

FRICTION

INTERNAL
You Are Not Your Job

Experiment #1: Separating Self from the Storm

Duration: 7 days (use as often as needed)

Time required: 10-15 minutes per activity

Goal: Use this practice anytime you've made a mistake, your business isn't doing well, or outside forces (like the economy or industry shifts) are crushing your numbers. It's designed to be done in 10-15 minutes.

Step One: Name the Event, Not Yourself

Write a one-sentence description of what happened, using neutral language:

- "We missed our revenue target by 20% this quarter."
- "I approved a project that went over budget by \$500,000."
- "A sudden rate hike/shock in the market led to a drop in demand." Avoid any "I am" language here. You're capturing what happened.

Step Two: Separate Fact From Fiction

Draw three columns (or use those included on page 3) and label them:

1. Facts
2. Story About Me
3. A Truer Story

Under Facts, list only what a camera or spreadsheet could verify: dates, numbers, actions taken, relevant external conditions (e.g., “interest rates rose,” “key client paused spending”). This column helps your brain see the situation as an event in the world, not a character judgment.

Under Story About Me, write the sentences that automatically come up in your mind when you think about this situation, especially after hours or at 3 a.m. Be honest and unfiltered. Common examples:

- “I’m not cut out for this.”
- “I’ve ruined everything.”
- “Everyone will finally see I’m a fraud.”
- “If I were truly competent, this wouldn’t have happened, even with the economy like this.”

Now, move to a truer story. This is not the same as reframing what you want or redirecting your attention. This column has one specific job: to put distance between *who you are* and *what happened*, so the event stops functioning as a verdict on your character. For each line in “Story About Me,” write a response that:

- Separates *you* from the event.
- Acknowledges both your part and the external conditions.
- Stays specific and grounded.

For example:

- Story: “I’m not cut out for this.”
 - Truer story: “I’m a capable leader who made a serious misjudgment in a volatile context. I’m learning what this role really demands.”
- Story: “I’ve ruined everything.”
 - Truer story: “My decision has created real problems that I’m now responsible for helping to repair. That doesn’t erase everything I’ve built.”
- Story: “If I were any good, the economy wouldn’t hit us this hard.”
 - Truer story: “External shocks are hitting our whole sector. My job is to respond as wisely as I can, not to control the entire market.”

You’re not sugarcoating what has happened. You’re putting the event back in proportion and reminding yourself that you are bigger than this one moment.

FRICTION: INTERNAL

Facts

Story About Me

A Truer Story

Step Three: Mark What's Yours, and What Isn't

Go back to the Facts column and put a small check mark next to anything you could realistically influence next time (e.g., “We relied too heavily on one segment,” “We ignored early warning signs”). Put a small dash next to things that are genuinely outside your control (e.g., “Regulation changed mid-year,” “Government shutdown froze budgets,” “Client’s parent company froze hiring globally”).

On a separate line, finish these two sentences:

1. “What is mine to own here is . . .”
2. “What is *not* mine to carry as identity is . . .”

This step helps align your energy with responsibility, not self-punishment.

Step Four: Expand Your “Identity Frame”

Finally, at the bottom of the page, answer these prompts:

- “Outside of this situation, I am also someone who . . .” (list at least three roles or qualities: parent, friend, neighbor, learner, mentor, musician, volunteer)

- “One small action I’ll take in the next 24 hours that is not about fixing this metric, but about living as the person I want to be, is . . .”

Maybe it’s reading with your kid, checking on a friend, going for a walk, or mentoring someone on your team. The point isn’t escape; it’s reminding your nervous system that your existence isn’t confined to this crisis.

When you’re done, read the A Truer Story column and your final answers out loud, slowly. Notice any shift in your body—breath, shoulders, jaw. You may still feel pressure and responsibility. But if you’ve done the exercise honestly, some of the crushing weight of “I *am* this failure” can begin to soften. You’re building a habit of seeing events as events, yourself as a whole person, and your work as one important place where that person shows up, not the only place where that person exists.

Experiment #2: Update Your Identity Portfolio

Duration: 3–4 weeks (to allow time for the introduction experiment to play out across multiple real conversations)

Time required: 30–45 minutes for the initial exercise; five minutes for reflection after each introduction experiment

Goal: Loosen the grip that a single role or outcome has on your sense of self.

Here's an activity you can use yourself, or with your team, to begin separating who you are from what you do.

Step One: Rewrite Your “I Am” Statements

Write three sentences that you often think or say:

- “I am a _____.”
- “I’m the kind of person who _____ at work.”
- “My value is in my ability to _____.”

Now, rewrite each one to separate you from the role or outcome. For example:

I am a high performer.	I’m someone who cares about doing my best and learning when I fall short.
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I am a CEO.	I currently serve as a CEO; I’m also a parent, a friend, and a person who loves mentoring others.
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Aim for language that:

- Describes roles as things *you hold*, not things *you are*.
- Emphasizes enduring qualities (curiosity, integrity, compassion) over titles and wins.

Circle one or two revised statements that feel both true and slightly stretching, as if they belong to the version of you that you’re growing into.

Step Two: Experiment with a New Introduction

Script a new answer to “So, what do you do?” Try two or three versions that include, but don’t center on your job. For instance:

- “By day I lead a team in healthcare operations; I’m really interested in how people grow through change. Outside of work I’m a dad and a very slow trail runner.”

Test this in the next low-stakes conversation (e.g., a colleague you don’t know well, a new neighbor, a breakout room at a conference). Afterward, jot down:

- How did it feel in your body to answer that way?
- What did you notice about the other person’s response?
- Did it shift, even slightly, how you felt about yourself in that moment?

Repeat this a few times over the next month. You’re not trying to land on a perfect script. You’re practicing a way of communicating to others (and yourself) that your job is something you *do*, not a judgment on who you *are*.