

## Motivation and Identity – Finding Your Voice

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### ABSTRACT

The quest for discovering our best selves motivates each one of us as we strive to live with purpose and meaning. Although we recognize our desire to constantly improve, we do not always understand how to best accomplish that noble objective. Often the challenge is not in knowing what we ought to do, but in understanding how to develop the self-discipline and moral courage to put our lives in order. As we mature, we recognize that the patterns we develop and the barriers that we impose on ourselves are often the biggest challenges to overcome.

The purpose of this paper is to address the quest to motivate ourselves most effectively as we struggle in understanding our identity and finding our voice. The paper begins by identifying the often-subconscious nature of our identities and the process we use to equate our actions with our beliefs about ourselves. We then address the nature of our individual voices as that concept has been described by Stephen R. Covey. Following that introduction, we present seven insights about the identity as it relates to motivating ourselves in the pursuit of personal excellence. The paper concludes with a summary of five benefits that derive from becoming the person we have the potential to being and words of encouragement to those who struggle with achieving that goal.

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### *The Nature of the Identity*

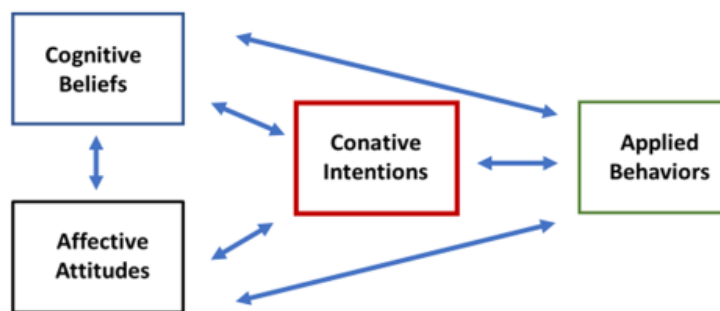
Although the identity is how each individual affirms his or her personal worth to others and to oneself, one's identity is not always consciously acknowledged and is often a product of personal self-deception, rationalization, denial, and self-justification<sup>i</sup>. Each identity includes the set of meanings associated with what it means to be who one is and serves as the standard for evaluating behaviors<sup>ii</sup>. The identity forms the basis of a person's self-image and the standards for holding oneself accountable<sup>iii</sup>. The identity is the foundation of self-esteem and identifies who we are, what we wish to be, and what we must change in our lives in order to fulfill our self-image<sup>iv</sup>. An identity integrates personal memories experiences, and values that contribute to one's sense of self<sup>v</sup>.

Ironically, our identities are often subconsciously present in our lives, inasmuch as we are often so busy with living each day that we do not consciously address who we are and how our values affect our individual decisions.<sup>vi</sup> Confronted with circumstances, we tend to simply respond to them at an emotional level – rather than spending a great deal of time pondering whether our actions are consistent with our rational definition of our “best selves.” We seldom acknowledge the fact that our attitudes, emotions, and feelings override who we think we should be and how we ought to make individual decisions – until we look back and realize how the emotional part of our lives has taken over those decisions<sup>vii</sup>.

The Theory of Reasoned Action provides a model for how our rational or cognitive beliefs integrate constantly with our emotions as we form our intentions and ultimately choose our actions. Figure 1 explains that theory and provides a model of how individuals ultimately make decisions about their behavioral choices.

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Figure 1: The Theory of Reasoned Action



As suggested by Figure 1, our beliefs and attitudes constantly affect our intended behaviors as we interact with others and the situations that we face<sup>viii</sup>. Those intentions to act are subjective preferences that we consciously or subconsciously choose, but those same intentions are frequently affected by the context of the situations that confront us and the resources that we have available. The ultimate result is that we may intend to do one thing but fail to convert that intention into actual behavior.

The rational process to justify our actions is also often subconscious and is equally subtle at the conscious level. Although we may define ourselves in a specific way and self-describe as committed to a specific standard of conduct, our actions are often affected by the context of the situations that we face. We may then look back at those actions and consciously or subconsciously justify our actions – or we may choose to affirm our ideal behavior and strive to change our future behavior to conform with who we wish to become. A model which reflects how we ultimately choose our behaviors is found in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Identity Standard and Its Impact on Behavior

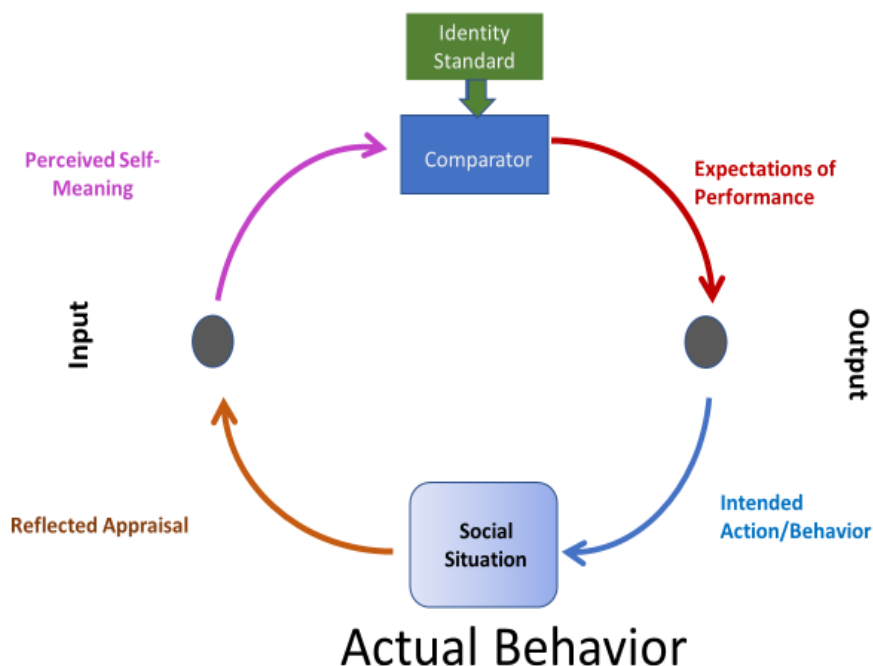


Figure 2 shows how our expectations and intended behaviors are part of our conscious and subconscious efforts to manage how we should act. Behavior is then impacted by the specific situations that we encounter. How we respond to each situation is affected by others' actions and feedback – shown as their reflected appraisal. In Figure 2 We then asses our behavior, or input, and that evaluation confirms or amends our future behavior – becoming a part of our identity standard for future behavior<sup>ix</sup>. The cycle of assessing our behavior is a constant one and our identity evolves when we modify our identity standard.<sup>x</sup>

The identity is generally thought of as central, enduring, and distinctive within generalized parameters, but each individual also is affected by significant emotional events that cause that person to reassess and reevaluate core values and assumptions. Both the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Identity Standard play a role in the evolution of our identities and both models provide valuable insights into understanding how and why changes in our beliefs and values may occur.<sup>xi</sup>

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### Identity, Voice, and Motivation

The concept of voice is closely linked with one's identity and has been defined as the ability of an individual to express himself or herself in response to the conditions that exist in relationships or within an organizational context<sup>xii</sup>. Stephen R. Covey defined voice as including both one's actions and his or her words. Covey called for individuals and organizations to go beyond effectiveness to achieve "fulfillment, passionate execution, and significant contribution."<sup>xiii</sup> Voice, Covey explains, includes accessing the higher reaches of human genius and motivation<sup>xiv</sup> and one's "unique personal significance—significance that is revealed as we face our greatest challenges and which makes us equal to them"<sup>xv</sup>.

Finding one's voice requires fulfilling what Covey described as the boundless capacity "to serve the common good<sup>xvi</sup>"—thereby enabling individuals and organizations to "survive, thrive and profoundly impact the future of the world<sup>xvii</sup>." Finding one's voice, unlocks the "deep, innate, almost inexpressible yearning within each one of us<sup>xviii</sup>" to achieve our highest potential in benefiting others and fulfilling a duty owed to the world<sup>xix</sup>. As a moral obligation, finding one's voice enables individuals and organizations to understand their ethical obligations to others<sup>xx</sup>.

Covey explained that the preeminent quality of an individual was not his or her personality but one's individual character<sup>xxi</sup>. The distinction between values, which govern individual behaviors, and the universal laws of truth determine the consequences of behaviors<sup>xxii</sup>. every individual possesses three important gifts that are essential to discovering his or her voice:

#### 1) Freedom to Choose

Each person has the power to make decisions about his or her life. This freedom to choose is possessed by everyone – although some people clearly have greater resources and opportunities in which to exercise that power.

#### 2) Natural Laws and Principles

Natural laws and principles influence the consequences of individual choices. By choosing what they value and the principles and laws that govern their life, individuals take apply those truths in making their choices.

#### 3) Four Intelligences – The Capacities of Our Nature

Covey's identifies four intelligences associated respectively with each person's body, mind, heart, and spirit. These four intelligences enable each person to grow, to develop, and to utilize free choice and universal rules.

##### IQ or Mental Intelligence

Our ability to think rationally, to remember information, to create new insights, and to reason abstractly constitute our IQ, or intelligence quotient. Mental intelligence includes the capacity to use language, to visualize, to learn, and to comprehend new ideas<sup>xxiii</sup>.

##### PQ or Physical Intelligence

Physical intelligence is the capacity to develop and refine one's physical skills to perform specialized tasks and develop physical strengths<sup>xxiv</sup>. This capacity includes the automatic responses within our bodies that keep us healthy as we obey the laws of life.

##### EQ or Emotional Intelligence

The capacity to be self-aware, to regulate our behaviors to respond in the most effective way to a situation, and to demonstrate empathy and compassion are all a part of EQ, or emotional intelligence. EQ also includes the ability to communicate effectively, to acknowledge one's own personal weaknesses, and to respect the differences in others<sup>xxv</sup>.

##### SQ or Spiritual Intelligence

Spiritual intelligence includes our relationship with God and our desire to honor our relationship with the divine. This intelligence acts as the conscience and provides guidance and direction for each of the other three intelligences. Spiritual intelligence also includes the pursuit of meaning in one's life<sup>xxvi</sup>.

These four personal dimensions serve to enable an individual to achieve his or her highest potential and it is by finding one's voice that we affirm our identities. In so doing, we maximize meaning in life and our ability to transcend the imperfections that we strive to overcome. Covey's concept of voice is presented in Figure 3, showing how the four intelligences contribute to identifying each person's unique capabilities and personal significance.

Figure 4: Covey's Concept of Voice and the Four Intelligences



Each of these four intelligences contribute to understanding what we are able to do best and to find our voice – our unique personal significance. Our voice is found at the overlapping of the four intelligences. The paragraphs below provide additional insight into the nature of these intelligences and explains how each one of them contributes to our individual motivation.

#### ***Physical Intelligence and Refining Discipline***

Each individual is a marvelous combination of physical systems that automatically fight disease, transmit nutrients and oxygen to millions of cells, and maintain bodily functions at a level that is primarily unconscious. However, the quality of one's life is also affected by a person's desire to maintain his or her body in healthy physical condition, obtain sufficient rest, eat the right foods, and exercise to strengthen muscles and joints. Each person also seeks to develop refined physical skills associated with a career, an avocation, or a hobby. The conscious desire to maintain our bodies in good health and to develop the physical endurance, strength, and coordination to perform important tasks is a stimulus not only to live a long life but to make that life satisfying and enjoyable – and those achievements demand personal discipline.

Unique physical attributes and capabilities are often developed and refined – especially in cases where we recognize that we have a special talent or potential to excel. Physical skills are often required to accomplish job-related tasks, to enjoy activities with others, or to conduct the daily business of living in the modern world<sup>xxvii</sup>. Often these physical tasks are associated with performing tasks that meet others' needs and add value in the world. In addition, virtually everyone has the ability to make wise choices about personal health by getting regular physical check-ups, obtaining appropriate health care, making wise health-related decisions, and taking other steps that make it much easier to live the long and productive life that is typically the goal of healthy people.

#### ***Mental Intelligence and Enhancing Vision***

Mental intelligence enables us to learn new ideas and to gain understanding about concepts, perspectives, and principles that we can then use to make our lives richer and more meaningful. This ability to learn and to increase our knowledge gives us the opportunity to be creative and innovative – developing new and more effective ways to govern our lives and to interact with others. Mental intelligence enhances one's capability to understand the world, to accommodate the conditions which we face, and to develop a plan of action for using our time and resources most effectively.

Our mental intelligence also provides the opportunity to assess the forces of change in our lives and to respond to an ever-evolving world and set of conditions. This capacity to assess our circumstances and the context of our lives makes it possible to make choices that enhance our self-interest, improve our ability to work as part of a larger group, and communicate effectively. Mental intelligence enables each of us to decide our goals, how we will achieve them, and what we wish to ultimately accomplish.

#### ***Emotional Intelligence and Personal Passion***

The ability to assess the needs of others and to respond appropriately is the foundation of both wisdom and love<sup>xxviii</sup>. When we care about others and demonstrate the ability to control our own emotional responses, we can then act in a way which most assists others to be successful. Emotional intelligence requires the personal awareness of others but also a clear

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understanding of oneself and one’s identity – including individual tendencies and proclivities that may cause us to act against our own or others’ interests.

When we truly love and care about others, we have a passion to refine ourselves, serve others, and make a better world for all. We demonstrate that deep commitment by managing our emotions and crafting a response that best fits a situation. As we are self-aware, we also can become more effective in our efforts to act in everyone’s best interests<sup>xxx</sup>. The depth of our desire to help others to become their best and to succeed in their lives is a unique quality that reflects emotional maturity and an understanding of who we truly are. With that understanding and the willingness to improve our self-mastery, we can then develop the ability to use our emotional intelligence most effectively.

### Spiritual Intelligence and Inspired Conscience

The power of Spiritual Intelligence lies in its ability to call upon one’s sense of what is morally right to guide a person’s actions<sup>xxx</sup>. The idea of spiritual inspiration, conscience, or moral sense is the underlying driver for this intelligence. Led by this sense of ethical duty and responsibility, an individual uses this moral compass to govern the other three intelligences and to guide his or her behaviors. The motivation involved in following this compass is to fulfill one’s identity – consistent with the idea of the identity standard<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Led by Spiritual Intelligence, an individual chooses to honor his relationships with God, with other key individuals, and with society. One’s life becomes purpose-driven when this intelligence plays a major role in decision-making and as a standard for personal conduct.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Spiritual Intelligence is not confined to religious individuals, however. A person of conscience can also be deeply committed to a set of universal truths, values, and principles that direct her/his decisions and serve as an internal conscience regarding duties and obligations.

One’s voice integrates the four intelligences, as indicated in Figure 4, with the identification of one’s unique significance becoming a useful tool for self-assessment and motivation. The four intelligences that are part of Covey’s model of voice are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Four Intelligences, Their Needs, and Attributes**

Whole Person	Four Intelligences	Four Needs	Four Attributes
<b>BODY</b>	Physical Intelligence PQ	<b>To Live</b>	<b>Discipline</b>
<b>MIND</b>	Mental Intelligence IQ	<b>To Learn</b>	<b>Vision</b>
<b>HEART</b>	Emotional Intelligence EQ	<b>To Love</b>	<b>Passion</b>
<b>SPIRIT</b>	Spiritual Intelligence SQ	<b>To Leave a Legacy</b>	<b>Conscience</b>

Understanding how to integrate these four intelligences into one’s life enables a person to understand more fully his or her strengths, potentials, and focus in life. Motivated by a commitment to become one’s best self, a person can not only enhance his or her skills but literally redefine her/his identity.

### The Identity and Motivating Forces

The ability to incorporate our identity in setting goals, refining one’s abilities, serving others, and achieving previously unrealized growth can be a personally exhilarating opportunity. The capacity to accomplish amazing things is well within our reach – and the history of the world confirms that much more than we have ever dreamed is possible. With those truths in mind, there are seven powerful insights about the importance of the identity as a motivating force in each individual’s life.

**1. Increasing conscious self-awareness creates more powerful commitments.**

Because much of our decision-making involves subconscious or unconscious patterns of behavior, we often make routine decisions that we rarely have thought through when a situation that appears familiar occurs<sup>xxxiii</sup>. The motivation of such decisions is often to simply move on to the next decision to be made in our busy lives. Only in retrospect do we tend to reflect on the ramifications of those patterned decisions.

**2. Identifying our past history and values enhances a sense of identity.**

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Significant emotional events in the past have often influenced our lives and our values and may have created deep wounds in how we respond to life and its challenges<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Tools like the Six Beliefs Model can be utilized to identify core beliefs about the past, our key relationships, and what we hope to achieve in the future<sup>xxxv</sup>.

### 3. **Conducting a regular personal inventory provides increased personal insight.**

Although it is helpful to examine one's progress, setting specific goals and conducting a periodic inventory of our progress in achieving desired outcomes is exponentially more effective<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Incorporating in this review the identification of how and why we get off course further increases the value of this approach<sup>xxxvii</sup>.

### 4. **Sharing our self-assessment with significant others increases our focus.**

The process of sharing information about how we view ourselves with those who know us well and who can give objective and supportive feedback can be a powerful tool in obtaining greater self-understanding<sup>xxxviii</sup>. Making and honoring commitments to significant others in our lives increases the power of this process<sup>xxxix</sup>.

### 5. **Journaling our personal progress improves our understanding about progress.**

Writing in a journal is an opportunity to not only document what has occurred or failed to occur in our lives but provides a chance to also reflect on how we feel at a specific time and to then recommit ourselves to making changes necessary to redirect our lives<sup>xl</sup>. Documenting good and bad experiences and how we felt at the time provides context for change.

### 6. **Meditating and mindfulness develop greater personal awareness.**

The ability to reflect, to meditate, and to focus one's mind enables an individual to concentrate on those parts of life which need special attention or the application of one's full efforts. Mindfulness with meditation enables a person to be fully present and to experience the significance of events in one's life – and to then redirect one's efforts to respond more effectively to those events<sup>xli</sup>.

### 7. **Formalizing a personal mission and vision statement provides clear direction.**

Establishing a personal mission and vision statement focuses an individual on achieving his or her goals and ultimate purpose in life<sup>xlii</sup>. Defining a personal mission and vision provides clarity about one's identity and highest potential<sup>xliii</sup>.

By incorporating these insights in the continuous process of focusing one's life, a person is able to capture a vision of the best version of themselves and can actually open the door to discovering hidden talents that had not previously been identified<sup>xliiv</sup>. "Finding one's voice" includes that personal discovery process.<sup>xliv</sup>

## Five Benefits from the Self-Discovery Process

Finding one's voice and becoming more aware of one's personal identity enables an individual to expand personal potential, focus thinking, and utilize time and resources<sup>xlvi</sup>. In addition, this self-discovery process creates five significant additional benefits.

### 1) **Discovering one's best version of oneself increases personal health and well-being.**

As we understand our identities, we empower ourselves to look at the world in a more positive manner and literally energize our capacity to live a fuller and more complete daily life<sup>xlvii</sup>.

### 2) **Self-discovery increases our sense of inner peace and decreases negative thinking.**

As we self-actualize, we are able to transcend past mistakes, overcome critical feelings about ourselves, and look forward in life.<sup>xlviii</sup> The steps of continuous improvement literally bring us into the light out of darkness and enable individuals to redefine who they are and what they value<sup>xlix</sup>.

### 3) **Acquiring a greater self-appreciation enhances feelings of both humility and love.**

Valuing oneself is one of the three pillars of the virtues of humility and love – and these two qualities are essential factors of leaders<sup>l</sup>. The ability to value oneself is a condition precedent to loving others and to serving them more effectively<sup>li</sup>.

### 4) **Finding one's voice empowers an individual to help others to also discover themselves.**

The moral obligation to help others and to assist them to become the best version of themselves is a clear responsibility for people who have discovered their own voice – as it properly should be.<sup>lii</sup> In recognizing who we are, we understand the precious value of self-discovery<sup>liii</sup>.

### 5) **Greater self-awareness increases the capacity of organizations and promotes success.**

Organizations are ultimately most successful when their employees have discovered their highest potential<sup>liiv</sup>. This principle is widely recognized in a broad range of leadership theories<sup>liv</sup>.

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These five benefits enable individuals to enjoy life more fully, fulfill their highest callings in life, and make a positive difference in society. As noted by Dr. Stephen R. Covey, this discovery process allows individuals and organizations to evolve from effectiveness to greatness<sup>lvi</sup>.

## Conclusion

Life has greater meaning when we know who we are and when we constantly strive to improve ourselves and others<sup>lvii</sup>. Oliver Sacks, the well-known British scholar and neurologist, offered the following powerful insight. To live on a day-to-day basis is insufficient for human beings; we need to transcend, transport, escape; we need meaning, understanding, and explanation; we need to see over-all patterns in our lives. We need hope, the sense of a future. And we need freedom (or, at least, the illusion of freedom) to get beyond ourselves, whether with telescopes and microscopes and our ever-burgeoning technology, or in states of mind that allow us to travel to other worlds, to rise above our immediate surroundings<sup>lviii</sup>.

As Sacks has affirmed, the exciting truth in life is that we are far greater than we have ever imagined. Our capacity to excel, to serve others, and to change the world is far greater than we have ever imagined. There is greatness in each one of us.

At the same time, our obligation is to discover who we truly are by finding our own voice and then empower others to discover their greatness as well. Understanding our own identities is the beginning . . . but it is just a beginning. Using that knowledge to then define our own unique significance brings the ability to rise above the commonplace and to reach for a potential rarely discovered by most men and women. That quest, that understanding of our identity and its impact on motivation, can open the door to previously unanticipated satisfaction – and is a moral responsibility that we each share.

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- 58) <sup>lviii</sup> This powerful insight is found at "Transcendence Quotes." *Goodreads*. Found online on March 19, 2020 at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/transcendence>.