested you under both optimal and adverse circumstances. If you consider your life as a journey, and yourself as an evolving product of that journey, you should think carefully about words that shed the most light on who you truly are.

STEP 2: 26 WORDS

With a dictionary in hand or online, make your way quickly through the pages of the 26 letters in the alphabet. Scroll through at a reasonably fast pace and let your eye pause where it is drawn to, for whatever reason. For each letter of the alphabet, you can choose only one word that best describes who you are. Put the 26 words on one page, but mix them up so that they aren't in alphabetical order.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____

17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____
26. _____

STEP 3: 13 WORDS

With your list of 26 words in front of you, put a circle around the top 13 words that *best* describe who you are. You are now making some deliberate choices. The 13 words you have circled have now become your new list.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____

STEP 4: REALITY CHECK

Send your list of 13 words to two people in your life who know you the best and are not afraid to be candid and genuine with you. These two people may include your partner, a parent, sibling, friend or mentor.

Ask these two people to put a cross next to any of the 13 words that *don't* match their perception of who you are. They don't have to justify or explain any of their choices. It's okay if they agree with all of your 13 words. It's okay if they don't agree with any of them.

STEP 5: SEVEN WORDS

After some deep reflection on your list of 13 words *and* the input from the two people who know you best, now put a circle around the seven words that best define who you are. Once again, you are making some deliberate choices. It's okay if you choose words from the list that the other two people indicated are least like you. It may be that they are unaware of some things about yourself that you have not made explicit to them. It may be that you have spent some time and effort to make sure they don't see these things about you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

STEP 6: FOUR DAYS, FOUR WORDS

For the next four days, choose one word each day to eliminate from your list of seven. By eliminating these four words, you are not saying that they don't describe who you are; you are simply saying that the three words remaining on your list are the ones that *best* describe who you are.

STEP 7: THREE WORDS

Write the three words on a clean sheet of paper. Under each word, write a few sentences about how the word applies to you. The example below may help you.

EXAMPLE

Student	I have been a lifelong student, eager to learn new things about the world, and often challenging those around me to keep an open mind and not become enslaved by rigid frames. Being on a learning curve energises me. Being stretched energises me. If I always leave room for a better way, that means that possibility lives in infinity.
Destined	The spiritual side of me is fuelled by my belief that our lives are ordained, and, therefore, position us on particular paths at particular times to encounter particular people and experiences. I don't put much stock in coincidence or luck, as I consider those to be throwaway explanations for things that are meant to be and are meant for me.
Accountable	I am perplexed by anyone who walks away from a commitment, unashamedly leaving others to pick up the pieces. Accountability is a core value and it is strongest when felt from within rather than imposed from without. The opposite of feeling personal accountability for something is choosing to walk away with no ownership for the result if things start to unravel. I stand behind those things I commit to, even if they don't turn out the way I hope.

STEP 8: YOUR EPITAPH

In loving memory of John Gray
Husband, Father, Soldier

We usually don't get a choice of the epitaph inscribed on our tombstone. Let's assume you do get a choice.

If a total stranger wandered up to your tombstone, are you comfortable with them deducing who you were as a person through the three words you have chosen in this exercise?

1. If not, what word(s) would you change? Why?

2. Does your epitaph say more about who you were or what you did?

3. Does that matter?

4. Does your epitaph define you as unique? Does the sum impact of the three words together truly capture the essence of your 'fingerprint'?

5. If you could add a by-line at the bottom of the three words, what would it be? Consider this example.

In loving memory of John Gray
Husband, Father, Soldier
'Born to Run'

What is your by-line?

6. Looking at the three words and the by-line, choose one word to describe the essence of your epitaph.
