

The Three Levels of Leadership

Disidentification & Centring Exercise

This exercise is reprinted from chapter 9 of *The Three Levels of Leadership: How to Develop Your Leadership Presence, Knowhow and Skill* by James Scouller

1. The exercise takes five minutes (or less if you want) and it's good to do it at the beginning, middle and end of every day. I recommend you practise it sitting down with your back straight in a comfortable, firm chair with your eyes closed,
2. First, become aware of your breathing. Notice your in-breath, then your out-breath, your in-breath, then your out-breath and keep following your breathing for perhaps 30 seconds. Don't force your breathing, just let it flow and enjoy it.
3. Then examine how you are in your body. Become aware of the pressure of the chair on your legs, buttocks and back. Then carry out a mental scan of your body and ask yourself, where do I feel good? And where do I feel stiff or tired? Consider how your body has carried you through life and indeed through this day so far. And then affirm to yourself, *"I have a body, this body. It carries me through life. And yet I am more than this body. I am not my body. My body may be energised or tired, but I am not my body. It is a tool that I treat well, but it is not me. I have a body, but I am not my body. I am more than my body."*
4. Then turn your attention to your feelings. What are you feeling, right here, right now? Name the emotion precisely – find the descriptive word that sums it up. Don't say "nothing" because you will be feeling something. If, for example, you are tempted to say "nothing", ask yourself, is that numb, serene, empty, drained, relaxed and alert? Be specific. Don't accept vague descriptions like "nothing" or "fine". Note your feelings with interest and accept them. Don't judge them, push them away or censor them. Realise that whether you like your present feelings or not, they enhance your sense of contact with the world and act as the bridge between thoughts and action. And then affirm to yourself, *"I have feelings, these feelings, but I am more than these feelings. I may experience the feeling of being excited or sad or tense or anxious or [current feeling] and yet although I have feelings – my feelings, feelings that I am responsible for – I am not my feelings. My feelings change, but my essence does not change. I am more than my feelings."*
5. Now turn your attention to your mind and the thoughts within. Watch them as they change. Note them without judging them. If it helps, see them as though on a cinema screen or as clouds moving across the sky. If or when you find yourself getting lost in them (i.e. identifying with them), stand back and watch them again. Then after a minute or two, affirm to yourself, *"I have a mind and I have thoughts within my mind. Yet I am more than my thoughts and mind. Behind my beliefs and changing thoughts I am the one who is aware, who chooses, who thinks."*

Sometimes I command my mind and it refuses to do what I want – therefore it cannot be the Self. It is a tool of knowledge and understanding, but I am not my thoughts and beliefs. Nor am I my mind. I am more than my mind.”

6. And finally, moving on from disidentifying with your mind, imagine yourself moving into a quieter, still place deep inside. Identify with Self by affirming to yourself, *“I am a Self; a centre of pure will, self-awareness and imagination. I express myself in the world through my mind, my feelings and my body. And yet behind them and above them I remain the Self – a centre of pure will, self-awareness and imagination – able to choose who I am and how to be in the world. I choose to remain aware of this fact throughout today. I am a Self, a centre of pure will, self-awareness and imagination.”* Now pause for a few moments and try to hold and experience this state of knowing you are a Self.
7. To close, redirect your attention to your breathing and watch and experience the in-breath and the out-breath again for a few seconds. Then become aware again of the pressure of your buttocks on the seat of the chair and the feeling of the back of the chair. Become aware too of the soles of your feet on the ground and any sounds you can hear inside or outside the room. This has the effect of grounding you, reconnecting you to your normal world. And when you are ready, open your eyes. You have completed the exercise.

Questions & Answers

How often should you do this exercise? And for how long?

There’s no straightforward answer, but repeating this exercise often and regularly is the key. I suggest you try it two or three times daily for at least six months, but you can practise it for years if you choose.

Private

Public