



How I Show Up

Cultivate Your Locus of Control

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This is an invitation to take **self-inventory** to thoughtfully explore how you **show up** across the many areas of your life. Below you'll find a series of topics that may or may not influence your behavior. In addition, there are **reflective prompts** designed to help you get curious about your patterns, responses, strengths, and challenges.

People naturally seek **autonomy, competence, and connection** because these needs form the foundation of psychological well-being and motivation. Autonomy helps people feel in charge of their choices, competence gives a sense of capability and progress, and connection provides reassurance that they matter and belong. When these three needs are met, people are more resilient, motivated, and emotionally balanced.

People naturally develop **cognitive and emotional defenses** as part of how the mind protects itself and makes sense of the world. These defenses such as avoidance, rationalization, confirmation bias, or downplaying distress help reduce emotional overwhelm, maintain a **stable sense of self**, and simplify complex experiences.

Similarly, **cognitive biases** help the brain process information quickly by relying on shortcuts shaped by past experiences, beliefs, and cultural learning. While these defenses and biases can sometimes distort reality or limit growth, they are not flaws; **they are normal**, adaptive human mechanisms designed to keep us safe, reduce uncertainty, and help us navigate daily life.

With awareness, individuals can learn to soften or adjust these patterns to support healthier thinking, emotional regulation, and relationships.

As you navigate this self-inventory, be open to identifying the internal "**characters**" or "**parts**" that influence your behavior and choices. Seek to understand the factors that act as "**motivators**" and "**forcing functions**" influencing how you show up.

Be open to identifying your productive patterns as well as the defenses and/or the biases you use as shortcuts to the world you navigate.

Suggestions:

As you work through this resource, try visualizing the following questions:

- **How Do I Want to Show Up?**

Reflect on what matters to you – your values. What is the version of yourself you strive to be in different roles and relationships.

- **Who's Driving the Bus?**

Who or what is steering your behavior in any given moment? Are you in the driver's seat, or is fear, stress, perfectionism, people-pleasing, etc. taking over?

- **Who Has a Seat at My Table?**

Think of the different "characters" or "parts" within you. e.g., the Critic, the Caretaker, the Avoider, the Achiever. What roles do they play? What are they trying to protect?

Watch this short video: [Characters @ Our Table](#)

The video illustrates the concept that we all carry multiple inner characters or parts. The goal isn't to eliminate them, but to understand, integrate, and turn toward them with curiosity and compassion.

Reference: **PDF Exploring our Parts**

Influences:

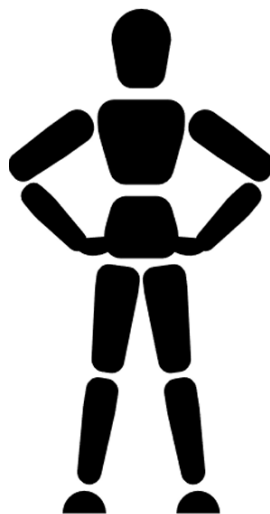
Intrinsic motivations, extrinsic pressures, personal acceptance, cultural norms, and faith or religious beliefs all shape how we show up in the world.

Intrinsic motivations guide us from within our values, passions, and sense of purpose while **Extrinsic factors** like expectations, rewards, or social approval can pull us in specific directions.

Acceptance, both of ourselves and from others, influences our confidence and emotional openness. **Cultural** backgrounds shape the behaviors, communication styles, and roles we learn to embody.

Faith and religion can offer guiding principles, meaning, and grounding. Together, these forces

interact to influence how we behave, relate, and make decisions in daily life.



Intrinsic

- *Organic, Self Initiated...*

Extrinsic

- *Influenced by Others...*

Acceptance

- *Desire for Others Approval...*

Cultural

- *Based on Fitting Into Cultural Norms...*

Faith or Religious

- *Based on Meeting or Achieving 3rd Party Norms...*

Influences: How Much Control Do I Have?

Locus of control refers to a person's **belief about what influences the outcomes in their life**. Individuals with an **internal locus of control** believe their actions, choices, and efforts significantly shape what happens to them. Those with an **external locus of control** tend to see outcomes as driven by luck, fate, or forces outside their influence. Both perspectives exist on a spectrum and can shift over time.

People can influence their locus of control by practicing awareness of their thoughts, recognizing where they *do* have agency, and taking small, intentional actions that reinforce a sense of competence and effectiveness.

Setting achievable goals, reflecting on past successes, building problem-solving skills, and noticing patterns of influence in daily life can gradually strengthen an internal locus of control. This shift often leads to increased motivation, resilience, and emotional well-being.

Use these resources to begin cultivating an **internal locus of control**.

Influences: Motivation

People often show up differently depending on whether they rely on a top-down, discipline-driven approach or a bottom-up, mood-based motivation approach.

A **top-down**, process-oriented mindset is anchored in intentional routines, structure, and clarity of values allowing someone to act consistently even when they don't "feel like it."

In contrast, a **bottom-up**, mood-influenced approach depends heavily on emotional state, energy, and moment-to-moment motivation; behavior fluctuates with how a person feels rather than with their goals or commitments.

Both approaches can inform behavior, but leaning too heavily on mood often leads to inconsistency, while process-oriented discipline helps support follow-through and emotional regulation.



Discipline

(Top Down | Process Driven)



Motivation

(Bottom's Up | Mood Driven)

Influences: Self-Achievement

"Self-achievement" activities are small, personal actions that primarily benefit the individual and contribute to a sense of internal satisfaction, even when no one else notices or understands their importance. These tasks like making the bed, keeping the sink clean, organizing a workspace, or completing a small personal ritual serve as quiet, self-directed wins.

They reinforce competence, autonomy, and emotional grounding by giving a person a sense of order, progress, or control. While they may seem insignificant to others, these behaviors can play a powerful role in supporting self-esteem, reducing stress, and reinforcing a sense of identity and well-being.

Influences: Forcing Functions

External “**forcing functions**” are structures, cues, or constraints in a person’s environment that trigger or support desired behaviors when internal motivation isn’t enough.

These can include deadlines, accountability partners, scheduled commitments, financial liability, physical reminders, or systems that make certain actions easier or harder.

By shaping the environment to guide behavior rather than relying solely on willpower, forcing functions create momentum, reduce friction, and help people follow through with goals, even during periods of low motivation or emotional resistance.

Influences: Internal Alchemy

Internal neurotransmitters and hormones our body’s “**internal alchemy**” play a powerful role in shaping behavior, motivation, and emotional experience.

Dopamine drives reward-seeking and motivates us to pursue goals; serotonin supports mood stability, confidence, and well-being; oxytocin fosters trust, bonding, and connection; and stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline influence alertness, reactivity, and decision-making.

This chemical interplay constantly shapes how we feel, what we focus on, and how we respond to others. When balanced, these systems help us regulate emotions, stay motivated, and engage meaningfully with our environment; when disrupted, they can push us toward avoidance, impulsivity, or dysregulated behavior.



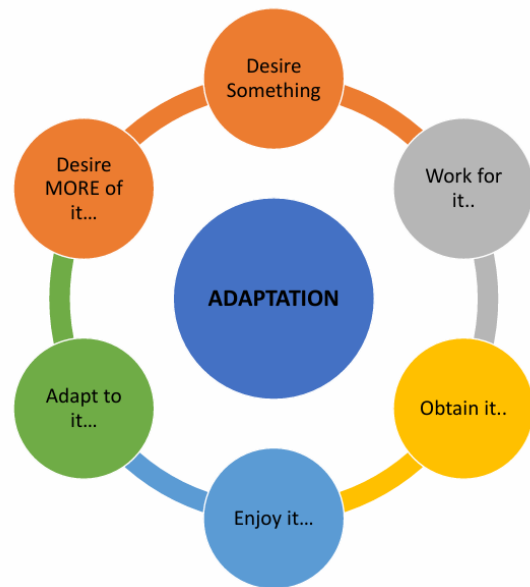
Influence: Adaptation

Adaptation and the **hedonic treadmill** shape behavior and motivation by constantly shifting what feels “normal” or satisfying. As people achieve goals or experience positive changes, they quickly adapt to new circumstances, making what once felt exciting or meaningful feel routine.

This process known as the hedonic treadmill creates **a cycle** where individuals continually seek new achievements, possessions, or experiences to regain that sense of fulfillment.

While this can drive ambition and growth, it can also **lead to restlessness**, reduced gratitude, and difficulty sustaining long-term motivation.

Understanding these forces helps people recognize when they’re **chasing novelty instead of nurturing deeper**, more stable sources of meaning and satisfaction.



Influences: Scarcity & Abundance

A **scarcity** mindset narrows motivation and focus because the brain becomes preoccupied with what’s missing from time, resources, support, or certainty. This tunnel vision can create urgency, reactive decision-making, and short-term thinking, often pushing people to act out of fear or self-protection.

In contrast, an **abundance** mindset broadens motivation and focus by reinforcing the belief that there are options, time to grow, and multiple paths forward. This sense of psychological safety allows for creativity, long-term planning, curiosity, and more consistent motivation.

When people operate from abundance, they tend to take healthier risks, stay engaged longer, and make choices aligned with values rather than anxiety.



Influences: Defenses

Often, when we become triggered or experience dysregulation, there are several ways one often shows up. These strategies are commonly referred to as "defense" strategies.

The strategies themselves are not bad. Rather they serve a purpose. The objective may be to build awareness around your defense strategies and then identify when they work for you productively and where/when they don't work for you or how they can contribute to the "frequency mismatch" that may occur in a relationship.

- **Denial** - Refusing to accept reality or facts, thereby blocking external events from awareness.
- **Repression** - Unconsciously blocking unpleasant emotions, thoughts, or memories from conscious awareness.
- **Projection** - Attributing one's own unacceptable thoughts or feelings to someone else.
- **Displacement** - Redirecting emotions or impulses from a threatening target to a safer one.
- **Rationalization** - Justifying behaviors or feelings with logical reasons, even if they aren't the true reasons.
- **Sublimation** - Channeling unacceptable impulses or drives into socially acceptable activities.
- **Deflection** - Where person shifts focus or redirect attention away from something uncomfortable, painful, or anxiety-inducing. Instead of addressing the underlying issue or emotion directly, the person changes the subject, jokes, or focuses on something unrelated to avoid confronting the distressing topic.
 - **Changing the Subject:** When someone brings up a topic that makes a person uncomfortable, they might quickly change the conversation to avoid dealing with it.
 - **Humor or Sarcasm:** A person might use humor or sarcasm to deflect attention from a serious or uncomfortable issue.
 - **Blaming or Projecting:** Instead of acknowledging their own feelings or responsibilities, a person might blame others or project their feelings onto someone else.
 - **Minimization:** Downplaying the significance of an issue or making it seem less important than it is.
- **Regression** - Reverting to an earlier stage of development in response to stress.
- **Reaction Formation** - Behaving in a way that is opposite to one's unacceptable thoughts or feelings.
- **Intellectualization** - Using logic and reasoning to avoid dealing with emotional stress or anxiety.
- **Compensation** - Making up for a perceived deficiency in one area by excelling in another.

- **Isolation of Affect** - Separating feelings from thoughts, leading to a lack of emotional response to a distressing event.
- **Undoing** - Attempting to reverse or "undo" a thought or action that causes anxiety by performing another action.
- **Strawman argument** is when someone misrepresents, distorts, or oversimplifies an opponent's position or argument to make it easier to attack or refute. Instead of addressing the actual argument, the person creates a "straw man" — a weaker, exaggerated, or altered version of the original argument
 - **Misrepresentation:** The original argument is distorted or altered
 - **Exaggeration:** The argument is blown out of proportion to make it seem more extreme or unreasonable.
 - **Oversimplification:** Complex arguments are simplified to a point where they no longer reflect the original intent.
- **Avoidance** - Engaging in actions that prevent encountering a stressful or anxiety-inducing situation.
- **Escape** - Actively removing oneself from a situation that is causing discomfort or stress.
- **Compulsive** - Repetitive actions performed to reduce anxiety or stress
- **Safety Focused** - Actions taken to feel safer in anxiety-provoking situations, often reinforcing the fear.
- **Distraction** - Diverting attention away from distressing thoughts or feelings by focusing on something else.
- **Self-Reinforcement** - Rewarding oneself after successfully completing a task or behavior, which can strengthen that behavior.

Influences: Biases

Often our behavior can be unpredictable. At times we can manage situations in a productive way.

Conversely, we can find ourselves repeating the same unproductive pattern repeatedly and wonder WHY? I do what I do.

Seeking to understand what "traps" we tend to fall into can be helpful to disrupt the patterns that tend to occur repeatedly.

Take some time to review the list below and see if any of the following apply to you?

- **Confirmation Bias** - Tendency to search for, interpret, and remember information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or opinions.

- **Anchoring** - Relying too heavily on the first piece of information (the "anchor") when making decisions.
- **Availability Heuristic** - Overestimating the likelihood of events based on their availability in memory.
- **Hindsight** - Seeing events as more predictable after they have occurred.
- **Overconfidence** - Overestimating one's abilities, knowledge, or control over situations.
- **Self-Serving** - Attributing successes to internal factors (e.g., skill) and failures to external factors (e.g., bad luck).
- **Stereotyping** - Generalizing based on oversimplified or exaggerated beliefs.
- **In-Group** - Favoring members of your own group over those in others.
- **Halo Effect** - Allowing a positive impression of someone in one area to influence opinions about them in other areas.
- **Fundamental Attribution Error** - Overemphasizing character attributes while underestimating situational factors in explaining others' behavior.
- **Loss Aversion** - Preferring to avoid losses rather than acquiring equivalent gains.
- **Framing Effect** - Being influenced by how information is presented rather than the information itself.
- **Status Quo** - Preferring things to stay the same over changing them.
- **Sunk Cost Fallacy** - Continuing an endeavor due to prior investments, even when it no longer makes sense.
- **Bandwagon Effect** - Adopting beliefs or behaviors because "everyone else is doing it."

Reflection Prompts:

Use the following prompts to guide journaling, mindful reflection, or dialogue with a therapist, coach, or partner. These are meant to uncover patterns, deepen self-awareness, and help you navigate life with more clarity and intention.

Emotional and Relational Awareness

- How do I respond to conflict, disagreements, or emotional triggers?
- How do I forgive others and model compassion?
- How do I share my emotions? Am I a **Tsunami**, a **Wave**, an **Island**, or a **Desert**?
- How do I judge others when they make mistakes?

- How do I express and receive affection? Do I want it? If so, how?

Boundaries, Limits & Self-Respect

- How do I express my limits when I've exceeded my capacity?
- How do I set boundaries for myself, for others, professionally?
- How do I recognize my personal limits? What are my "margins"?

Self-Care, Recovery, and Regulation

- How do I take care of myself and recover from hard moments?
- How do I transition from one task or role to another (e.g., work to home)?
- How do I grieve losses of a job, a person, or an opportunity?
- Where do I feel stress or emotional pain in my body?
- How do I recognize what I may be ashamed of or regret?

Motivation, Identity & Self-Worth

- How do I build confidence in myself?
- How do I motivate myself internally? How do external factors influence me?
- How do I recognize what makes me unique?
- How do I experience success? How do I experience failure?
- What excites me? How do I feel it in my body?

Habits & Patterns

- How do I practice my life skills and healthy habits?
- How do I fall into my personal "junk food" behaviors those patterns I know don't serve me but are hard to resist?
- How do I take risks and stretch beyond my comfort zone?

Relationships, Connection & Support

- How do I connect with others emotionally, physically, and mentally?
- How do I ask for help? How do I help others?
- How do I show up as a friend? What do I expect from friendship?
- How do I know I'm appreciated and by whom, when, where?

- How do I know when I'm accepted and by whom, when, where?
- How do I recognize encouragement or attention I'm seeking?

Communication & Expression

- How do I communicate when I'm upset or angry?
- How do I translate what I need or want?
- How do I recognize when I've been hurt or when I've hurt someone else?

Play, Joy & Creativity

- How do I play alone and with others?
- How do I recognize joy, creativity, or emotional openness in myself?

Closing Thoughts:

This exercise is not a test there are no right or wrong answers. It is an ongoing invitation to:

- Pause and reflect.
- Listen inwardly.
- Recognize your patterns with compassion.
- Make intentional shifts aligned with who you want to be.