

WRITE YOURSELF INTO YOUR *Dreams*

Chapter 10 ELS Written Exercise

Version 1.20

Before you begin, create a sacred, comfortable space to work. Turn off your devices and make sure you won't be interrupted for at least an hour. Open your *My ELS* document, read your ELS Intention and update it if needed, and then complete the following:

1. Make a list of the Old Messages in your ELS using the Instructions for Identifying Your Old Messages, under the header "Message List."
2. For each Old Message on your list, create a New Message to counteract it, following the Instructions for Crafting Your New Messages.
3. Combine and distill your Message List until you have three essential sets.
4. Have a trusted friend or writing partner provide you with feedback on your Message List, making sure that you followed both sets of instructions from this chapter.
5. Add any significant breakthroughs or results that you experience under the Breakthroughs and Results area of your *My ELS* document.

Instructions for Identifying Your Old Messages

Here's how to find the Old Messages in your ELS:

1. LOOK FOR EXPLICIT OLD MESSAGES.

Some Old Messages will be simple and easy to find, because they're written verbatim in your ELS, right after the experiences that seem to provide evidence for why they're true. For example, you may follow a heartbreaking account of how you were cheated on for the third time with the Old Message, *Men suck*. Or you may follow a grisly description of a particularly rough chapter in your life with the Old Message, *Life is hard*. Or you may follow a series of traumatic events with the Old Message, *Bad things always happen to me*. Any such negative, overarching statements about the story of your life that feel like "facts" you need to resign yourself to are contenders for the three essential Old Messages on your Message List.

2. LOOK FOR IMPLIED OLD MESSAGES.

Some Old Messages in your story are implied rather than stated, so you have to do a little digging and contemplation to find them. Whenever you notice a negative repeating pattern in your story, ask yourself what Old Message is held inside of it. I noticed a prominent pattern in my client Melissa's story of things taking a sudden turn for the worse, right after things started getting better. She wrote about the time that she was excited to go on vacation with her family, because they'd never been able to afford a vacation before, right before describing how they had to return home early because their dog was injured in a fishing accident. Then she wrote about how excited her family was to buy a new house, which turned out to have a laundry list of unforeseen problems. The hidden Old Message in her story was, *Every time things start to get good, the other shoe drops*.

3. CONSIDER THE MEANING YOU HAVE ASSIGNED TO NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES.

Old Messages can also make their way into your story through negative assumptions you make about yourself as a result of bad things that have happened to you. If you see a memory in your ELS that feels heavy and significant, ask yourself, *What negative belief do I have about myself, or about life, as a result of this experience?* One of my clients had this line in his ELS about his first memory: *When I was two, my mom left me alone in the family station wagon, which then rolled down the driveway and into the road*. I knew that there had to be a hidden Old Message connected to that experience, because it was his first memory, and also because it was significant, negative, and scary. I asked him what negative belief he imagined he had about himself as a result of the experience, and his response revealed the hidden Old Message that, *I am easily forgotten*.

4. LOOK FOR PLACES WHERE YOU CONTRADICT YOURSELF.

If you notice a place in your ELS where you contradict something you wrote elsewhere in the story, that's a sign of a hidden Old Message. For example, let's say your parents had an unhealthy marriage and you describe their relationship in a way that makes marriage sound like a prison sentence. Then, toward the end of your story, you describe your dream of marrying your soulmate and living happily ever after. The Old Message you'd be

unconsciously telling yourself about your parents' marriage would be at odds with the message that you'd be *trying* to tell yourself about what marriage could be for you. In this case, it would be important to identify the Old Message you're telling yourself about marriage, which might be, *Marriage is a prison sentence*, so that it can evolve into a New Message that supports your dream, like, *Marriage is a liberating blessing*.

5. REVISIT YOUR CHAPTER 4 ELS WRITTEN EXERCISE RESPONSES.

Many of the Old Messages in your ELS will make their way into your story through your parents' influence. Look back at your ELS Written Exercise for chapter 4 and ask yourself if you see any Old Messages in your responses that are connected to repeating patterns in your ELS. For example, if your dad didn't meet your need for attention, because he rarely spent time with you, you may have come to believe the Old Message that, *I have to work really hard to get attention*, and thus attract romantic partners who also rarely spend time with you. Or if your mom often said, "What is wrong with you?!" you may have adopted the Old Message that, *Something is wrong with me*.

6. PAY ATTENTION TO MEMORIES THAT COME TO MIND AS YOU EDIT.

Sometimes as you're working on your Message List, a memory will come to mind of an experience that isn't currently in your ELS, because it carries a powerful Old Message inside of it that your mind wants you to become aware of. This happened to me once: My dream was to make a bigger impact with the work that I do, and while I was working on my Message List, I suddenly remembered the time that Mrs. Bivens, my middle school cheerleading coach, said to me, "You don't have what it takes to be a leader." Her words became an implied Old Message in my story that, *I don't have what it takes to be a leader*. This Old Message unconsciously directed my thoughts and influenced my actions for decades—causing me to gravitate toward situations where my leadership skills were judged or overpowered. When I realized that it was operating behind the scenes in my story, I evolved it into, *I'm a natural leader*. So, if seemingly random memories arise while working on your Message List, please take the time to reflect on what Old Message your mind is trying to reveal to you.

7. NOTICE ANY OLD MESSAGES THAT YOU ABSORBED FROM POPULAR CULTURE.

If you mention a story from popular culture in your ELS that had a big impact on you, it's likely that you wrote about it because an Old Message from that story was adopted into your own. Ask yourself, *What Old Message from this story might have become absorbed into mine?* For example, one of my clients wrote in her ELS about watching *Les Misérables* on Broadway when she was six years old. She resonated so strongly with the character Éponine, who didn't get to be with the man she loved, that she adopted the Old Message that was governing Éponine's story into her own story, *I don't get to be with the man I love*.

8. LOOK FOR OLD MESSAGES IN YOUR FAIRY TALE FREEWRITE.

Your Chapter 7 ELS Written Exercise is a great place to look for potential Old Messages. Ask yourself what Old Message was governing the main character in your Fairy Tale Freewrite (who represents you) before overcoming their challenge. For example, one of my clients wrote her Fairy Tale Freewrite about a monster-man

that she was able to free herself from using magic. The Old Message in her Fairy Tale Freewrite, which was also present in her ELS, was, *Men are monsters*. Using the instructions in the following section, she was able to transform that Old Message into the New Message that, *Men are angels*.

Instructions for Crafting Your New Messages

Even though Old Messages feel like irrefutable truths, they can change in an instant. For each Old Message you identify, you will create an equally powerful and opposite New Message to reverse it. Your New Messages will describe reality as you *would like it to be*, and thus represent a very different reality from the one you've been experiencing.

1. WRITE YOUR NEW MESSAGES IN PRESENT, POSITIVE LANGUAGE.

Make sure that you write your New Messages in present, positive language, as if they are *already* true. For example, if your Old Message is, *I'm unlovable*, your New Message would be, *I am lovable*, rather than, *I want to be lovable*, or, *One day I will feel lovable*. If your Old Message is, *I'm always alone*, your New Message would be, *I am infinitely loved and supported*, rather than, *One day I might not be alone*.

2. CONVERT YOUR OLD MESSAGES WORD-FOR-WORD.

The best way to create a New Message is by converting its Old Message counterpart word-for-word. For example, if your Old Message is, *Life is hard*, an ideal New Message would be, *Life is easy* or *Life is fun*, because the subjects are the same and the sentence structures are parallel. Similarly, if your Old Message is, *Money brings out the worst in people*, an ideal New Message would be, *Money brings out the best in people*.

3. MAKE SURE YOUR NEW MESSAGE IS THE SAME LENGTH AS YOUR OLD MESSAGE.

When converting your Old Messages, it's common to come up with New Messages that are a lot longer and wordier than the Old Messages they're meant to replace, which makes the New Message less powerful. For example, you might try to replace an Old Message like, *Men suck*, with a New Message like, *Men can be okay if you are able to find one who's trustworthy*. But an ideal New Message is simply, *Men are wonderful*.

4. MAKE SURE YOUR NEW MESSAGE IS MORE COMPELLING THAN YOUR OLD MESSAGE.

It's important to compare the power of each of your Old Messages with the power of their New Message replacements, before considering your Message List complete. For example, the Old Message, *I'm doomed for failure*, is very powerful, and your New Message needs to be even more powerful to reverse it. A New Message like, *I'm capable of succeeding*, wouldn't be strong enough. To fully reverse, *I'm doomed for failure*, you would need a New Message like, *I'm destined for success*.

5. STRETCH YOURSELF TO WRITE YOUR ABSOLUTE IDEAL.

In order for a New Message to change your life in a positive way, it has to describe a reality that is *different* from the one you've been living. You'll know that you've successfully achieved that when your New Message feels

exciting, but untrue. Anytime I'm working with a client and they feel stuck coming up with a New Message, I ask them, "If a genie fell from the sky right now and could grant your any wish, what New Message would you ask for, to rule over the story of your life?" When you answer that question honestly, you'll have your ideal New Message every time.

6. MAKE SURE THE OLD MESSAGE COULD NOT COEXIST WITH THE NEW MESSAGE.

You will know that a New Message is able to fully counteract an Old Message when it would be impossible for the Old Message and New Message to be true at the same time. One of my clients had an Old Message that, *Others have control over me*. In reversing that, she came up with a New Message that, *I have control over myself*. And while that New Message is on the same subject, is the same length, and is a direct opposite of the Old Message, both the Old Message and the New Message *could* be true at the same time. We talked it through and came up with the New Message that, *Nothing is more powerful than my connection to myself*, which described a reality in which it was impossible for anyone to have more control over her than she did. When a New Message fully names your ideal in this way, your Old Message can simply no longer be true.

7. DON'T BE LIMITED BY CULTURAL NORMS.

Just as you have the power to upgrade your parental modeling through story, you have the power to upgrade your *cultural* modeling through story. And evolving the messages in your story is, in my opinion, the most powerful way to do that. There are indigenous peoples around the world who live by completely different rules than people in our culture do—ideals like, *Everyone is accepted and lovable*, *We honor one another's needs*, and *People are good*. We can look to, and emulate, those aspects of their model that feel right and good through the creation of New Messages—no matter how impossible it may seem for those New Messages to be true in *our* culture. If a New Message feels good to you, and you would *like* it to be true, it *can* be and it deserves a home in your story.

Joseph Campbell named his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to highlight the fact that each one of us is living out the same overarching story in their own unique way. When helping clients clarify their Message Lists, I'm often fascinated by this truth, which is evident in the parallel messages I see from one client to another, even as the stories that contain those messages are unique. Because of our inherent interconnection, you can benefit from looking at the work that others have already done on their own messages. In the ELS Resource Bank, I provide you with a list of common Old and New Messages that you can adopt—word-for-word or adapted—if they resonate and feel relevant to your own story.