Owning Your Experience

Taking responsibility for your results at work, and in your life
The Salesforce Ignite team is a passionate group of professionals who have been working differently (and loving it!) for years. We come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, but share a common love of creating new products and services that bring new value into the world. We’re excited to work with you and your team to help you start working differently today.

Owning Your Experience was developed through years of experimentation, using various models to help us work differently. Special thanks to The Conscious Leadership Group for much of our inspiration.

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How many times have you heard the phrase, “I’m my own worst enemy”?

In the world of innovation this is true for most of us.

Bringing something uniquely valuable into the world is hard, and innovators often fuel their work with self-created pressure. Whether it’s an inner critic telling us our work isn’t good enough, we have concern for how others are perceiving us, or simply have a basic fear of failing, these pressures give us the juice we need to get things done.

However, while this internal drive helps push us across the finish line, it often comes at a cost. Team collaboration can suffer, and even the best in the game can burn out. And unfortunately, too much internal tension can diminish our ability to maximize our creativity.

This guide was written to help innovators get out of their own way. The following pages include a framework with simple activities to help you maximize your creative potential as well as your happiness at work.
Humans have evolved as skilled survivors over thousands of years. In doing so, we’ve developed autonomous behavior patterns and continually scan our environment looking for threats. However, our brains are horrible at differentiating between threats to our physical safety and threats to our ego.

Have you ever experienced sweaty palms, shallow breathing, and an elevated heart rate before presenting to an audience? That’s your brain saying “Run for safety!!” when the only danger is getting some strange looks from your audience.

Aside from fight or flight physiological responses, many of our decisions and behaviors are impacted when we sense a threat to our ego’s survival. More specifically, we’re influenced when we sense a threat to three primary desires:

1. Security
2. Control
3. Approval

Some common behaviors most of us fall prey to include: blaming, avoiding conflict, gossiping, getting overwhelmed, convincing others you’re right, and numbing out our pain with food, media and other distractions.

Regardless of which fear-based behaviors are common for you, all of them can get in the way of innovation.
We sacrifice our creative potential when we’re in a threatened state.

When in an anxious or threatened state, our amygdala (feeling brain) bypasses our neocortex (thinking brain) and we lose our ability for expansive thinking and creativity. Ultimately this can result in sub-optimal work, lost time, and wasted money.

While research shows that a moderate amount of arousal can lead to motivation, feeling present and safe helps us optimize our creative potential. Being in a state of safety is especially important for teams trying to bring something new into the world through design thinking and innovation practices.
Moving from a threatened state to a safe state is a choice. We call this Owning Your Experience.
Owning Your Experience is a four-part process.

So if our brains are wired to keep us in a threatened state, what can we do to eliminate our stress and tension? Well, short of brain surgery, there aren’t many options. And we wouldn’t want to eliminate this part of our brains anyway. It helps us survive! The idea isn’t to eliminate this natural reaction but to recognize when it is occurring and shift back to a safe state.

We’ve found that a simple four-part process can help us do just that. This is the essence of “Owning Your Experience.”

01 LOCATE
Determine if you’re in a threatened state or a safe state at any given moment.

02 INQUIRE
Get curious about how you’ve landed exactly where you are.

03 ACCEPT
Appreciate yourself for having gotten exactly where you are.

04 SHIFT
Take a step to move back to safety.
At any given moment each of us is either in a safe state or in a threatened state. Using a simple model to make this theory tangible, we can say at any moment each of us is either “above the line” or “below the line.” Effective innovators recognize when they’re below the line and “shift” back above. Ineffective innovators stay below the line and recycle their tension.

**Locating yourself**

Identifying “where you are now” is the first step to shift from a threatened state back to safety.

**SAFE STATE**
- Curious
- Driven by vision
- Learning focused
- Open
- Present

**THREATENED STATE**
- Defensive
- Driven by fear
- Focused on proving you’re right
- Closed
- Distracted

**BEHAVIORS**
- Listening attentively
- Maintaining curiosity
- Recognizing feelings
- Speaking unarguably
- Differentiating between facts and stories
- Questioning beliefs
- Playing
- Finding appreciation
- Breathing easily

**THOUGHTS**
- What can I learn from this?
- How can the opposite of my story be true?
- I appreciate you for...
- I choose to...
- How are they my ally?
- How can everyone win?
- I’m lacking nothing.
- This doesn’t need to be serious.
- Revealing is better than withholding.

**STEP 01**
- Take a moment to scan the list of behaviors and thoughts below. Now identify which of them are showing up for you around a particular issue you’re facing.

**STEP 02**
- If you’re experiencing any behaviors or thoughts from below the line, then that’s where you are: below the line! In our experience just simply acknowledging we’re below the line can help break us out of our threatened state.

**SAFE STATE ABOVE THE LINE**

**THREATENED STATE BELOW THE LINE**
Walking the threat triangle

**STEP 01**
Find a room with some space and place three cards or sticky notes on the floor (one for each role: Victim, Hunter, Hero).

**STEP 02**
Take two minutes to walk from card to card, and act out how you’re playing each role around your issue. Ham it up! Get as dramatic and over-the-top as you can. Rather than talking about how you are a Victim, Hunter, and Hero, speak as the role itself. The more you amplify how you’re acting, the clearer it will become how you’re creating your issue.

**STEP 03**
At the end of your two minutes, reflect on your pattern for moving from one role to the next. What did you learn? What do you see differently about your issue now? Note: If space is limited, this process can be done by typing or journaling.

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**INQUIRE**

If we know we’re in a threatened state, or below the line, understanding what we’re fearing is the next step in releasing it. In 1968 psychologist Dr. Stephen Karpman concluded that when we feel threatened, our fight, flight, freeze instincts are acted out by behaving in three common ways. We call falling into these primary behaviors becoming a Victim, Hunter, and Hero.

**HUNTER**

**TRAITS**
Looks for someone to blame, including him/herself.

**COMMON PHRASES**
- “I’m not good enough.”
- “It’s all your fault.”
- “My way or the highway.”

**VICTIM**

**TRAITS**
Feels powerless, without any control.

**COMMON PHRASES**
- “It’s always this way.”
- “It’s not fair.”
- “Poor me.”

**HERO**

**TRAITS**
Rescues self or others, for temporary relief.

**COMMON PHRASES**
- “I’ll take care of it for you.”
- “It’s not that bad.”
- “I need a drink.”
Once we have clarity as to how we’ve reacted to the threat, the next step is to find a way to accept ourselves for creating it.

While it’s easy to judge the tension in our lives as “bad,” there’s always a good reason why we created it. If you take a look, you’ll see that all of our reactive behavior stems from a part of ourselves just trying to protect our security, control, or approval. And there are lots of benefits of being below the line! It feels good to think “I’m right.” People also report that they can get things done when they’re playing a Hunter. So the third step to Owning Your Experience is to identify what we’re getting from being below the line and find a way to accept ourselves for creating it. If we beat ourselves up for being below the line, it usually just drags us deeper into the muck.

Identifying the benefits of being below the line

We wouldn’t get stuck below the line if we didn’t get any benefits from being there. Understanding the upside for doing what we’re doing can help us build empathy for the threatened parts of ourselves that are just trying to keep us safe.

STEP 01
—
Take a moment to consider how being in a threatened state is working in your favor.

I get to avoid my core feelings, especially fear, sadness, and anger.
I get to stay connected with the people in my situation.
I get to feel the excitement and adrenaline.
I get to stay in this predictable pattern and avoid uncertainty of different choices.
It makes life interesting and will result in a fun story to tell.
I get to focus on someone else’s problems and avoid my own.
I get to avoid taking responsibility for my issues.
I get to be right about something.

STEP 02
—
Next, write down all of the other reasons you might benefit from creating this situation.

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Letter to self

When we’re below the line, a threatened part of our self is driving the bus. One common part that shows up for most of us is our inner critic. Striving for perfection, this part often gets caught up in thoughts and assumptions that likely aren’t true.

Helping our threatened parts understand there is no real danger allows them to loosen their grip and relax.

**STEP 01**
- Take a minute to check in with the part of yourself that feels threatened.

**STEP 02**
- Write a short letter to him or her.

  Consider these prompts:

  What words of support might that part want to hear?
  What might help that part feel a greater sense of safety and security?
  What’s really true? What stories or assumptions are driving this part that may be hard to recognize?

**STEP 03**
- Ask yourself, “Am I willing to accept there is just a scared part of me that feels threatened?”

  If your answer is no, take a minute to find something about this situation that you are willing to accept.

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Often times gaining self-awareness and acceptance is all it takes to shift from below the line to above. Sometimes a simple breathing exercise can do the trick. However, to make larger shifts around recurring patterns, the dissatisfaction of staying below the line must outweigh the resistance to change.

In Kathleen Dannemiller’s 1992 Formula For Change, change can only happen when Dissatisfaction x Vision + Knowledge of a First Step exceeds Resistance to Change.

For most of us, creating a new vision for what’s possible is easier than fully feeling the dissatisfaction of where we are now. Not fully taking responsibility for our dissatisfaction is what prevents us from making big shifts.

The next activity will move you closer to making large shifts by helping you connect with the dissatisfaction of staying below the line.

The key to embracing your dissatisfaction with your current state is to take responsibility for creating it. Innovators with high emotional intelligence ask themselves,

What am I REALLY committed to?

Rather than answering with what they want, they answer the question by highlighting the results they are actually achieving. For example:

“I’m committed to being anxious around my manager and living a life of exhaustion.”

As you begin to play with this concept don’t blame and shame yourself! The idea is simply to recognize the part of yourself that feels some threat to security, approval, or control. Then from a place of acceptance you can see if the dissatisfaction you’re experiencing outweighs the resistance to doing something different.

**STEP 01**

Write down the core complaint of an issue that is keeping you below the line.

**STEP 02**

In front of the issue, write “I’m committed to…”

Examples:

“I’m committed to not getting promoted.”

“I’m committed to living a life of exhaustion.”

“I’m committed to doing work that is unfulfilling.”

**STEP 03**

Write a list of all the ways you create those results.

What do you do or not do?

What is the exact sequence of steps you take?

What thoughts or beliefs do you hold on to?

**STEP 04**

Tell three people you trust what you’re unconsciously committed to.
Each of us has the power to recognize when we’re below the line and shift.

Owning Your Experience is a simple four-part process.

01 **LOCATE**
Determine if you’re in a threatened state or a safe state at any given moment.

02 **INQUIRE**
Get curious about how you’ve landed exactly where you are.

03 **ACCEPT**
Appreciate yourself for having gotten exactly where you are.

04 **SHIFT**
Take a step to move back to safety.

*Inspired by The Hendricks Institute*
Quick Shift Moves

There are many ways to shift back to presence from below the line. Here are a few that require only a few minutes of time and can be done just about anywhere.
FIND A SPACE
Find a space where you’ll be comfortable closing your eyes and sitting silently. This can be a conference room, your desk, a bench outside, or any other place.

BREATHE, HOLD, EXHALE
Breathe in slowly for four seconds (through either your nose or mouth). Hold for four seconds. Exhale for four seconds. Stay still with empty lungs for four seconds.

REPEAT
Repeat for two minutes or until you feel a shift back to presence.

4 x 4 x 4 x 4 breathing
When we’re in a threatened state, our breathing shallows, and the oxygen level in our blood drops. Resetting our blood chemistry is the quickest way to move out of a reactive fight or flight state and back above the line to safety.
STEP 01
——
Identify the negative story, belief, or assumption that is creating tension.

i.e. “Our customer thinks I’m not smart enough to lead this engagement.”

STEP 02
——
Ponder the question: How might the OPPOSITE of the story I’m making up about this situation be as true or truer?

i.e. “How might our customer think I’m more than smart enough to lead this engagement?”

STEP 03
——
Find at least three reasons why, and write them down.

STEP 04
——
Identify additional stories, beliefs, or assumptions, and repeat steps 1-3 until you feel a shift back above the line.

Debunk your story

Human beings are wired to create stories and interpretations of what’s going on around us.

This autonomic process helps us avoid danger. The problem, however, is that we’re often wrong, which commonly creates all kinds of unnecessary stress and tension in our lives.

Exploring how the opposite of our stories is true is a speedy method for releasing their grip.

Is it REALLY true?
With embracing what’s actually true comes an opportunity to shift back above the line. Every event at work, and in life, comes with learnings if you choose to see them.

Finding the gift in front of you

For most of us, it’s easy to get stuck focusing on what’s “wrong” with any given situation. It’s also easy to get stuck fantasizing about what “should have” occurred.

“Our customer should have bought what we were selling!”
“I should have gotten a promotion!”
“My teammate should stop being so inconsiderate!”

What’s really true is that your customer didn’t buy what you were selling, you didn’t get a promotion, and your teammate is doing whatever she’s doing. AND, here you are!

To shift back to above the line, answer the following questions:

What can I learn from this situation?
How might what happened be absolutely perfect?
What’s the real gift this situation has to offer me?
Body listening

Most innovators are good at “figuring things out.” While most of that puzzle solving happens in our heads, often our bodies have all the answers. If your brain falls short, take a moment and see what wisdom your body has for you.

**STEP 01**
—
Scan your body looking for any sensation.

**STEP 02**
—
Describe each sensation you notice using words that end with “ing” (aching, pulling, tingling, etc.).

**STEP 03**
—
Map your physical sensations to a feeling state (sadness, anger, fear, joy, creative feelings).

**STEP 04**
—
Using the questions to the right, ask what is trying to happen within yourself.

**ANGER**
—
Jaw
Head
Neck
Shoulders
Back

**FEAR**
—
Belly

**CREATIVE FEELINGS**
—
Pelvis
Groin

**SADNESS**
—
Eyes
Throat
Chest

**JOY**
—
Core
Spine

**CREATIVE FEELINGS**
—
Pelvis
Groin

**SADNESS**
What wants to be let go of or mourned?

**ANGER**
What wants to be stopped, changed, ended?

**FEAR**
What wants to be known?

**JOY**
What wants to be celebrated?

**CREATIVE FEELINGS**
What wants to be created?
Find additional resources to help you work differently at:
salesforce.com/workdifferently