Finding and developing your Professional Identity

SELF WORTH ACADEMY

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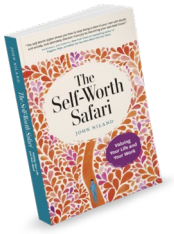
Introduction: John Niland

- Supporting professionals on **professional identity & communication**
- **Based on self-worth** vs. self-esteem
- Boosting **energy** and confidence, so that work is **sustainable** and **enjoyable**
- Founder of Self-Worth Academy



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Context: Why professional identity?

- Constant waves of change, re-organisation
- Talent development / retention of key people
- Longer working lives = more transitions
- Energy challenges: particularly during transition (when self-worth is also vital)
- Foundation for meaning & purpose
- To communicate your value to others
- Many CVs / websites read much the same
- Virtual- / hybrid-working strips away old reference points

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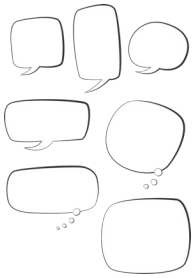
Opening exercise

- Complete this sentence:
- "I am… _____"



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AGENDA

1. Professional Identity: what and why?
2. Self-Worth, why this is a vital foundation
3. Developing Professional Identity
4. Tips to develop professional identity with others

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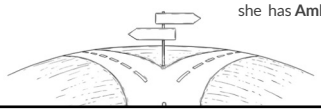
Two Project Managers - a world apart

"Peter"

- A wide variety of roles
- Defines expertise in terms of project-management
- Adapts / responds to opportunities (or lack of them)
- Seen as a service-provider, among many others

Joanna

- Clear professional **identity**
- Defines in terms of *Approach*: **"build trust & credibility with key stakeholders"**
- **Clear** about which projects she does / doesn't
- Known for this Approach: so she has **Ambassadors**



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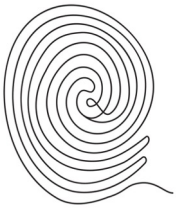
What is Professional Identity?

- More than just a job title or qualification
- It's **who you are** in the workplace, not what you do
- The "**red line**" that runs through all your various roles, businesses, projects
- The **fingerprint** you leave on anything that you do



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Common misconceptions

≠ Current / last role

≠ Qualifications

≠ Personal Brand

≠ Values

≠ Purpose

≠ Achievements

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Differences with "Personal Brand"

Personal Brand	Professional Identity
About "Me"	*About what I stand for, at work*
Focus: How I am seen in the marketplace	*Focus: Knowing who I am in the marketplace*
Success determined by Extent (e.g. likes, followers, shares etc)	*Success determined more by Depth / Meaningfulness*
Sets you apart from others	*Connects you with others*

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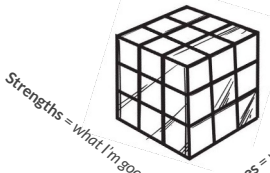
Three dimensions of professional identity

Needs of Others = *Usefulness in current or future marketplace*



Strengths = what I'm good at

Values = what matters to me

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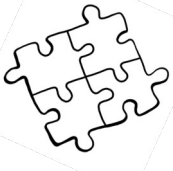
Four key benefits of an Identity based on Self-Worth

4: Developing Talents of others

2. Opportunity

You communicate with more impact

Others can be your Ambassadors



3. Value

Raises the value of work

You are their Partner… not their Servant

1. Energy & Focus

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More about Professional Identity

Resources:

www.SelfWorthAcademy.com/links

- Slides
- Self-assessment
- Webinars etc

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Relationship with Self: Why is this important?

- The basis of all our interactions with others
- Early life / work experiences have often created vulnerabilities
- Particularly vital during transition
- Resilience: strong sense of self enables swift recovery from setbacks
- Joy and "flow" at work vs. performance anxiety
- Practical application: e.g. discussing money, setting boundaries etc

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Why self-worth?

My own story: When self-esteem was not enough

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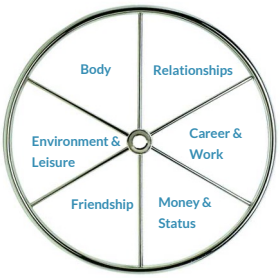
How is your reputation with you?



Thinking of each area, how do you rate **yourself**?

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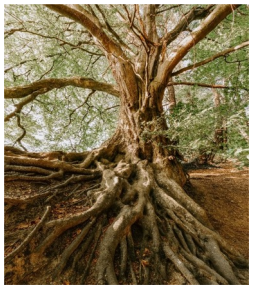
Self-Worth vs. Self-Esteem

- We have been measuring **self-esteem**
- Self-worth comes **from within**, not from performance or achievement
- **Unconditional** vs. Conditional
- Our upbringing usually focuses on self-esteem, not self-worth
- The strongest possible **roots** of confidence and performance
- Other-esteem: what they say about us, or we imagine they do



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Limitations of Self-Esteem

- Can lead to excessive self-preoccupation and narcissism
- Comparison with others: "How am I doing"
- Anxiety: not being enough
- Energy expended chasing validation
- Imposter Syndrome: the gap between the image and the core identity
- **Building a contingent Professional Identity: another "Me Story"**

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The problem with conditional identities

- Professional Identity becomes another **condition** in the quest for self-esteem…
- Rather than **an expression of self-worth,** as a result of which identity is…
- a) **vulnerable**, particularly during transition
- b) **limited** in impact / value
- c) accompanied by **anxiety**, e.g. "Imposter Syndrome"
- d) leads to **competition** with others (vs connection with others)

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Other benefits of Self-Worth

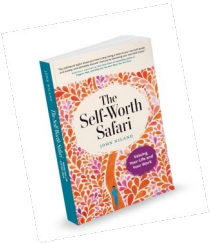
Resilience: Dealing with multiple transitions at once, swift recovery from setbacks

Productivity: getting on with the job / studies vs. chasing validation

Teamwork: better able to do self-presentation in a group setting

Creativity / Opportunity-focus

Courage to deal with uncertainty / change



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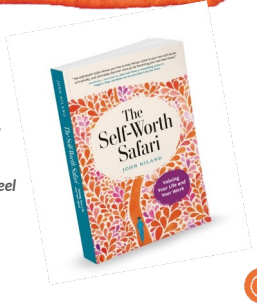
Quiz: Self-Worth or Self-Esteem (p.28)

- *"A healthy lifestyle is essential to a good relationship with myself"*
- *"No matter what, I am a good friend to myself"*
- *"I am so proud of my children"*
- *"If I could only find meaningful work, I would feel so much better about myself"*
- *"I deserve to be happy"*



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Shift #1: From Assessment to Assertion

What assessments are you making about yourself?

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The problems with Self-Assessments (even when "Positive")

Reinforce a conditional relationship with self

- Never-ending struggle to reach the end of the rainbow
- Blank cheque for future anxiety
- Constant comparison with others, loss of energy
- Positive assessments can just reinforce the addiction, without a deeper sense of worth

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EXERCISE:

What are your habitual self-assessments?

Negative	Positive
- I'm stupid?	- I'm smart?
- I'm unattractive?	- I'm good looking?
- I'm not successful?	- I'm an achiever?
- Nobody listens to me	- I'm a natural leader?
- I'm always changing my mind?	- I'm reliable?
- Yours?	- Yours?

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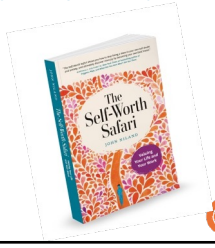
Shift #1: From Assessment to Assertion

Assertions= Declarations & Actions that anchor Self-Worth

- Example: "*because I'm worth it*"
- "*I am enough, I do enough and I have enough*"
- "I'm going to be a loyal friend to myself today"
- See "Morning Routine" on p.68.



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Overview of remaining shifts

- Shift #2: From Condition to Expression
- Shift #3: From Self-Reproach to Self-Acceptance
- Shift #4: From Self-Evaluation to Usefulness
- Shift #5: From "Should" to "Could"
- Shift #6: From Proving yourself to Valuing yourself
- Shift #7: From Interesting to Interested

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Practice #1: Explorer Conversations

Exploring the impact of change – not promoting self

" May I ask for your input / advice?"

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More about Explorer Conversations

- Being interest**ed** vs. Interest**ing**
- Exploring trends, impact of change, shape of the future etc.
- *"Be a journalist for a day"*
- Finding out the key issues
- Developing your **insights**

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A few simple conversation starters

- *"May I ask for your advice?"*
- *"I'm researching for a project I'm doing, may I interview you?"*
- *"I would like to get your perspective on x: can we talk?"*
- *"I'm in London next week: coffee?"*
- *"Could I ask for some input on my career-/business-planning for the next year?"*

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Practice #2: Develop Your Insights

Package your strengths into useful insights

(not Solutions, nor Sales Messages, nor Process, not Methodology)

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What is an insight?

- A fresh **perspective** that gets people thinking in new and different ways
- Highlights the **value** of what you do with others
- Establishes credibility and **trust**
- **Differentiates** you

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An insight is…

- **NOT a solution** or a set of steps
- **NOT** your **beliefs** or values (but can be linked to your experience),
- NOT a **proposal**, or "how-I-can-help"
- NOT an entire **methodology**
- IS your approach to a problem, irrespective of whether you are involved or not

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Examples of Insights

Strength		Insight
"I am a Relationship-builder, an Empath and a Nurturer of partnership"	→	*"In a changable world, trust and reliability are more vital than ever. The key to sustainable success is forming relationships with trustworthy people, rather than trying to control them."*
"I am an expert on business-development: my achievements include…"	→	*"B2B Sales has changed dramatically, due to e-procurement practices. I work with organisations to leverage this shift to grow their revenue (and maximise pricing opportunities)"*
ME		WORLD

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More Insights

Strength		Insight
"I am highly intuitive. I can help people to see things before they can"	→	*"In a chaotic, fast-changing world, your intuition is more important than ever, because…."*
"I am a certified coach with the ICF and I've taught mindfulness for over 10 years"	→	*"Hybrid working is creating new sources of stress for many people, such as…* *This is when mico-moments of connection to yourself is really vital…"*
ME		WORLD

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Possible insights (business)

- Stories e.g. the risk someone didn't see coming, e.g. security
- Trends, factual data e.g. impact of hybrid working etc.
- Risks and threats (current events)
- The gap between "winners" and "laggards"
- How the future will be different to the past
- Predictions about how specific markets will grow / shrink etc

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Possible insights (personal)

- Impact of stress, ripple-effects
- Linking career with new life aspirations
- Implications of longer working lives
- The changing landscape of belonging (international families, mobility etc)
- Evolution of… just about anything!
- Surviving a 24/7 world, always-on

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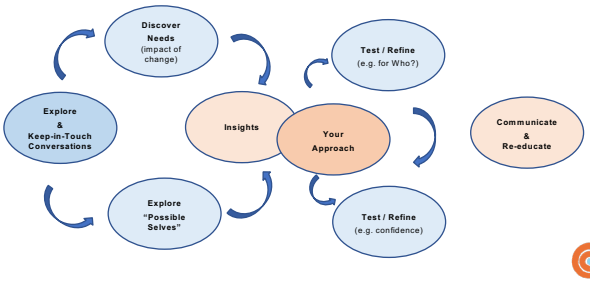
Practice #3: Start your "Identity Investigation" Project



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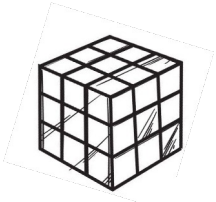
More?

- **Assess**: www.SelfWorthAcademy.com/links
- Shape your **Strengths** into **Insights**
  - distilled lessons from your experience
- What are the **marketplace trends** that make your identity more relevant in the future?
- Choose / refine your **Identity Story**
- **Distil** ideally with a challenging coach / mentor
- **Test** via Explorer Conversations



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Practice #4: Have a Sounding Board

Work with a coach / critical friend / thinking partner:

- To avoid slipping into old habits and stories about self (e.g. "I am a…)
- Overcome doubt & uncertainty – build energy & momentum
- To help spot your insights / approach

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Practical Tips to develop Identity with Others

- Interrupting their **routine narrative** or career-story
- Translate their **strengths** into relevant **insights**
- The hunger for **self-validation** (driven by self-esteem)
- **Ask them to explore** "How am I valuable? rather than "How valuable am I?"
- Support them to develop their **Approach**

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Daily Tips

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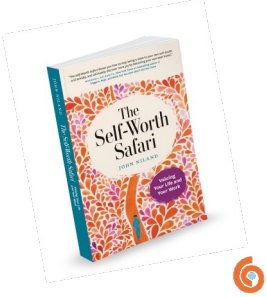
Tip #1 Morning Routine (p.68)

As your feet touch the floor:

Affirm your friendship with yourself, without conditions

"I'm going to be on my own side today"



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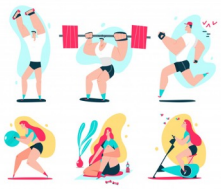
Tip #2: When exercising, check your intention



Is it an expression of Self-Worth...
Or a condition of Self-Esteem ?

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Tip #3: Have "Explorer Conversations"

Am I interested...
or trying to be interesting?

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Tip #4: Difficult people, or those who don't get you?

"Never wrestle with a pig. You both get dirty and besides; the pig likes it."
- George Bernard Shaw

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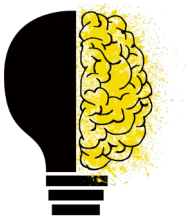
Tip #5: Replace "Should" with "Could"



Benefits: Creativity – Regeneration - Innovation

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Closing Exercise: rerun

- Complete this sentence:
- "I am... _____"

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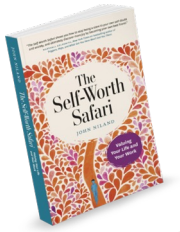
More?

- **Facilitator Course** for those wishing to develop professional identity with others: John@SelfWorthAcademy.com
- Webinars / events / resources www.SelfWorthAcademy.com/links
- **In-house** workshop? To discuss: https://calendly.com/talktojohn
- The "**Self-Worth Safari**" is on Amazon



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