

## Integration Four

# CLEARNESS COMMITTEE PROMPT

“Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we are supposed to be and embracing who we actually are.”

- Brené Brown

For this activity, we want you to spend some time exploring more of your “true self,” especially as it is experienced in relationship to others. Part of this process will involve distinguishing between who you think you “should” be, how others experience you, and how you understand yourself. The exercise, sometimes known as a Clearness Committee, involves honest consultation with a trusted group of advisors, friends, and family members who can help you think through important issues in your life. More specifically, we will use these discussions to go beyond basic, self-reported introspection to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves.

The process of consulting a trustworthy group of advisors for guidance is a powerful undertaking that has been used by people from various religious traditions as well as the social sciences.<sup>1</sup> We have only a partial understanding of our own story because we see our lives through one lens that is limited by our personal perceptions. Other people can help us see things that we cannot see ourselves. Very often, we can be harder on ourselves than others, and a Clearness Committee can help us see not just weaknesses but also strengths that we cannot see from our limited vantage point. This is why third-party or external observers, such as Clearness Committee members, can be so beneficial for self-awareness.<sup>2</sup> By seeking the advice of people that know us well and care enough about us to be honest, we can gain refreshing and powerful perspectives on our lives. Ultimately, this exercise can help us discover how to live more freely and fruitfully as our most authentic selves.

## Committee Composition

The best members of a “Clearness Committee” know you well and can be honest and direct. They frequently include people who are:

- Trustworthy and knowledgeable about your life
- Varied and from diverse times and places in your life
  - E.g., high school friends, roommates, close family members, coworkers, etc.
- Small and manageable, ~5-10 people
  - More than 10 can become cumbersome
  - Fewer than 5 limits your feedback loop

<sup>1</sup> The Quaker version, popularized by Parker Palmer, differs in that it is a literal committee on retreat (members are chosen by the director) that covers one specific issue or problem in a person’s life. Social science versions, such as Michigan’s Reflected Best Self Exercise, are focused on the improvement of workplace engagement and performance. This version is more oriented towards a wider perspective on self-awareness that will lead to self-gift.

<sup>2</sup> Language and research drawn from Harvard Business School’s Allison Brooks on “[The Unfair Coach](#)”, *Against the Rules with Michael Lewis*, Puskin Industries, June 09, 2020.

## Discussion Format

There are a number of ways to seek feedback from your Clearness Committee. Some of the most common ways are face-to-face conversations (Zoom or similar format during COVID-19), written survey responses, or a full committee gathering. Each method comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, by giving your committee time to reflect on the written questions, they are not put on the spot and can come up with more detailed and/or nuanced responses. On the other hand, an entirely written format prevents you from experiencing the benefits of interpersonal conversation.

Regardless of the method you choose, we want you to have at least 3 conversations with people in a face-to-face (Zoom) format. We ultimately want you to make this process your own and not impose unnecessary restrictions. However, we recommend that you either record your conversations or get some form of written responses in order to save your insights for future reflection.

## Questions

In your discussions, you will ask 6-8 questions. There are 4 time-tested questions that you must ask, and then we recommend that you choose/create 2-4 questions that most suit your needs.

### Required Questions

1. *What do you think I most value and desire in life? Why?*
2. *Can you reflect on a specific episode when you saw me “in the zone”, when I was at my very best? What was I doing? How/Why does this episode demonstrate my true/best self? Can you describe when you saw me when I was NOT “in the zone...”*
3. *What issues are important to me? How/Why? Put another way, what do you think I want to change in the world?*
4. *What is something that is difficult to say but important for me to hear?*

Please choose or create 2-4 of your own questions, based on your own needs and curiosities, to ask your committee.

- Questions should be open-ended, i.e. without yes/no dichotomies that stifle nuance.
- The following question bank is an extensive but non-exhaustive list of questions that people have asked.
  - Do not feel bound to use any of suggestions, or even adhere to the categories if they do not fit your needs.
- Do not overwhelm your committee with too many questions. Prioritize asking what you consider the most important questions.
- Make the process your own! Feel free to be creative with your questions.

## Sample Question Bank

| Authenticity  | Values  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where/when have you seen me live most authentically?</li> <li>• What is an authentic memory involving me?</li> <li>• When are the moments that you see me most joyful?</li> <li>• When are the moments that you see me most sad?</li> <li>• What do you think is holding me back from being my truest self?</li> <li>• Start, Stop, Continue: What do you think I should start doing, stop doing, and continue to do? Why/how?</li> <li>• If I were a computer, what would cause me to crash?</li> <li>• If I had a warning label, what would it say?</li> <li>• When have you seen me come alive?</li> <li>• When am I least myself?</li> <li>• When am I most myself?</li> <li>• What do you think helps or hinders me from being my best self?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What values do you think are most important to me?</li> <li>• What values do you think I most live out?</li> <li>• If you could give me one piece of advice for *whatever year or post grad life*, what would you say?</li> <li>• What do you think matters most in my life? What do you think my passions are? How do you think I help the world around me?</li> <li>• How do you visualize my life 10 years from now?</li> <li>• Do my goals in life actually match up with who I am as a person? How/why?</li> <li>• What do you think matters most to me in life? What do you think I really stand for? What do you think I really believe in? What do you think I am most happy about? Most sad about? Most passionate about?</li> <li>• Where do you see God acting in my life?</li> </ul> |

| Strengths/Weaknesses  | Relationships  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you had to candidly describe to someone who's never met me, how would you?</li> <li>• Where have you seen me fall short (in relationships, goals, anything)? How have I shown my strengths to you?</li> <li>• When do you see me being most selfish?</li> <li>• What are questions that you think I should reflect on?</li> <li>• What is something you think I believe about myself that's false?</li> <li>• If you could change something about me, what would it be?</li> <li>• What are my strengths/weaknesses?</li> <li>• What is something you have learned from me?</li> <li>• What about me brings you the most disappointment/anger/frustration?</li> <li>• How would you rank or guess my top VIA values?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you most proud of me for?</li> <li>• What is the biggest change, good or bad, you have seen in me over the course of our friendship?</li> <li>• What is something you appreciate about me, but have never told me?</li> <li>• What do you think of when you think of me?</li> <li>• Where do you see me being open/closed to God working in my life?</li> <li>• In your time knowing me, how have you seen me grow?</li> <li>• Think back to your first impression of me. How does it differ from your impression of me now?</li> <li>• What role do I play in our friend group/family? What would the friend group/family be like if I was no longer a part of it?</li> </ul> |

“For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.”

- Thomas Merton

## Sample Requests

While asking your friends and family to participate, feel free to use or adapt any of the templates below. Feel free to share this prompt as well if you want.

*I'll be taking part in an activity called the Clearness Committee for an online program that I'm doing. The Clearness Committee is a powerful method that allows friends, family members, colleagues, teachers, and others to share with me their stories of when they've seen me at my best.*

*I've invited you to participate in this discussion because I value our relationship and your perspective. If you have the time, I'd appreciate it if you would offer your reflections. The insights you share will help me to discover who I am at my best and, in the long run, how I can fruitfully live and work everyday as my most authentic self.*

*Please respond to the questions below regarding me and your relationship with me (or be ready to discuss in person). Honesty is very important in this exercise, but don't stress about finding the perfect answer. If a question doesn't speak to you, skip it and move on. You can always come back, and it's okay if some questions have very short answers. Your instinctual first answer is often enough, however brief or lengthy. Elaborate where you feel called, and examples are always welcome!*

## Follow-Up

After you wrap up your Clearness Committee, reflect on what you learned. What stretched your awareness? What confirmed or affirmed your previous beliefs? What patterns can you detect? Do any of these findings bring about specific Integrations/habits that you can apply to your everyday life? Write down your top 5-7 takeaways or new insights in bullet-point format.

“As iron sharpens iron,  
so a friend sharpens  
a friend.”

Proverbs 27:17