

# FACES:

## The 5 Sides of Becoming Your Best Self

### What Self-Improvement **Requires and Why**

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Self-development stands as one of the most admirable, courageous, and difficult endeavors to undertake. It's not solely about defining selfhood; self-development is about shaping the quality of one's interaction with others. It's also about shaping one's responses to circumstances, opportunities, and realizations throughout their life. Given this perspective of development, the process can be complex and, therefore, may require months or years of time for these developmental efforts to lead to a sustainable change.

The core of self-development centers on discovery and exploration of one's core self and expression, which should be central considerations, since self-development is, ultimately, about the quality of one's existence as expressed through their thoughts and actions. In order to achieve such progress, one should be proactive in the expansion of their awareness, knowledge, and skills. Challenges are integral to the process and often include confronting one's fears, ego (self-regard), and pride (regard for one's qualities, possessions, or achievements).

Understanding the framework of development provides essential context. Three areas of knowledge are important for framing a developmental effort: aim, context, and process. Each plays a vital role: Aim centers on a desired result for development and is often related to facets of life—health and well-being, relationships, education and career, safety and security, social engagement, belief and spirituality, aging and mortality, etc. People naturally express themselves in distinct contexts, whether it's within a professional sphere, among friends, in public, or privately. As for the developmental process, whatever the aim, the process for one's development should involve IDEAL, an acronym for a five-step process that will be explained later.

## About Your Development

Several factors make any effort toward improvement a unique undertaking. The path of development often proves unpredictable, presenting an array of issues and unexpected challenges and considerations to wade through. Development can involve significant internal conflict, requiring continual effort in order to achieve progress. This transformative journey could involve a multitude of elements such as self-reflection, courage, honesty, forgiveness, and embracing personal truths. Additionally, advancement often hinges on one's willingness to be vulnerable, admit shortcomings, take ownership of responsibilities, question their beliefs, confront biases, hone new skills, and relinquish ego and pride. Why would anyone voluntarily subject themselves to the challenges of personal growth? That is an important question to answer and is linked to the final comments of this article.

Growth opportunities emerge throughout life, and the decision to pursue development is typically driven by an interest in some personal benefit such as achieving peace or a more satisfying life. Regardless of one's situation or motivation, pursuing self-development offers numerous advantages. However, it's important to recognize that self-development has relevance beyond personal gains; our actions influence a larger framework that connects to the lives of countless others.

The word "self" in the term "self-development" is somewhat of a misnomer because two fundamental truths underscore its relevance to other people: firstly, people are inherently social beings, relying on various forms of bidirectional connection, and secondly, throughout life, we encounter situations and circumstances that necessitate responses that are likely to affect others. Through this lens, we see how self-development empowers us to lead more fulfilling lives and has a ripple effect that extends through our immediate relationships to others we may never know. It should be seen as more than a proactive endeavor to improve one's own life; personal growth significantly contributes to the networks of relationships that shape our experiences.

# FACES

Self-improvement extends beyond superficial aspects of our existence; it encompasses a quest for deeper knowledge and transformation, and should be a life-long endeavor across each stage of our experience. FACES is an acronym representing five areas essential for self-understanding and developmental efforts: Facts, Alarms, Convictions, Empathy, and Selfhood. These dimensions present unique challenges and opportunities for self-discovery and personal growth. Let's examine each component in turn.

## 1. Facts

Self-development objective: **accept the facts**

Facts: *actuality, something true, objectively knowable*

When it comes to self-improvement, there are different types of facts that you should consider. The first pertains to personal and privately held truths about oneself. The second category involves "facts" related to beliefs in objectively unknowable things, such as the existence of God and the nature of consciousness.

Confronting personal truth establishes the cornerstone of development, and, therefore, may be the best place to begin a developmental endeavor. Success at this step promotes strength that could be useful in other aspects of development.

Acknowledge truths about yourself and your life. Why? Self-development necessitates awareness and acceptance of what one holds as being true. Honesty must start with introspection because growth should stem from an authentic foundation. The goal is not to judge these "facts," but to recognize them and develop comfort with complete self-honesty.

To address challenging truths, consider these proven approaches: practicing vulnerability and objectivity over guardedness and judgment; seeking feedback from others; practicing an open mindset; and focusing on progress toward

development, rather than dwelling on past mistakes, regrets, self-condemnation, and feelings.

In Sum

Self-improvement necessitates accepting hard truths about ourselves. The value of improvement is, in part, its being based on authenticity. If we cannot be honest with ourselves, our development will be skewed and progress impaired. By acknowledging facts about ourselves, we establish a genuine basis for growth from which progress may become auspicious. **Success here is useful to other facets of our development.**

## 2. Alarm (worry, fear, anxiety)

Self-development objective: **settle alarms**

*Alarms: fear, worry, anxiety, stress; a distressing apprehension or dread.*

Settling alarms offers many benefits, since they can significantly narrow one's thought and ability, creating a sabotaging impact on progress. These mental barriers manifest in several ways: confusing rational thinking and interfering with effective decision-making, inciting regression and avoidance, and adversely impacting one's energy and mental state.

Identify sources of stress, worry, anxiety, and fear. Why? Settling alarms frees you from barriers to personal growth. Confronting alarms effectively dissolves their constricting impact, allowing you to expand your understanding and capability.

The process of overcoming alarms requires systematic approach: breaking down an alarm into rational, manageable components and settling them one piece at a time. This process diminishes the power of an alarm. Introspection can help reveal the causes of, and irrational beliefs underlying, alarms and allow a useful perspective to emerge.

In Sum

Alarms interfere with self-development by suppressing one's sense of capability, confidence, or responsibility. Therefore, settling alarms is an essential step toward personal development on several fronts. By learning how to constructively confront our alarms, we promote a sense of self-confidence and capability that can be empowering. Success in this area is liberating, and necessary in order to reclaim agency over our lives.

### 3. Conviction (beliefs and aspirations)

Self-development objective: **answer conviction**

*Conviction: a compelling sense or idea that is believed to be true or valid without certainty or positive knowledge: a strong belief*

Convictions assist us in navigating challenges and setbacks, shaping our self-identity, and fostering personal growth by aligning with our core values.

Understanding conviction begins with acknowledgment. Recognizing your convictions is crucial for self-development because of their implications and promotion of authenticity and self-awareness. Convictions alert our attention to something important and can inspire a sense of direction. They can help us navigate challenges and setbacks, and contribute to our self-identity and personal growth. However, convictions can be a cause of alarm that draws resistance to facing important issues.

People often act against their convictions due to cognitive dissonance - a stressful psychological condition caused when one holds conflicting beliefs, attitudes, or values that they feel pressure to reconcile. The process of reconciliation can lead to rationalization or justification of actions as one works out their conflict.

Answer your convictions. Why? Convictions arise from your beliefs and values, so acknowledging them promotes authenticity and may offer growth opportunities. Yet answering convictions does not necessarily mean complying with them. Self-development can involve scrutinizing convictions. Answering your convictions can reinforce your beliefs, spark cognitive dissonance, or lead to reconsideration of

your knowledge, values, and ideas, which can reshape beliefs. Each of these possibilities should be seen as integral to personal growth.

To explore your convictions effectively, consider these approaches: writing about them, reflection, questioning assumptions, assessing strong emotions, understanding the influences of your upbringing—family values, culture, circumstances—and broad-based learning. Additionally, work at listening to yourself, identify your rationalizations, and accept responsibility for your beliefs, assumptions, judgments, and decisions.

### In Sum

A conviction—to or not to do something—deserves your attention and respect, but does not necessarily mean the conviction warrants precedence over other choices. Self-development necessitates attention to our convictions because of their connection to our authentic selves. Ignoring or disregarding our convictions can lead to inner conflict, lack of fulfillment, and a distorted perception of personal growth. By answering our convictions, whether that involves adherence to them or scrutinizing them, we advance toward clearer self-knowledge and position ourselves for greater progress toward growth.

## 4. Empathy

Self-development objective: **build empathy**

*Empathy: the psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the emotions, thoughts, or attitudes of another*

While empathy might seem paradoxical to self-development given its focus on others, it serves as a crucial catalyst for personal growth. Learning to regard the human plight and respect differences among people is vital to self-development. The value of empathy to personal growth lies in how it challenges our biases and promotes greater awareness, self-reflection, and self-conception. Through this expanded perspective, we're able to shift from seeing our commonalities with others rather than our dissimilarities, which

increase our humanity, maturity, and helps move us beyond self-contentedness. Such an achievement is certainly essential for self-development.

Learn to increase empathy toward others. Why? Empathy aids self-development by cultivating emotional intelligence, which enables us to appreciate difference among people and recognize our own feelings and motivations. These benefits can lead to our having a broader perspective and ability to understand situations with others. This, in turn, can empower us to effectively navigate conflicts, reduce intolerance, and replace judgment with thoughtful consideration, leading to more meaningful relationships.

In Sum

Empathy promotes self-development in several ways. Through learning about others and the human condition, we learn about ourselves. Such clarity can be powerful in dissolving prejudices and other barriers, and seeing our own situations. Empathy arises through recognition of our need for, and similarities with, others in spite of the differences between us. Of course, interaction with other people can present challenges, become complicated, and test our patience, because the work of building empathy entails transcending ego-centric interests. Progress toward empathy will encourage further personal growth.

## 5. Selfhood

Self-development objective: **choose and accept responsibility for your selfhood**

*Selfhood: the state of being an individual; the realm of the self. The interest in, and regard for, the self*

While the previous aspects of FACES involve philosophical elements, Selfhood places philosophy at its core. Selfhood is the deliberate expression and management of ourselves, based on our self-conception. Self-conception includes the recognition of a division between our identity (state of being) and an idea of a "higher" self, such as a version of our developed self—what such a person is, does, and has the potential to

effect. Selfhood involves the sorting out of our being an identity with an interest to improve, achieve, or become something envisioned for that identity.

## The Management of Self

The management of ourselves culminates in some kind of self-expression or declaration, and balance between self as an identity and self as imagined (as developed). As our lives transpire across times and contexts, selfhood may remain unintegrated and never be fully understood. This, however, does not mean that efforts made to develop one's self are in vain. Rather, the pursuit of self-development holds profound meaning and value in what the effort reflects about the person and may yield. Development is not about a destination; it's about the process and reasons for which the process is embraced. Having a worldview is vitally important to defining selfhood.

Recognize selfhood as representative of your intention – a purposeful reaction to experience or declaration toward something. Why? Selfhood is dynamic, a context or means through which to learn and communicate. This view of selfhood emphasizes the significance of personal agency in defining oneself and evolving in response to one's environment, opportunities, convictions, and aspirations.

To cultivate authentic selfhood, focus on these essential aspects: intention, recognition of potential and purpose within actions, conflict resolution for inner peace, and adopting a worldview that reconciles the material life and mortality. Build awareness of self-protective thinking, defensive reactions, pride, and selfishness in your behavior. Take time to identify the core values and beliefs that guide your thought process, question their source and validity, identify assumptions, and explore diverse philosophical perspectives. For deeper development, develop critical thinking through learning about various concepts, having discussions, and daily introspection. Consider journaling, meditation, or contemplation. Learn from adversity and failures; view these as useful opportunities for growth and demonstration of progress.

## In Sum

Defining selfhood is an essential aspect of self-development. Selfhood involves purposeful decision-making, based on a sense of being and the potential to become. A philosophical perspective is essential to selfhood. It unites thought, action, and a



direction for life. Without such a foundation, one may feel a sense of futility and struggle with decision-making. A philosophical foundation can validate our rationale, values, and beliefs, as well as serve as a source of guidance and be useful when assessing perspectives, situations, and options.

Most importantly, Selfhood acknowledges our potential to change, transcend circumstances, and become what we will, to a certain extent. By taking responsibility for who we are and want to become, we shape our potential, our lives, and our interactions with others.

## Note on Development

The course of self-improvement is an ongoing process, demanding patience and self-forgiveness as you address the aspects of FACES. Progress will be gradual but rewarding, and, therefore, always worth the effort.

There is no generic manual, playbook, or single course for how you should approach your development. Personal growth is a unique undertaking because each of us is distinct, as are the particularities of our lives. You must be prepared for occasional disappointments, whatever your course. Understand the human condition—its frailty and neediness—and expect that development could involve adversity and failures. That's life. But so are successes part of life. The key is to be realistic, persist, and make your best effort toward progress. This brings us to IDEAL.

## Apply IDEAL

IDEAL represents: Intend; Direct; Engage; Assess; and Learn. These five human characteristics form the most natural process for our development and the success of our goals. Our challenges and successes often stem from how IDEAL manifests in our lives. Understanding the key to making auspicious progress toward a goal lies in how the aspects of IDEAL work together. Consider IDEAL from this premise:

- We're not mindless; we intend.
- We're not aimless; we direct our lives along the courses we choose.
- We are not idle; we engage life – every day.

- We care about our progress, so we, naturally, assess – others, ourselves, and situations.
- We learn and apply what we learn in order to improve what we intend, how we direct our lives and businesses, how we engage, and the ways we assess.

IDEAL is the process that shapes who we are, and how we'll realize our potential to become and achieve our aims. In order to benefit from this natural process for our development and the achievement of our goals, we must be aware of IDEAL, and choose to express each aspect deliberately, as steps of a process. Let's examine each component in detail.

## Understanding IDEAL Components

### **Intend**

Work toward self-development with a vision of the person you wish to be, and set clearly defined goals. This will serve to guide you, promote motivation, and aid focus. Make it a practice to regularly assess yourself against the aspects of FACES—Facts, Alarms, Convictions, Empathy, and Selfhood—and consider how your aims contribute to your overall development.

Your clarity of intention directly impacts energy toward your progress. Keep in mind that developmental efforts are dynamic, so expect to make revisions with your intentions, as you grow and learn. Regardless of your starting point, FACES remains a valuable model for approaching self-improvement, across the stages of life.

### **Direct**

Once intention crystallizes, strategy must follow. Direct involves making decisions about how to approach and achieve a developmental goal. There may be several considerations to think through, depending on your start point, goal, and consideration of FACES.

Since aspects of FACES have subjective relevance, their significance and order in which they're addressed is individually determined. For many, addressing Selfhood first can provide a useful foundation from which to approach the other areas. However you approach development, all developmental efforts require a process. Progress and

success do not occur spontaneously, so recognize your expectations for how development will be achieved. Importantly, Direct extends beyond merely defining a developmental course; it involves readiness to face whatever challenges that course presents.

## **Engage**

Self-development is a daily commitment that demands attention. This commitment manifests through establishing routines and schedules, cultivating healthy habits, and refining strategies. In the Engage step, work also encompasses seeking opportunities for growth and learning that extend across the stages of life and various contexts.

It's crucial to understand: since Engage activates the transformative process of personal growth, it can give rise to unexpected challenges that test your ability to resolve emotion with rationality, ego with humility, and pride with empathy. These tests can be difficult and intensified by inner conflict, doubt, confusion, and other trying conditions. Progress may necessitate learning and openness to periods of discomfort while you work within the developmental process.

## **Assess**

Assessment stands as a cornerstone of meaningful development. The Assess step in IDEAL involves identifying shortcomings and recognizing progress, yet it demands more than casual observation. Success requires establishing standards, support systems, and routine practices, while maintaining measurable objectives and seeking honest feedback.

Beyond metrics, emotional intelligence plays a vital role. Pay attention to emotional cues and how you feel about your progress. This internal barometer often reveals insights about your behavior patterns, interpretations, assumptions, and motivation. Crucially, assess your development in terms of both your personal goals and their broader impact.

A critical insight emerges here: people naturally downplay weaknesses and inflate strengths. This self-protective tendency, driven by our desire to maintain a positive self-image, can sabotage growth. These ego-driven influences cloud judgment, obscuring areas essential for improvement. Therefore, approach assessments as opportunities for

growth by specifically seeking improvement areas. Failure to assess honestly and vulnerably undermines the entire developmental process.

## Learn

Learning stands at the heart of self-development—a powerful catalyst for discovery and growth. Learning equips us with practical skills, enhances awareness, and empowers critical thought, empathy, and achievement. Most significantly, acquiring knowledge opens a world of developmental possibilities with far-reaching benefits.

The transformative power of learning extends beyond acquiring knowledge and honing skills. When we engage in mental work—understanding, imagining, and problem-solving—we build character, particularly when we approach learning with earnestness and information that promotes introspection, objectivity, emotional intelligence, appreciation for diversity, and interpersonal skills. Through learning, we gain valuable insight into a vast world of ideas, emotions, and human experiences.

## The Power of a Foundational Concept

Earlier, we posed a crucial question: why would anyone voluntarily subject themselves to the challenges of personal growth? The benefits of self-development, while valuable, often fail to provide sufficient motivation for consistent engagement in personal growth. Several factors create this motivational gap: human psychology tends to prioritize short-term gratification over long-term goals, and many resist self-improvement due to the discomfort associated with challenges, change, and persistent effort. Simply put, benefits alone rarely inspire sufficient interest in self-exploration, settling alarms, answering convictions, building empathy, and defining selfhood.

The solution lies in establishing a Foundational Concept—a guiding principle, core belief, or life philosophy that can transform motivation. The influence of a central concept reshapes perspective, values, and priorities. Alignment with a Foundational Concept shifts motivation for self-development beyond personal benefits to a matter of principle, creating a deeper, more sustaining drive.

This concept becomes a game-changer for those committed to self-development. It provides profound direction and purpose, inspiring lives worthy of personal sacrifice. By

connecting self-development efforts with fundamental values, beliefs, and life perspective, the demands and challenges of development take on greater significance—transcending personal gain to serve something greater than the self.



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