

EXCERPTED FROM *LEADING FROM YOUR BEST SELF* (McGraw-Hill)

PROTAGONIST LEADERSHIP JOURNEY - PART I

Taking the time to reflect upon your personal journey is a clear path toward discovering your many identities and forming an integrated sense of self. Think of it like conducting your own personal archeological dig. As a story archeologist, your search for deep narratives within your personal history and then mine for an unearth your most powerful stories. Contained within your stories are the clues to the values and principles that are most important to you and that describe you at your best. These stories serve to illustrate the challenges you have experiences in your life, how you faced these challenges, and the lessons that you learned. They also serve as an indisputable window into your core identity and validation of principles that underscore your leadership.

Before we can begin to look ahead at the next chapter in our life, we must become deeply familiar with who we were in our prior (and present) chapters. Take some time to reflect upon and answer the questions below. Look for memorable moments or scenes in each chapter of your life. You might think about a time when you faced a choice, or when you challenged your boundaries. These are the decision points, transitions, and self-defining events that have brought you to where and who you are today.

CHILDHOOD (ages 0-12)

What is the name of this chapter of your life?

What would the first two sentences of this chapter be?

Who were you as a child?

What role did you play in your family? How did this impact you?

Did you have a nickname? If so, what was it? What is the story behind this?

What were you known for at this time?

What was your most admired trait?

What as your least admired trait?

Describe your experience of choosing teams on the playground. What role did your play? Was it enjoyable or painful?

Who were the three most influential people for you during this time? Were they mentors, coaches, friends, and/or family?

Identify several moments or scenes that define this time. Give each a headline.

1. _____

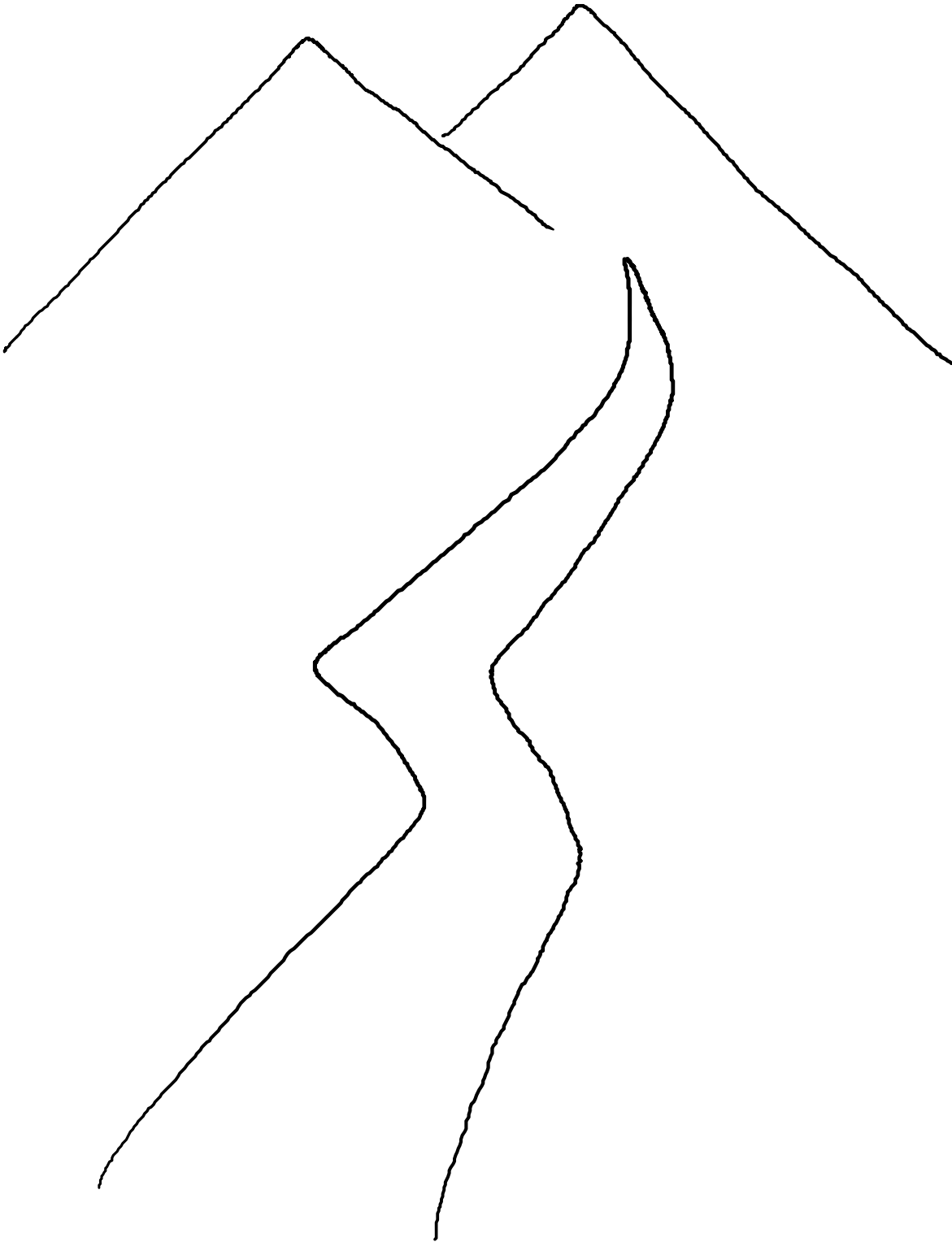
2. _____

3. _____

On a separate piece of paper, write a short paragraph describing each of these stories. Be sure to include the following details.

1. How old were you? Where were you? What were you thinking, feeling and wanting at this time?
2. Who was with you? What were they thinking, feeling and wanting?
3. What did you learn?
4. How did this event impact you and the course of your life?

Use the diagram below to stimulate your memory. Chart out the affirming and challenging moments, as well as the people, places and events that you experienced during this time.



YOUTH AND ADOLESCENCE (ages 12-24)

What is the name of this chapter?

What would the first two sentences of this chapter be?

Were you an insider or outsider among your peers? Explain.

What were you know for?

What mattered most to you?

Who were the three most influential people for you during this time? Were they mentors, coaches, friends, and/or family?

What were the biggest lessons that you learned?

Describe a goal or idea of who/what you wanted to be.

When did you challenge your limits or expand your boundaries?

Identify several moments or scenes that define this time. Give each a headline.

1.

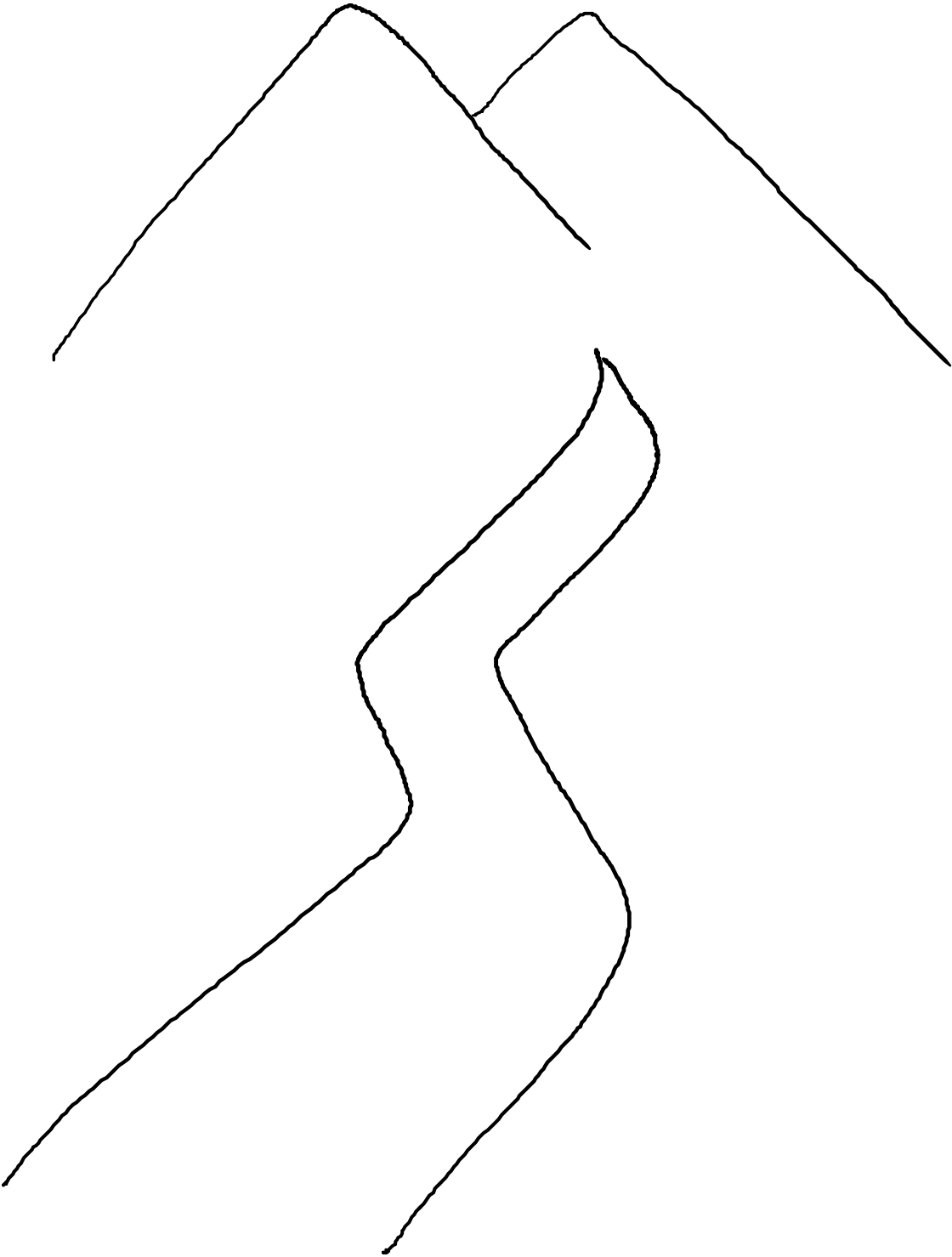
2.

3.

On a separate piece of paper, write a short paragraph describing each of these stories. Be sure to include the following details.

- How old were you? Where were you? What were you thinking, feeling and wanting at this time?
- Who was with you? What were they thinking, feeling and wanting?
- What did you learn?

Use the diagram below to stimulate your memory. Chart out the affirming and challenging moments, as well as the people, places and events that you experienced during this time.



ADULTHOOD (ages 24-35)

What is the name of this chapter?

What would the first two sentences of this chapter be?

When did you first “feel” like an adult?

What were you know for?

What mattered most to you?

Who were the three most influential people for you during this time? Were they mentors, coaches, friends, and/or family?

What were the three most important lessons that you learned during this time?

1.

2.

3. _____

What was the most important decision you made during as a young adult?

Identify several moments or scenes that defines this time. Give each a headline.

1. _____

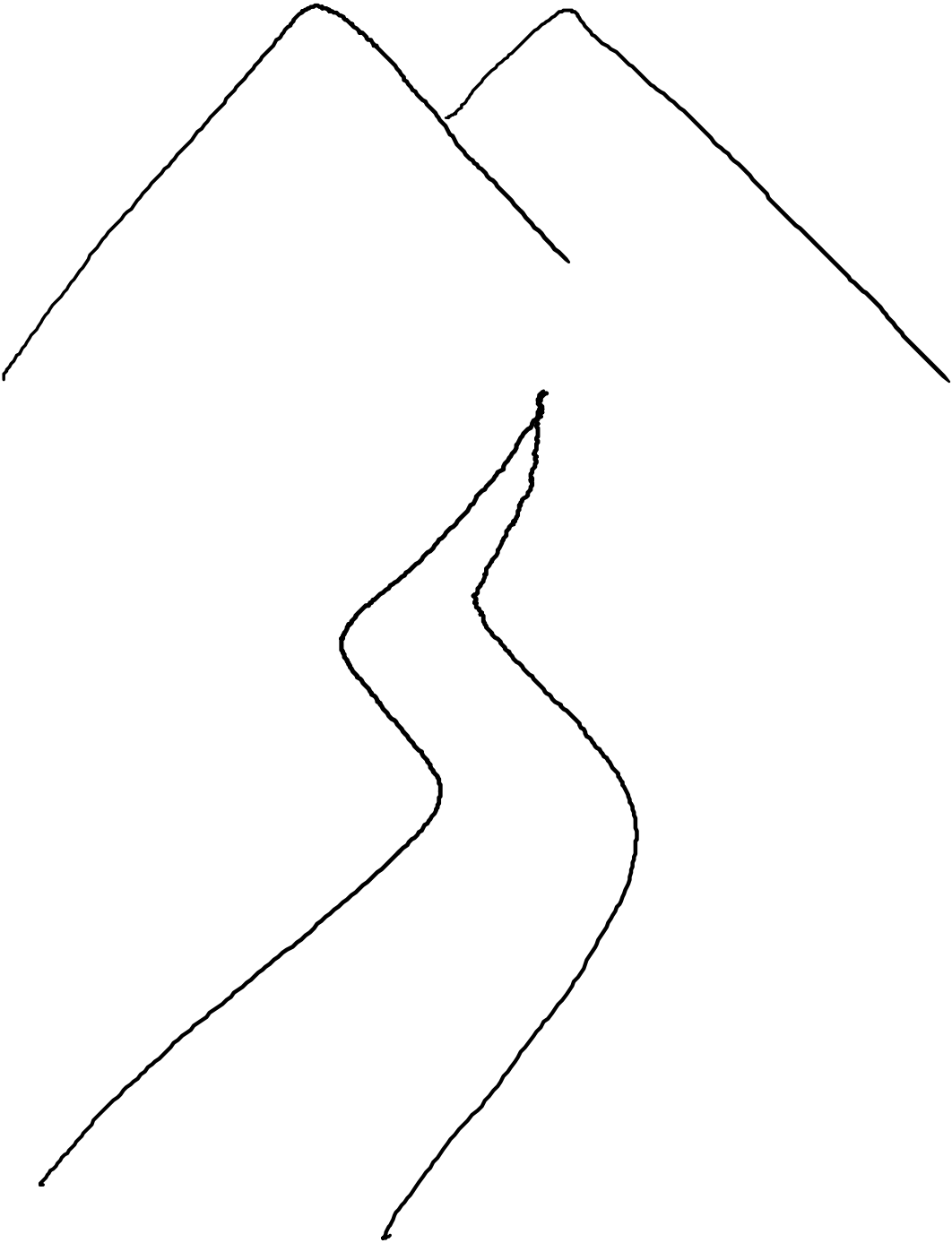
2. _____

3. _____

On a separate piece of paper, write a short paragraph describing each of these stories. Be sure to include the following details.

- How old were you? Where were you? What were you thinking, feeling and wanting at this time?
- Who was with you? What were they thinking, feeling and wanting?
- What did you learn?
- How did this event impact you and the course of your life?

Use the diagram below to stimulate your memory. Chart out the affirming and challenging moments, as well as the people, places and events that you experienced during this time.



THE SEARCH TOWARD INTEGRATION

Was there a part of yourself that you had to leave behind in order to step fully into adulthood?

Is this unfulfilled part of you still calling you? Do you need to reclaim it?

PROTAGONIST LEADERSHIP JOURNEY - PART II

Building your personal story can be easier than you might think. The framework laid out in the following pages can be the template to write the next chapter.

But before we get there, you need to understand your role as the protagonist in your own story.

A protagonist is the main character of a story and the one with whom we build an emotional connection and who we watch transform. A protagonist is also the driver of the action in the story, an advocate or champion of a particular cause or action.

You are the protagonist, catalyst, and main character of your own authentic story (both in real life and in the context of this exercise). It's important to note that this model assumes that everyone is the main character in his or her own story, and that we simultaneously play a supporting role in the stories of others. This is not a model of leadership as much as it is a journey of self-discovery. Being the protagonist of your own story is not about being the person with all the answers, i.e., “the hero”, but understanding who you are, what you want, and learning how to be flexible and adaptable and resilient in the midst of change.

So, what are the steps in a protagonist's journey? Let's take a look.

1. **A Protagonist is good at something.** Every main character has specific capabilities, strengths, and gifts that are a result of his or her individual experience.
2. **They want something.** Protagonists have a clear and explicit goal. They yearn for something greater.
3. **There is an obstacle in their way.** External or internal barriers prevent this person from getting what he or she wants.
4. **The protagonist must go through some kind of transformation.** The main character of a story must become something greater than he or she was before.

Let's look at each of these points and discover what is unique about you as a main character of your story.

1. WHAT ARE YOU GOOD AT?

Identify your adaptive qualities, leadership strengths, core capabilities and personal gifts.

2. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

What are your personal aspirations? Include both short-term and long-term goals.

Why are these personal goals so important?

What are your professional aspirations? Include both short-term and long-term goals and be as specific as possible.

Why are these professional goals so important?

What are the capabilities that you will need to fulfill these goals?

What capabilities do you already possess to fulfill these goals?

What capabilities do you need to develop to fulfill these goals? This is the gap.

3. WHAT IS IN THE WAY OF YOU ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS?

In what ways are you limiting yourself and restricting your growth? These can be current beliefs, mindsets, and more.

What assumptions might you be making about these barriers that need to be challenged?

In what ways are other people or circumstances limiting you or restricting your growth?

What assumptions might you be making about these barriers that need to be changed?

4. WHAT IS THE TRANSFORMATION THAT YOU NEED TO GO THROUGH TO GET TO YOUR FINAL GOAL?

What are you most ready for but have not allowed yourself to achieve?

What part of yourself that no longer serves you do you need to let go of?

What would it be like to live a fulfilled life?

Going Deeper

In order to truly understand what drives you as an individual, it is essential to dive even deeper into what you want and why you want it. Answer the following questions in order to gain clarify on what propels you to act.

What is the part of yourself that most defines who you are but is not obvious to others?

What are your external motivations (fame, money, position, reward, etc.)?

What are your internal motivations (autonomy, learning, belonging, mastery, etc.)?

What were your top 3 career values 10 years ago?

- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____

What are your top 3 career values now?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

What do you see as your top 3 career values in 10 years?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

What were you known for 10 years ago?

What are you known for now?

What do you want to be known for in the future?

What are you most passionate about?

What activities bring you the most energy?

What inspires you?

In what activities or situations are you at your best?

Describe a time in your life when you felt the greatest sense of meaning and purpose.

How could you put your gifts and talents to the best and highest use?

Explain your purpose in life, at work, and/or at play in one sentence.

YOUR LEADERSHIP POINT OF VIEW

What are the top 3 values and/or principles that guide your leadership?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

What stories from your life best illustrates each of these values or principles from any time period?
Please describe three separate stories.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

What is the vision that you have for yourself as a leader?

YOUR NEXT CHAPTER

What will the name of this chapter be?

What will the first two sentences of this chapter be?

What shift have you made or are making to fulfill the vision you have for your future self?

On what principle will your future be built?

What can you do right now that will accelerate your process and get you what you want and where you want to be?

Who can you reach out to that will support you in your journey?

LEGACY

Put yourself into your brightest future. What are you most proud of?

How will you be remembered?

What is the story that others will tell about you when you are gone?

Write an epitaph that will best describe the impact that you had in your life.

I AM

My daughter Maya was enrolled in a Montessori School through 5th grade. She became quite good at bringing her experiences to life through writing. One of the exercises that her class used was called an “I AM” poem. I use it in many of my executive development programs as a way to break out of linear thinking and create a possibility mindset.

A sample of Maya’s poem is below. She wrote this at 9 years old.

I am Maya

I am...observant

I wonder...about people’s decisions

I hear...people chatting in agreement

I see...an open door waiting for me to step inside

I want...to hear more stories

I am...Enchanted

I pretend...to be in a magical world with endless possibilities

I feel...healthy and strong

I touch...a friend’s hand so I won’t be alone

I worry...about the slightest detail

I cry...alone behind the curtain

I am...an artist

I understand...that not everything is sparkling

I say...there is a bright side to everything

I dream...about my future and how it will turn out

I try...to get along with people

I hope...there is a train waiting for me at every stop

I am...Maya

Try it for yourself. It is not about being perfect. It will be different every time you do it. If you feel stuck, set the poem in context, such as “I am a coach.” This will make the process much easier.

I AM

I am _____

I wonder _____

I hear _____

I see _____

I want _____

I am _____

I pretend _____

I feel _____

I touch _____

I worry _____

I cry _____

I am _____

I understand _____

I say _____

I dream _____

I try _____

I hope _____

I am _____

For more information on this process go to: www.leadingfromyourbestself.com.