



THE COMPROMISE TRAP

Individual & Small-group Activities

This document outlines six activities designed to help individuals and groups, as well as the coaches and trainers who work with them, to expand their personal foundations in fun and engaging ways. It is based on the principles outlined in **The Compromise Trap**.

Your personal foundations provide the internal reinforcement system that enables you to act creatively and independently in challenging situations. They help you keep a broad perspective and take courageous action, uncovering ways to “redefine the game” in situations where there seem to be few options. When you are under pressure, your personal foundations help you to stay true to yourself and avoid unhealthy compromise. When you are pursuing a larger goal, they enable you to be a positive force, influencing your organization and others for the better. The stronger your foundations, the more you are able to influence effectively and thrive regardless of the circumstances.

There are six personal foundations that create this internal reinforcement system:

1. **Reconnect to your strengths:** The ability to access confidence, creativity and self-awareness to guide your choices.
2. **See the larger field:** Sustaining a broad perspective so you recognize choicepoints, act on your true priorities, and see all your options.
3. **Define a worthy enough win:** Having a sense of mission and a reason for courage to help you focus your efforts and weigh hard choices.
4. **Find your real team:** Having strong relationships with your family, close allies, and other professionals to give you well-being, perspective, and reinforcement.
5. **Make positive plays:** Having a broad range of constructive actions you can use under pressure – including the ability to say no.
6. **Keep your own score:** Developing internal guideposts to evaluate your progress and determine what is “enough”.

Each of the six activities in this document is designed to help you build one of the six foundations. They are meant to be used by both individuals and small groups.

WorkLore



Before you get started, you may want to take two diagnostic questionnaires to help you identify which foundations will make the most difference for you:

Organizational Pressure Diagnostic allows you to take stock of the type, source, and strength of healthy and unhealthy pressure in your organization.

Personal Foundations Self-diagnostic helps you identify the constraints that may be limiting your ability to redefine the game and the personal foundations that are likely to be of most use.

One way to use these activities is to schedule yourself to complete one every two weeks for twelve weeks, gradually cycling through all six foundations. Another way is simply to do the activities for the foundations identified in the diagnostic questionnaires mentioned above.

The six activities are:

[Activity #1: Finding the Strengths in Your Story](#)

[Activity #2: Redefining-the-game Opportunity Map](#)

[Activity #3: Discovering Your Professional Quest](#)

[Activity #4: Strengthening Your Connections with Allies](#)

[Activity #5: Redefining-the-game Action Planning](#)

[Activity #6: Personal Goal Review](#)

ACTIVITY # 1

Finding the Strengths in Your Story

Personal Foundation: Reconnect to your strengths

Purpose: To help you discover the strengths and the values embedded in your life story and clarify the routines and the habits that help you stay in touch with them

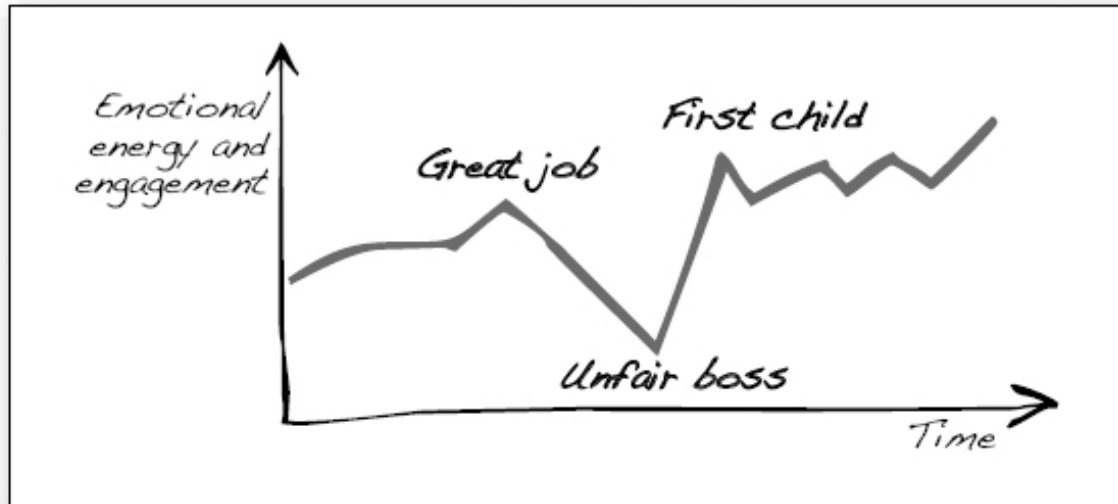
Timing: 1 to 3 hours (2 hours minimum for a group)

Number: Can be done individually, with a partner or coach, or in a group of seven to twelve participants

This activity invites you to use your own life story as a resource for discovering your strengths and values and for clarifying the nonnegotiable routines that support you.

Step 1 Draw your "emotional journeyline" Working individually, lay out a piece of paper with "Emotional Energy and Engagement" along one side and "Time" across the bottom. (See figure A-1.) Then, reflecting back on your life from childhood to now, draw a line to represent the ups and downs of emotional energy and engagement over time—when you felt good about yourself and when you were having a hard time. Label the most pivotal events, including those where you felt most engaged, capable, and courageous. Take a moment to reflect on the key moments of your journeyline, reliving them with all five senses if you can. *Allow 15 to 20 minutes for this step.*

Figure A-1 Sample Journeyline



Adapted from Noel M. Tichy of the University of Michigan, who created the concept of "emotional journeylines" as a way for leaders to formulate their leadership storylines out of their past experiences. To learn more about this powerful tool, see Noel M. Tichy, *The Leadership Engine* (New York: Collins Business, 2002), pp. 58–78 and 332–47.

Step 2 Tell your story Now, working with a partner, briefly tell the story of your journeyline, focusing on the pivotal experiences that most shaped you—using your judgment about which details feel comfortable and appropriate to share. Then, with your partner, reflect on these self-discovery questions:

- What are the main themes and lessons weaving through your experience? What is your story “about”?
- What strengths have shown up when you were most engaged and committed? What gifts or talents seem to give you energy?
- What does your story tell you about your values and priorities?
- What’s core to your identity and what’s peripheral?
- When you are most engaged, what principles or values do you find yourself embodying or advocating?
- What does your story tell you about the conditions that best support you? What are the routines and the habits that help you access your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy?

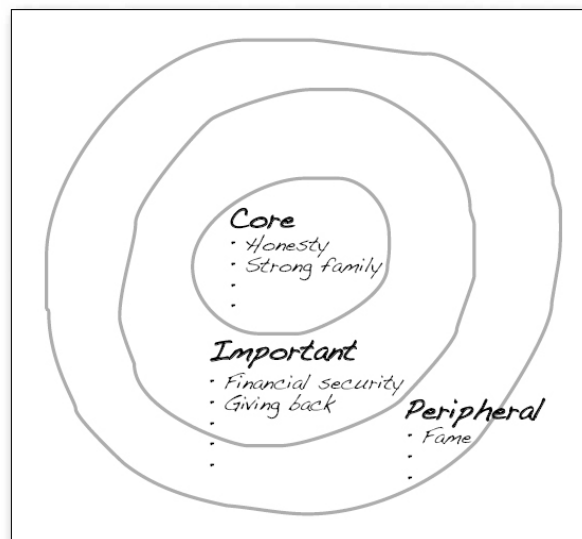
In a small-group setting, you may want to take a few minutes for each pair to share their key insights with the group and see if there are any larger themes at the group level. *Allow about 20 to 40 minutes total for the pair activity and 5 to 7 minutes per pair for group discussion.*

Step 3 Summarize your insights To help you put your insights into practice, take a moment to capture them in three lists:

List #1: Your Core Strengths Write a short list of the core strengths that make you most who you are, based on your story. To go further here, complete the online VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire, which measures twenty-four character strengths, using your story and notes as guides when you answer the questions. (See www.authentic happiness.com.)

List #2: Your Core Values List the values you identified as core to your identity, those that are important but not core, and those that are more peripheral. (You might like to draw a diagram similar to the one in figure A-2.)

Figure A-2 Sample Values Scheme



List #3: Nonnegotiable Habits and Routines Based on your reflections about your story, write down the bare minimum routines and practices for staying sane and healthy and for keeping in touch with your core strengths and values. Try to keep it to a critical few, listing separately any that are helpful but not nonnegotiable. Decide whether you are ready to commit to your list of nonnegotiables or, alternatively, identify what it would take for you to be ready.

You can use your journeyline and these lists anytime you face unhealthy pressure. To help you stick to your core routines and practice your strengths and values, you can also use these lists proactively when you are setting goals or prioritizing your tasks. *Allow 10 to 15 minutes for this step.*

Optional variation Many people find it astonishingly helpful to have a private image or symbol of themselves at their full strength. To give this a try, ask yourself, *Who am I when I am at my most clear, courageous, and capable?* Notice what qualities or associations come to mind. Then think of someone you consider a role model of those qualities or associations—a historical figure, a mythical character, a comic book figure, even a superhero or movie character. Try to find an image or photo of that individual, or look through old magazines for iconic figures or images that capture that spirit.

Once you've found an image, consider giving it a title or finding a quote to capture the qualities or values you find yourself embodying when you are at your best. For example, in one recent workshop people adopted titles such as *the Voice of Reason*, *Advocate for Accountability*, *the Spirit of Courage*, and *Warrior for Innovation*. You can both have some fun with this and use it to experiment with how powerful images and phrases are for evoking the clarity, courage, and energy you feel when you are in touch with your strengths. Of course, the key is knowing that you don't have to show anyone if you don't want to!

ACTIVITY # 2

Redefining-the-game Opportunity Map

Personal Foundation: See the larger field

Purpose: To identify inherent tensions in your business and survey Opportunities to redefine the game that would make a difference to your organization or your role

Timing: 1 to 2 hours

Number: Can be done individually, with a partner or coach, or in a group of seven to twelve participants

This activity helps you uncover the inherent tensions and opportunities to redefine the game in your business, role, or industry. You start by mapping what gets attention and what is important but tends to fade from view.

Step 1 Draw a map of what gets your attention As Saul Steinberg demonstrated in his famous *New Yorker* map, what is near and frequently visited looms large in your attention and what is farther away, in the future, or not as emotionally vivid gets lumped together and fades onto the horizon. With that in mind, start by drawing a rough horizon line on your map, then sketching in blocks, shapes, or figures in the foreground of what gets your attention day to day, where there is the most “heat and light.” What data are most vivid and urgent—your performance metrics, the company stock price? On whom do you focus most—bosses, senior executives, employees? What events tend to get your focus—presentations, deadlines, crises? What places are most real to you? Don’t worry about making the map elegant; just sketch some representation of the important demands on your attention. (See figure A-3 for a sample map.) *Spend 5 to 10 minutes working on your own.*

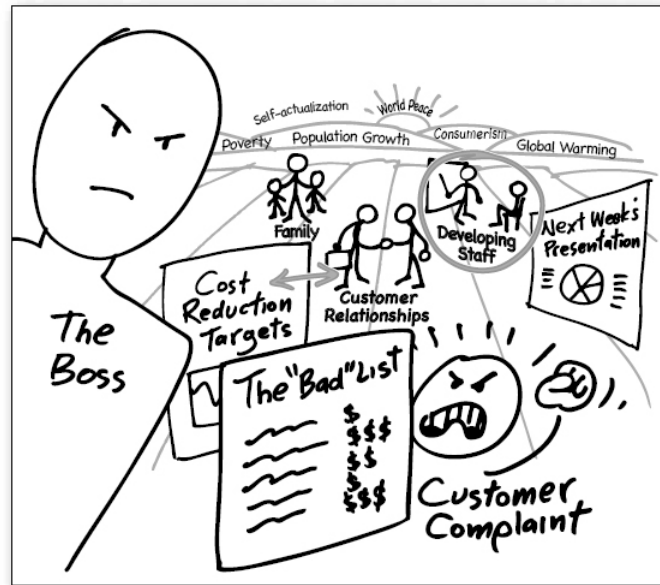
Step 2 Add what tends to fade in the distance We only have so much ability to focus. As your attention is drawn to these pressing issues, what tends to recede into the background? What is easy to neglect or postpone in your industry, business, or role because it is intangible, delayed, or remote? Who or what is important but rarely urgent—significant relationships, processes, assets, core knowledge? Who depends on you or your company to be trustworthy? Add the most important of these factors to your map, perhaps in the middle or background areas. *Work for another 5 to 6 minutes individually.*

Step 3 Highlight the tensions Now share your map with a partner. Looking at the whole landscape together, ask yourselves:

- What are the inherent tensions here, especially between what is immediate, local, and tangible and what is delayed, remote, or intangible?
- Where are there trade-offs or either/or choices?
- Which of the areas that fade from view are important to future success?
- Where could discounting or ignoring an important factor come back to haunt the organization?

Using a different color, draw circles around the factors that might be underweighted in decision-making and arrows between each side of the either/or trade-off s. For example, you might draw arrows between the cost metrics in the foreground and customer quality in the background to show that these areas are often in tension. Allow 10 to 15 minutes total for pair discussions.

Figure A-3 Sample Redefining-the-game Opportunity Map



Step 4 Highlight the redefining-the-game opportunities Finally, working with your partner, take a step back and reflect on the tensions you highlighted and the opportunities they suggest. Think about them from the perspective of who you are as a person, parent, or citizen. What needs more attention in this situation? What needs more weight in decision-making? Where is innovation needed to reduce the pressure to make unhealthy trade-offs? Make a few notes about these redefining-the-game opportunities. Allow 10 to 15 minutes total for pair discussions, and 15 to 20 minutes for small-group debriefing.

You can use your Redefining-the-game Opportunity Map to identify areas where you can bring “more of reality” into decision-making processes or focus your efforts on innovation. See if it gives you any hint of what is important enough to be a professional quest for you. (You’ll get to explore this further in Activity #3: Discovering Your Professional Quest.) Or, you might share it with others and invite them to help you upgrade your understanding.

Optional variation Here’s a variation to make this activity even more useful. Try taking a field trip to check out the situation on the ground. Talk with those whose priorities tend to fade from view, who are important but rarely urgent to your organization. See if you can visit customers or suppliers; go to the neighborhoods or businesses where your products are made or used. Visit those people who seem to think your business is the enemy. Or try a virtual field trip via the Internet and search for magazine articles and/or blogs that show the state of the world on the ground in the places where your organization does business.

ACTIVITY # 3

Discovering Your Professional Quest

Personal Foundation: Define a worthy enough win

Purpose: To help you discover the unique professional quest that unlocks strength and guides you to what is really worth doing while developing and clarifying your professional guidelines

Timing: 1 to 2 hours

Number: Can be done individually, with a partner or coach, or in a group of seven to twelve participants

This activity helps you uncover a sense of a professional quest by looking for the links between your strengths and gifts and the particular situation and opportunities around you. It also helps you bring that into action by identifying professional guidelines you can use to make day-to-day decisions based on that sense of mission or purpose.

Step 1 Revisit your story, strengths, and values Take a moment to revisit what you discovered in Activity #1: Finding the Strengths in Your Story. Or reflect on these questions:

- What does your story explain about who you are?
- What are the personal strengths you most enjoy using, the ones you bring in a unique way to whatever situation you are in?
- What are the most important values that define you and why are they important?
- Who are you when you are at your most clear, courageous, and capable?

If you came up with an image or title in Activity #1, take a look at it now and recall how it connects to your strengths. Jot down a few notes. *Allow 5 to 10 minutes for individual work here.*

Step 2 Reflect on what needs attention in the world Take a moment to revisit your Redefining-the-game Opportunity Map from Activity # 2, or reflect on these questions:

- What are the most challenging inherent tensions in your business or role?
- Who or what tends to fade to the background because they are important but not urgent?
- Where are there opportunities for improving decision-making by raising the visibility of important factors or innovating to reduce the need to make trade-offs?

Now step back and ask yourself, just as a person, citizen, parent, or human being:

- What most needs attention these days?
- What opportunities seem most important, and what concerns are most troubling?

Don't limit yourself to your current setting or industry. Jot down a few notes. *Allow 5 to 10 minutes for individual work here.*

Step 3 Draw the connections Working with a partner, briefly describe your story, strengths, and values and what you see needs attention in the world—using your judgment about which details feel comfortable and appropriate to share. Then, reflecting together, ask yourself these self-discovery questions:

Then, reflecting together ask yourself these self-discovery questions:

- What connections do you see between your gifts and strengths and what needs attention?
- Given your strengths, gifts, and values and what you see most needs attention in the world, where are you uniquely situated to contribute? What would you most like to offer or contribute?
- What opportunities or possibilities seem most necessary and inspiring? What are you most curious or energized to explore?

Invite your partner to work with you to craft a short statement or a few sentences that capture your sense of a professional quest or mission. You might even try framing it as a question. There is no “right” level of ambition or importance here—your passion might be creating a culture of mutual respect at work, making customers’ lives easier, or designing transformative healthcare experiences. (It should be something beyond caring for your children because it will be most powerful if it is something that makes your children proud, something you can use to help model the life you hope they might lead.) To ensure that your professional quest thoroughly galvanizes your energy, you might check that it has these qualities:

- It is worthy of you; it taps your highest potential.
- It is singular and unique, such that only you can fulfill it.
- You really want it; you don't just think you *should* want it.
- It's intrinsically valuable to you, whether or not others approve.
- It is concrete and reflects what is needed in the world.

Allow 10 to 15 minutes per person, 20 to 30 minutes total for this pair activity.

Step 4 Clarify your professional guidelines Considering your professional quest, what professional guidelines would allow you to bring it to life in your day-to-day decisions? Given the inherent tensions in your industry, business, or role, what principles will you use to make practical decisions that incorporate both what is immediate and measurable and what is important but less visible or measurable? What commitments do you need to make to be trustworthy to those who must count on you? (For a reminder, see figure 7-1, Jim Lehrer's Personal Work Guidelines.) Start by making a list of just three or four guidelines so that you can try them out first. Share them briefly with a partner and refine them to ensure that they help you be “angular” to the pressures in your industry rather than automatically opposed or completely compliant. Then, if you are working in a small group, you might want to come back together to debrief. *Allow 10 minutes individually, then 5 minutes per person in pairs and 15 to 20 minutes for the group.*

ACTIVITY # 4

Strengthening Your Connections with Allies

Personal Foundation: Find your real team

Purpose: To take stock of your most critical relationships and develop a plan for deepening and forming new connections

Timing: 1 to 2 hours

Number: Can be done individually, with a partner or coach, or in a group of seven to twelve participants

With this activity you can survey your current relationships, identify where you would like to form stronger alliances, and craft the first steps toward doing so. It includes a list of Dinner-table Conversation Starters to help you deepen the conversation in informal settings with your family, friends, or allies.

Step 1 List your relationships Working on your own, draw lines to create four columns on a sheet of paper and label the columns *Family*, *Allies*, and *Network*. Leave the last column blank. In the first column, list the names of your immediate family members or people you consider family. Under *Allies*, list your closest friends and connections at home and work—the people who make sure you have a birthday party, who you can call on in a pinch. Finally, in the third column, list those who are in your broader network—friends, professional connections, extended family, members of your community, acquaintances, and so on. Notice how you feel as you write each name and whether you are drawn to connect more actively with that person. *Take 5 to 10 minutes for individual work.*

Step 2 Circle those you'd like to cultivate further Now circle the names of those people who are or could be most aligned and supportive of the person you want to be, regardless of whether they are currently close to you. Include people you admire, learn from, get the most satisfaction from spending time with, those who “get” you, and those who stretch you in positive ways. For your family, circle those with whom you suspect there are ways to deepen or further align the relationship. In the last column enter and circle any additional names that come to mind as you think about potential members of your real team. Now sit back and take a look: Where are your circles? Which potential allies most attract your curiosity and interest? Which current relationships would you like to deepen? Take a moment to share any aha’s with a partner. *Allow 5 to 7 minutes for individual work and 5 minutes for partner sharing.*

Step 3 Identify two or three ways you can deepen or extend your relationships with allies

Select two or three relationships from those you circled and think about how you might get to know the individuals better or connect on a deeper level. For those to whom you are already close, are there ways you could acknowledge them or ask for their help (or offer it)? For those who are farther out, how might you reach out to them? This can be quite informal. The Dinner-table Conversation Starters below can help you get started. Briefly share your plans with a partner. *Allow 5 minutes for individual work, 5 minutes for partner sharing, and 2 to 3 minutes per pair to debrief as a group.*

Dinner-table Conversation Starters

In the world of computers, cell phones, text messaging, and television, a good conversation is in danger of becoming a lost art. Yet when someone takes the initiative to ask a really good question, others often respond enthusiastically. Here are a few you might try with your spouse, partner, children, friends, and allies—or use these for inspiration to crafting a few of your own:

- How did you come to be in the field you're in? How does your work relate to your priorities, values, or strengths as a person? What do you like most about your work (or school)? What really engages you?
- What pressures do you face at work (or school)? What do you like least?
- Where have you had to compromise for work (or at school)? Why?
- How do you find yourself changing as you grow in your profession (or your skills at school)?
- What are your bottom lines? Have you ever had to stand up for something you believed in at work (or school)?
- What makes one thing work and another play? What work would you really *want* to do?
- Whom do you consider really successful? Why?
- What is "enough" for you? What do you consider extra, a luxury? What helps you avoid getting caught up in always needing more?

Further options At some point you may want to move beyond informal conversations to form an ongoing support group. To help you get started, I have crafted a guide for forming your own "professional quest group" or hosting larger-scale conversations as part of a retreat or leadership development program. For more information, please see "Online Resources."

ACTIVITY # 5

Redefining-the-game Action Planning

Personal Foundation: Make positive plays

Purpose: To recognize opportunities to make a positive play and think through which best fits your situation

Timing: 2 to 4 hours

Number: Best done in a small group of two or three individuals, then vetted and upgraded with others who have similar inspiration to influence the situation

This series of questions helps you identify which action to take and when, especially in more prolonged and challenging efforts.

Step 1 What is needed here? If possible, before you do this step, make a Redefining-the-game Opportunity Map for the organization or role you are concerned with. Then, with your small group, explain your map and brainstorm:

- What needs to happen here?
- What needs to be made more visible?
- Where would innovation help?
- What would it look like to redefine the game at a higher level?
- What is the worthy enough win?

Look for leverage, where the smallest effort can have the greatest positive impact. You will be most effective if you can think it through without blame, imagining how each person or group views the situation differently. *Allow 15 to 20 minutes per person in small groups of 2 or 3 individuals.*

Step 2 What is within my control?

Now, working on your own, brainstorm:

- Where might I start with myself in pursuing what is needed here?
- What experiments might I try?
- What new habits might I adopt?
- What information might I provide to others?
- How could I capture what I learn in a way that helps tell the story to others?

Jot down a few ideas. *Allow 5 to 15 minutes for individual work, then 15 to 30 minutes to compare notes in small groups.*

Step 3 Where do I need to connect with others? Returning to your small groups, expand your horizon to consider additional potential allies, sponsors, or even worthy opponents you might engage. Ask yourselves:

- Who might improve our thinking?
- Who sees the risks and the opportunities most clearly?

- Who could act differently to help the right thing happen?
- Who might already be working on this issue?

Try to identify the important stakeholders from these different perspectives, how they view the world, and why you think it might be in their interest to consider the worthy enough win you are proposing. Consider how you might tell the story, what you'd like to understand better from each of them, and what you want to propose or request of them. Jot down a few notes for each key conversation. *Allow 15 to 30 minutes in small groups, then 5 to 10 minutes for individuals to summarize their final plans. If you are working in a multiple-group setting, do a quick general debriefing, then ask 2 or 3 individuals to share their plans; have the larger group work with them to identify how they would know they were successful and what they might expect to learn from the experience.*

Step 4 Identify your first steps Take a moment on your own to jot down a few first action steps you want to take in terms of testing your assumptions or assessments of the situation, trying your own experiments, or meeting with others. *Allow 5 to 10 minutes for individual work. If meeting in a group, close the session with a round of reflections on any aha's or responses to this thought process.*

Each time you go through this process, taking action yourself and connecting with others, you broaden the group involved as well as your impact, refining your story, clarifying what you can act on directly, and identifying new places to connect. This becomes part of a reinforcing loop as a greater number of people get involved in helping redefine the game and you each get clearer about what is needed and what is possible. To learn more, I encourage you to check out the further reading described under "Online Resources."

ACTIVITY # 6

Personal Goal Review

Personal Foundation: Keep your own score

Purpose: To bring your goals into greater alignment with your professional quest or mission, including developing independent ways to gauge your success and reinforce your efforts

Timing: 1.5 to 2 hours

Number: Can be done individually, with a partner or coach, or in a group of seven to twelve participants

This activity helps you reshape your goals to align more closely with your true priorities and what you consider "enough" by reviewing your current goals and spending. It also invites you to craft a uniquely personal celebration to acknowledge the work you have put into achieving greater alignment.

Step 1 Reflect on your current goals Take a moment to jot down your current goals—implicit or explicit—then ask yourself the following questions to see how well they align with your sense of your quest or mission.

- Why do I want these goals? What feelings/experiences will they get me? Are these goals intrinsically valuable to me, or are they a means to an end?
- Are these mostly playing-along-with-the-game goals or redefining-the-game goals? Are there redefining-the-game goals lurking behind any of the playing-along ones? (See figure A-4.)
- Finally, which of these goals might I want to refine or let go of, knowing that it may no longer fit for me? Which might I want to watch carefully in case it costs too much?

Playing-along-with-the-game Goals	Redefining-the-game Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> I'll be somebody if I do this.<input type="checkbox"/> This will prove I'm not a loser.<input type="checkbox"/> Everyone will admire me when I get there.<input type="checkbox"/> If I make a ton of money, I won't have to deal with these downs.<input type="checkbox"/> Once I show them, I can do what I really want.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> I am fully engaged when I work on this.<input type="checkbox"/> I need to earn a living, but I don't need to "win" to keep doing this.<input type="checkbox"/> This is worth doing whether or not I get credit.<input type="checkbox"/> This is part of what my life is all about.<input type="checkbox"/> I may not work on this all the time, but I still value it.

Take a moment to briefly share your insights with a partner, using your judgment about which details feel comfortable or appropriate to share. Jot down a few notes about what adjustments you might make based on your reflections. *Allow 10 to 15 minutes for individual work and 5 to 10 minutes total for pairs.*

Step 2 Get clearer about what is enough Think for a moment about what “survival” really means to you, jotting down notes as you reflect on the following questions: How have you and your family defined survival and security, implicitly or explicitly? What have you personally viewed as a comfortable life, a luxurious life, and a life of hardship? How does your family feel about each of these? Which of your financial commitments, purchases, and activities are inherently, directly pleasurable to you? Which are more oriented toward social standing? Which are a result of your efforts to deal with stress? (You may want to revisit an old budget or spending records for this.) Where do you feel scarcity in your life? Where do you feel there is enough? Where is there too much? How do you think your family would answer? Again, take a moment to share your insights with a partner; strategize together on how you might initiate these sorts of conversations with your family. Then identify some experiments you might try with different ways of using your time and resources to see whether they increase your sense of well-being and satisfaction. *Allow 30 minutes total for pair work, then 15 to 20 minutes for a small-group debriefing.*

Step 3 Design a celebration As an experiment in the use of appreciation, gratitude, and intrinsic satisfaction (and all the hard work of doing these activities), work with your partner to craft a celebration with your family, friends, or circle of allies. What’s the right way to celebrate what’s working in your life—for you? A toast over a meal, an awards ceremony, an outing, a roast? Whom would you invite? What would you say? *Allow 10 to 15 minutes total for brainstorming in pairs. If you are in a larger group, allow 15 minutes for sharing “best ideas,” then close with a round of reflections from each person.*