



# Yale SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

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Dear Members of the Advanced Emerging Leaders Program class,

As part of the program, you will complete the Reflected Best-Self Exercise (RBS). The RBS is a multi-step process wherein you begin to understand and see yourself at your best, based on your reflections on feedback from a diverse set of people. This process involves gathering data in the form of short anecdotes about times when you were at your best from former classmates and colleagues, friends and family members. The RBS encourages you to create a developmental agenda for engaging your reflected best-self and expanding your capacity to add value in medical, academic, professional, service and social environments. In the AELP program, we will focus on how to use the exercise to guide your thinking about the best professional contexts for you in the long-term in your future career. For several years now, alumni of the school have noted that this exercise was one of the most powerful experiences they had at SOM.

Please review carefully the following pages that detail how you will gather and analyze your Reflected Best-Self feedback. I look forward to discussing your key insights from this feedback and self-reflection experience during our September session. ***Before the class begins on September 11, 2015, you need to complete Steps 1 through 6 of the Reflected Best-Self feedback exercise. Please read the instructions to ensure that you are on track for gathering your feedback and preparing to analyze it.*** In the meantime, if you have any questions about the goals or implementation of this exercise, do not hesitate to contact me via email or telephone. My contact information is listed above.

Best regards,

Amy Wrzesniewski

## **Orientation to the Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise**

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The Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise will give you an opportunity to (1) identify your personal strengths and capability to add value to organizations, (2) create personal and career development plans, based upon the insight that your reflected best-self feedback provides and, (3) enhance understanding about what kinds of work situations bring out the best in you.

In this exercise, you will generate a portrait, or description, of your reflected best-self, based upon your own reflections about situations in which you fulfilled your potential to add value and make a positive difference. You will also obtain data from other people to create an extensive reflected best-self portrait. You will acquire short descriptions of who you are and what you do when you are at your very best from a diverse array of significant people in your life, who have unique and valuable insights about your strengths and talents. This structured feedback exercise will provide you with a rare opportunity to learn important things about your reflected best-self that you may have never realized before.

The Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise is not a standard performance feedback evaluation. It differs from other performance feedback mechanisms in its explicit focus on understanding how people experience others when they leverage their strengths constructively. Traditional models of performance evaluation (such as 360-degree feedback and one-on-one performance appraisals) typically focus on identifying performance deficits and competency gaps, with action recommendations for eliminating or compensating for weaknesses and limitations. The RBS is deliberately positive in focus, and encourages people to create a developmental agenda for leveraging their reflected best-self and expanding their capacity to add value in organizations. This exercise also enables you to reflect on how you as an individual might create an environment where you and others around you can engage their best-self and perform maximally from positions of strength.

You will complete the RBS in six steps.

### **Step 1: Identify Best-Self Feedback Providers (by July 27, 2015)**

The first step is to identify the individuals from whom you wish to solicit reflected best-self feedback. You may solicit feedback from whomever you choose. Those you ask for feedback may be current or former classmates, work or community service colleagues, personal friends, mentors and/or family members, at your discretion. **I recommend getting feedback from at least one person in each domain of your life**, so that you may receive well-rounded feedback. I do not stipulate how many people you should ask from each category. You may wish to consider whether you believe these people know you well enough to provide such feedback, but keep in mind that many people have observed you at your best when you didn't even realize that they were paying attention. This exercise works best when you have several examples of your best-self, so you can see what patterns emerge. We find that receiving feedback from 10 people is certainly ample, so be sure to ask enough people so that you will receive *at least* 10 responses. It is best to invite your respondents as early as possible. **Please note that I do not read or receive the feedback that is sent to you.** Rather, you receive the feedback and analyze the patterns, building your analysis from the relationship between your own best-self portrait and the one that is suggested by the set of feedback you received. This means that you can solicit feedback in several languages if that facilitates completing the exercise. Communicating this to your feedback providers will result in much more candid and frank feedback. If feedback providers think they are writing for a third party, they write what sounds more like a recommendation letter, and this is not at all helpful to you (or me). It's also not as much fun for them.

My advice is to cast a wide net – think creatively – old friends from school, camp, or sports, childhood friends, colleagues from former jobs, a random uncle or aunt – participants have even had their parents, siblings, partners, or in-laws write – *the broader you go, the richer the feedback.*

### **Step 2: Solicit Feedback from Others (by July 31, 2015)**

Send your selected contacts a personal request for reflected best-self feedback. You may include a personal note as well as the official request letter from me. In case they're helpful, sample letters are included in Exhibits 1 and 2. We recommend allowing at least 21 days for people to respond to your request. Please personally handle any hard copy correspondence by mail or fax. Again, their feedback goes to you, not me.

### **Step 3: Create a Best-Self Portrait (by August 14, 2015)**

While you are awaiting your feedback, I ask you to engage in deep personal reflection about times when you were at your best. Specifically, I ask you to complete the **“Reflecting upon Your Best Self”** (p. 10 of this document). This page will guide you through the process of creating your own Reflected Best-Self Portrait based on your conception of how you add value and make positive contributions. You will write three stories that stand out as times when you were at your best. Next, you will identify patterns that arise across those incidents. You then use these observations of the patterns to compose a one- or two-paragraph best-self portrait. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU COMPLETE THIS STEP OF THE EXERCISE BEFORE YOU READ AND ANALYZE YOUR FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS.** Please refer to Exhibit

3 for an example of a Reflected Best-Self Portrait and for directions on how to format this part. While you won't hand in your best-self portrait, it is essential to the assessment. Without it, there is no point of contrast with which to compare the rich set of feedback you will receive.

#### **Step 4: Feedback Check and Reminders (by August 21, 2015)**

Take the time now to complete a status check on the responses you have and have not received. At your discretion, call or email your contacts that have not yet provided feedback to remind them that the due date for their responses is nearing. Depending upon the circumstances surrounding particular response providers, you may decide not to send a reminder to certain people. If your responses are thin, invite others to participate so that you end up with enough feedback. **Please refrain from reading the feedback that you have already received until you reach Step 5!** This is the best way to preserve the impact of your feedback, by allowing you to take a "deep dive" into how others experience you at your best. Use your willpower – instead of reading responses as you receive them, hold off and immerse yourself in the feedback all at once.

#### **Step 5: Review your Best-Self Feedback & Look for Themes (by September 4, 2015)**

The next step involves analyzing your best-self stories to compose the Reflected Best-Self portrait. The feedback will include short descriptions of when the feedback provider saw you make positive contributions. Here, you will look for commonalities in your data across your feedback providers. Analyzing these critical incidents to identify commonalities will enhance your appreciation of the interaction between your personal characteristics (e.g., strengths and talents) and the situational features that enable you to achieve high performance. **Please refer to Exhibit 5 for step-by-step instructions on analyzing your best-self feedback.**

#### **Step 6: Revised Best-Self Portrait (by September 11, 2015)**

The sixth step involves revising the portrait of who you are at your best, incorporating others' feedback with your own reflections. Your revised portrait should pull together the themes you identified in your feedback into a written description of the essence of your best-self. **Please refer to your handout on Classes v2, "Analyzing your Reflected Best-Self Feedback" for step-by-step instructions on revising your best-self portrait.** Barring a schedule change, we will debrief the Reflected Best-Self Exercise in class on September 11, 2015. During the class, you will have the opportunity to share your observations in large and small group discussions.

#### **Next Steps: Action-Planning (post September 11, 2015)**

Last, you will be able to link your Reflected Best-Self learning to future actions, with a specific focus on how you might change personal contexts to leverage or play to your best self. We will talk more about this step when we debrief the Reflected Best-Self exercise. One essential component of this step is the professional coaching session you will have in the fall, following this session.

## **Exhibit 1** SAMPLE E-MAILS REQUESTING REFLECTED BEST-SELF FEEDBACK

- ***You can get back in contact with old friends:***

Dear Sheila,

It's been a few years since we worked together on the United Way campaign. Can you believe how fast the time has passed? How are you and what have you been up to? I am currently in a leadership development program at Yale. As part of the program, one of our assignments is to complete the "Reflected Best Self" Exercise. The exercise is part of a personal development theory that focuses on a person's strengths, and helps identify when and where these strengths come to light. Because this exercise requires input from people who know me and who might be able to recall a few moments where they saw me at my best, I thought I'd ask you if you might be able to help me with this assignment.

Will you take a look at the "official" letter from Professor Amy Wrzesniewski that gives more details on how this exercise works? You would have until August 21, 2015 to send me your feedback. Please let me know as soon as you can if you think you will be able to help. Either way, I hope we can get back in touch soon!

All the best,

Karen

- ***You can refresh connections with your mentors:***

Hello Dr. Jones,

I hope this message finds you well. Exciting things are happening with me. I am about to begin an advanced leadership program at the Yale School of Management. This development wouldn't have been possible without all of your support and encouragement, not to mention the opportunities you gave me to grow and take on greater responsibilities. This fall, as part of the leadership program, one of our assignments is to complete the "Reflected Best Self" Exercise. The exercise is part of a personal development theory that focuses on a person's strengths, and helps identify when and where these strengths come to light. Do you think you might be able to spend a half hour to write down three incidences where you saw me doing well—possibly what you might thought to have been my best? The idea of the exercise is to help us understand our talents and learn how to more deliberately use them to make a contribution. It's not just about getting people to tell us how great they think we are!

Thank you, Dr. Jones. You would have until August 21, 2015 to send me your reply. Please let me know if you can provide me with your feedback in this time frame. I know your schedule is quite busy, so I will certainly understand if you aren't able to help. I have attached an official email from Professor Amy Wrzesniewski to give you more details in case that's helpful.

Best,

Jorge

## Exhibit 2 OFFICIAL REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

You should send this letter to each person you would like to provide you with Reflected Best Self feedback.

<Date>

Dear <Respondent's Name>,

<Student's Full Name> is participating in Yale University's Advanced Emerging Leaders Program at the Yale School of Management. As part of this program, <Student's Name> is required to complete the Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise. This exercise is designed to help <Student's Name> learn more about <his/her> best-self, so that <he/she> will be able to leverage <his/her> strengths and make positive contributions within and beyond <his/her> career. The exercise is quite different from other performance review mechanisms because it focuses on an individual's strengths and contributions, not weaknesses. This has proven to be a powerful tool for helping managers to know how to best use their strengths constructively. In order to complete this exercise, <Student's Name> must solicit feedback from several people who know <him/her>.

I would like to invite you to help <Student's Name> with this exercise. This should not take more than 30 minutes of your time. We are requesting that you provide three stories of when <Student's Name> was at <his/her> very best in your eyes. This will require you to think about your interactions with <Student's Name> and to identify those incidents when <Student's Name> added value and made important contributions. In writing, please be sure to provide examples so <Student's Name> can understand the situation, behaviors and characteristics you are describing. I have attached an example of what these stories could look like. Please use this only as a guide. You may provide examples from work or non-work related incidents. *Please note that your feedback will only be read by <Student's Name> and not by me.* Please be as candid, personal, and honest as you can; this is not a letter of recommendation nor is it an official document.

Feedback Example:

1. One of the greatest ways that you add value is: Through your ability to get people to work together and give all they have to a task.

For example, I think of the time that: We were doing the Alpha project. We were getting behind and the stress was building. We started to close down and get very focused on just meeting our deadline. You noticed that we were not doing our best work and stopped the group to rethink our approach. You asked whether we wanted to just satisfy the requirements or whether we wanted to really do good and important work. You reminded us of what we were capable of doing and how each of us could contribute to a better outcome. No one else in that room would have thought to do that. As a result, we did meet the deadline and created a result we all feel proud of.

2. One of the greatest ways that you add value is: Helping others to think clearly and make good decisions.

For example, I think of the time that: We were talking about my plans for the future. You listened as I described a few possible scenarios and then helped me weigh each option relative to the others. I hadn't thought about many of the pros and cons that came up in our conversation. Because you took our conversation seriously and encouraged me to consider many alternatives, you helped me move closer to a decision that I could be confident about.

3. One of the greatest ways that you add value is: Through your capacity to persist in the face of adversity.

For example, I think of the time that: You were applying to colleges. In your heart, you knew you wanted to attend Harvard, but you were worried that you wouldn't be admitted. You worked very hard on your application, asking many people to read your essays and provide you with feedback. You worked extra hours at your job after school to pay for a visit to Cambridge, so you could meet with the Admissions officers. All the while, you stayed actively involved in your little sister's life, making sure she knew you cared and paid attention to her. You also stayed on the honor roll for the entire year! When you found out you were accepted to Harvard, you worked even harder to make sure you would have enough financial aid and work study to cover your tuition and living expenses. I have always admired your determination.

This feedback is most effective when communicated in writing, rather than orally. As such, we ask that you please write your feedback letter and send it to <Student's Name> directly at <his/her> email address <Insert your email address here> or mail your feedback letter to <Insert your mailing address here>.

**In order to complete this exercise as assigned, it is critical that <Student's Name> receives your feedback no later than Friday, August 21, 2015.** Please let <Student's Name> know as soon as possible if you will not be able to assist with this exercise. Thank you so much for your help.

If you have any questions about this exercise, please contact me at [amy.wrzesniewski@yale.edu](mailto:amy.wrzesniewski@yale.edu) or (203) 432-5979.

Sincerely,

Amy Wrzesniewski  
Professor  
Yale School of Management

## Best-Self Reflections

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**Your Name:**

**First Name, Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Feedback Provided For:**

**First Name, Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_



1. One of the ways that **(Participant)** adds value and makes important contributions is:

Type below a story that illustrates this contribution.

*For example, I think of the time when:*

2. One of the ways that **(Participant)** adds value and makes important contributions is:

Type below a story that illustrates this contribution.

*For example, I think of the time when:*

3. One of the ways that **(Participant)** adds value and makes important contributions is:

Type below a story that illustrates this contribution.

*For example, I think of the time when:*

**Additional Comments:**

### Exhibit 3 CREATE YOUR OWN REFLECTED BEST-SELF PORTRAIT

#### Reflecting Upon Your Best-Self

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*All of us can recall our own extraordinary moments, those moments when we felt our best-self was brought to light, affirmed by others, and put into practice in the world. These memories are seared into our minds as moments or situations in which we have felt alive, true to our deepest selves, and pursuing our full potential as human beings.*

Think about three times in your life when you were at your very best. For each best-self episode, write the story of what happened, including how the episode got started, what kept it going, and how it came to an end.

**Best Self Episode #1:**

**Best Self Episode #2:**

**Best Self Episode #3:**

**Characteristics of your Best-Self**

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**Review the three episodes you just described and search for patterns of behavior and experience that emerged in the episodes.**

What strengths did you display during these episodes?

What emotions did you experience during these episodes?

Were other people involved in any of your episodes? If so, how do you think they experienced you during these episodes?

## Composing your Best-Self Portrait

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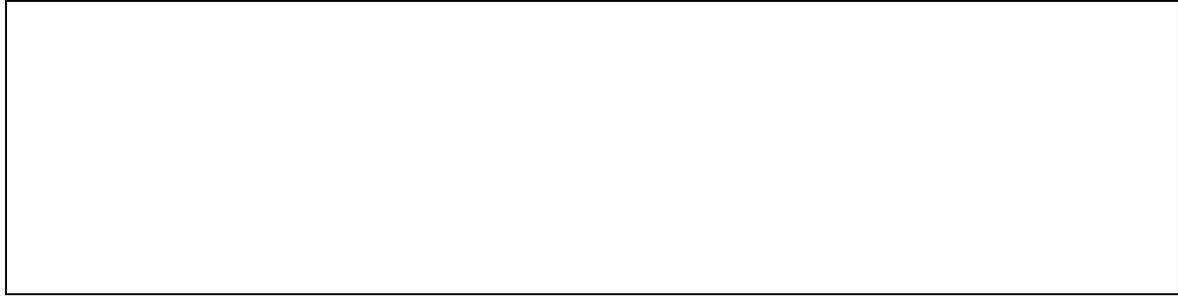
Combine your observations about the three episodes into a written portrait that captures what you are like when you are at your personal best. If in one story you notice you did something that seemed important, ask yourself if you also did that in the others and just forgot to include it. Be sure to incorporate the characteristics you listed above.

Here is an example of what a best-self portrait might look like:

*At my best, I am a visionary. I create a vision, and then I develop the roadmap for achieving it. Being a visionary is not an isolated, lonely process. For me, it is an inherently social process of co-creation. In planning and executing, I incorporate others' strengths and talents, so that they will be constantly reminded that their presence and their contributions are valued. My vision creatively weaves together systems, people, and experiences, such that the tiniest details will fit together in a coherent whole.*

*I commit myself fully to the vision. I do not linger in my comfort zone. I give 100% of my time, mind, and heart to my vision, so that it will be fulfilled in the spirit of excellence. Even in the face of disappointment, I persist, searching for even better ways to achieve the desired outcome. I don't make a big deal about confronting adversity; I just do it.*

Write or type your best-self portrait here.



**Exhibit 4 ANALYZE YOUR FEEDBACK & REVISE YOUR REFLECTED BEST-SELF PORTRAIT**

**Analyzing your Reflected Best-Self Feedback**

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**Step 1: Make sure you have completed your initial Best-Self Portrait.**

**Step 2: Find a quiet, private place. Reading best-self stories can be an emotional experience.**

**Step 3: Before looking at your feedback, predict what you think other people will say about you.**

**Step 4: Read and reflect upon each piece of feedback you have received.**

**Step 5: Search for patterns across your feedback.**

**Step 6: Incorporate new insights or modifications into a *Revised Reflected Best-Self Portrait*.**

## **Predictions about your Best-Self Feedback**

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**Take a few moments before you read your feedback to quickly note a few of your predictions. What do you think others will say about your best-self? How do you add value and make important, positive contributions in their eyes? What types of stories might they tell about your best self?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their predictions about their best-self feedback.

## Patterns across your Best-Self Feedback

Read all of your feedback and take notes on the key insights. Look for commonalities across the responses. Create themes where you find a commonality and link any relevant examples to it. The themes can include: strengths you displayed during these episodes, emotions you experienced during these episodes, and how others experienced you at your best.

You may find it useful to extend and fill in the table below.

Commonality/Theme	Examples Given	My Interpretation
<i>Creative</i>	<i>1. Innovative builder of new projects for education. 2. Find new solutions for old problems in department relationships with my boss. 3. Guided company in transforming itself.</i>	<i>My ideas tend to be bold and creative. I am an innovative builder of the new. I tend to bring a new vision to the old.</i>
Commonality/Theme	Examples Given	My Interpretation

## Revising your Reflected Best-Self Portrait

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Capture the wisdom in your data in a new best-self portrait. This portrait should incorporate your interpretation of the data you received from others about your reflected best-self, as well as the insight gained from your personal reflections of times when you were at your best. You may start with your initial best-self portrait and make additions, deletions, or modifications to it. You may also create a brand new portrait if you would like.

Write/type your best-self portrait here.

## **Exhibit 5**

### **Reflections on the Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise**

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- How does your best-self profile correspond with the sorts of things you spend the bulk of your time doing in your career?
- What work situations or organizational contexts encourage your best-self to emerge? What keeps you from operating at your best more of the time?
- How can you prioritize your life so that you maximize the potential for your best-self every day in your work? What can you do differently? Are there certain organizational contexts you can put yourself in to maximize your potential?
- How has the feedback changed or reinforced the way you think about your career?