

HISTORY AND BASIS IN RESEARCH

The *Reflected Best Self Exercise™* (RBSE™) is the product of work by scholars at the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. It had its genesis in Bob Quinn's belief in the benefit of colleagues sharing their thoughts on each other's strengths. After seeing the power it had in executive education programs, he joined Jane Dutton, Emily Heaphy, Laura Morgan Roberts, and Gretchen Spreitzer to form the Reflected Best Self lab in 2002. The team conducted research on the concept, and began using it in classes, with great success. In 2003, Bob Quinn, Jane Dutton, and Gretchen Spreitzer wrote the *Reflected Best Self Exercise: Assignment and Instructions to Participants*, and they, along with Laura Morgan Roberts, created an accompanying teaching note. Since then, use of the RBSE™ has spread throughout the U.S., and it is increasingly being used around the world. Universities, which have included it in their curricula include Darden School of Business, Harvard Business School, MIT, Stephen M. Ross School of Business, University of British Columbia, University of Southern California, and Washington University. It was also the subject of articles in the *Harvard Business Review* and the *Academy of Management Review* in 2005 and in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* in 2009. Key references include:

Roberts, L., Dutton, J., Spreitzer, G., Heaphy, E., & Quinn, R. (2005). Composing the reflected best self portrait: Building pathways for becoming extraordinary in work organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(4), 712-736.

Roberts, L., Spreitzer, G., Dutton, J., Quinn, R., Heaphy, E., & Barker, B. (2005). How to play to your strengths. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(1), 75-80.

Spreitzer, G., Stephens, J.P., & Sweetman, D. (2009). The Reflected Best Self field experiment with adolescent leaders: exploring the psychological resources associated with feedback source and valence. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(5), 331-348.

AUTHOR INFORMATION



Robert E. Quinn
Margaret Elliott Tracy Collegiate Professor in Business Administration; Professor of Management and Organizations, University of Michigan

Robert E. Quinn is interested in the process of positive change. He seeks to understand processes that lead to increased individual and collective capacity. His recent books include *Lift: Becoming a Positive Force in any Situation* (Berrett-Koehler 2009) and *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* (Jossey-Bass 2006). He combines both a research and an applied orientation. He has 25 years of

experience in working with executives on issues of organizational change. He teaches in both the MBA and Executive Education programs at the University of Michigan and is known for innovative instructional efforts.



Jane E. Dutton
Robert L. Kahn Distinguished University Professor of Business Administration and Psychology, University of Michigan

Jane Dutton's research on positive organizational scholarship began with an interest in compassion and the difference it makes for individuals and organizations. Her research has expanded to focus on the power of positive relationships at work, positive identities and meaning, job crafting, and resilience. Her recent books include *Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations* (Routledge 2009), *Exploring Positive Relationships and Organizations* (Lawrence Erlbaum 2007), and *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (Berrett-Koehler 2003). Jane's background in strategic management keeps her focused on how positive dynamics create sustainable capabilities in organizations.



Gretchen Spreitzer
Professor of Management and Organizations, University of Michigan

Gretchen Spreitzer's research focuses on employee empowerment and leadership development, particularly within a context of organizational change and decline. Her most recent work is looking at positive deviance and how organizations enable employees to thrive and become their best selves. Most recently she is involved in a large-scale project to validate a measure of thriving at work and better understand strategies employees can use to regulate their subjective and physiological energy. Her

books include *A Company of Leaders* (Jossey-Bass 2001) and the *Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship* (Oxford, 2011), co-edited with Kim Cameron.



Laura Morgan Roberts
Professor of Psychology, Culture, and Organization Studies, Antioch University

Laura Morgan Roberts's research focuses on how to construct, sustain, and restore positive identities at work. She became interested in positive organizational scholarship through her doctoral dissertation research on social identity-based impression management among medical professionals. Her interests in the social construction of positive identities now include: the reflected best self, diversity, authenticity, strengths, leadership, and talent management. She is a faculty affiliate of the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship.

Excerpts from *Reflected Best Self Exercise™*, 2nd Edition.

Available at www.centerforpos.org.

Email positiveorg@umich.edu for more information.

The Reflected Best Self Exercise™ is a structured opportunity to collect and internalize rich stories about you when you are at your best.

REFLECTED BEST SELF EXERCISE™ 2nd Edition

MICHIGAN
ROSS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Center for
POSITIVE
Organizational Scholarship

Robert E. Quinn, Jane E. Dutton, Gretchen M. Spreitzer, and Laura Morgan Roberts
Revised by Emily J. Plews and Janet Max

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Born from empirical research from University of Michigan's Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship, the *Reflected Best Self Exercise™* (RBSE™) uses stories collected from people in all contexts of your life to help you understand and articulate who you are and how you contribute when you are at your best. With this new insight, you will feel immediately strengthened and connected to others, experience clarity about who you are at your best, and refine personal development goals to be your best self more often. The RBSE™ guides you step-by-step through the process of identifying potential respondents, making the request for feedback, creating your *a priori* best-self portrait, analyzing your reflected best-self stories, creating a new, reflected best-self portrait, and translating that portrait into proactive steps for living at your best.

CHANGES TO THIS EDITION

The 2011 version of the *Reflected Best Self Exercise™* has been updated to reflect advancements in research and years of feedback from users and facilitators of the exercise. Some of the important updates were to:

- Highlight unique attributes of the RBSE™, such as the use of stories, an emphasis on strengths exclusively, and solicitation of respondents from all contexts of the participant's life
- Instruct participants to write personal best-self stories to consider with the reflected best-self stories
- Provide more instruction on the analysis of best-self stories individually and in aggregate
- Incorporate action-planning activities into the RBSE™ to help participants identify developmental goals that relate to the best self
- Combine the best of the original *Reflected Best Self Exercise: Assignment* and *Instructions to Participants* and the *Bringing My Reflected Best Self to Life* booklet previously published separately
- Honor wisdom gained by facilitators and users over the years since first publication

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PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS *(first page)*

Two phases comprise the *Reflected Best Self Exercise™* (RBSE™). In Phase 1, you will create your reflected best-self portrait. In Phase 2, you will create a personal development action plan inspired by new insight into you at your best. (Content previously found in the *Bringing My Reflected Best Self to Life* workbook.) After each step in either phase you will see how our sample participant, Shawn, approached the step and a "Your Turn" icon (★) with suggestions for how you can approach the step yourself. For some steps we also discuss other options to augment the exercise.

Phase 1 | Creating the Reflected Best-Self Portrait

Step 1: Identify Potential Respondents

Thoughtfully select 15-20 people whom you will ask to write stories about you at your best.

Why 15 - 20?

Over time, researchers of the RBSE™ have found that identifying 15-20 potential respondents from whom you wish to solicit best-self stories should help surface a sufficient number of stories. Realize that due to time and other constraints, not everyone will be able to respond. Ideally, you will receive at least 30 stories, or three stories from 10 respondents, of you at your best. This number has provided past RBSE™ participants with sufficient data in which patterns across those stories can be found.

How should I create this list of potential respondents?

Choose people who have seen you at your best and people who will give you their honest opinion. Research shows that the RBSE™ is most effective when your respondents come from a mix of colleagues (former or current), superiors or subordinates, friends (old or recent), family members, customers, and anyone who has had extended contact with you. Know that past participants have found that their respondents have been quite willing, even eager, to assist with this exercise. (And past participants have been happy to reciprocate the favor!)

TABLE 1: SAMPLE LIST OF POTENTIAL RESPONDENTS

Family	Friends	Current Job	Past Jobs	Volunteering
Chris (spouse)	Miriam (childhood)	Katherine (boss)	Alexis (colleague)	Tad (fellow board member)
Greg (brother)	Evan (college roommate)	Daniel (assistant)	Gabe (former student)	
Lisa (mother)	Tim (sports coach)	Kevin (teammate)	Ellen (mentor)	

★ YOUR TURN: Review the lists of contacts in your email account, address book, or social networking sites to refresh your memory. When you create a list of potential respondents, double-check to make sure a cross-section of people from your spheres of influence is represented. Shawn used a spreadsheet to organize the list.