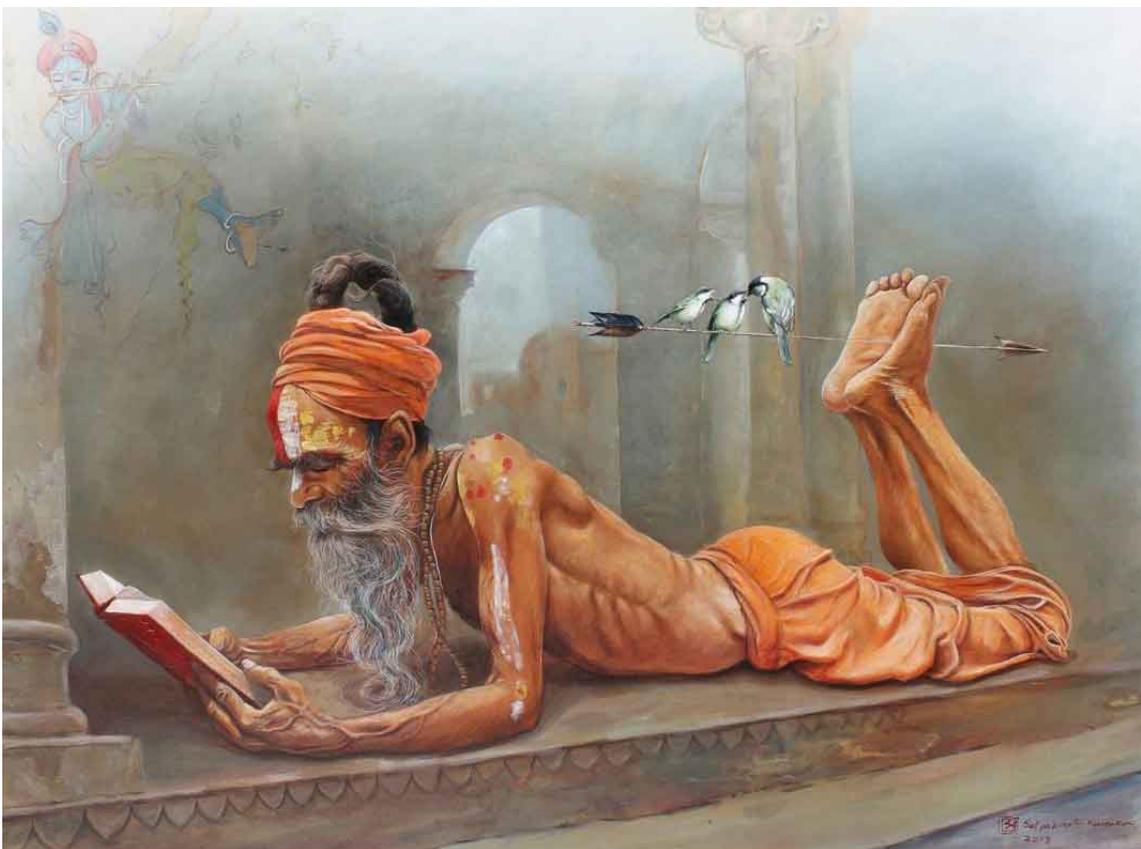


# HOW TO MAKE SELF-DEVELOPMENT PAY OFF

A travel guide for navigating your search to stop thinking  
excessively towards a finish line

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## Preface

This is not a self-development book, but a method to find the right book or practice out of the many options you already have at your disposal. In fact, when I was looking for it myself, there were so many options (60,000+ according to Amazon) that it seemed almost impossible to find the right one. Years of unsatisfying trial-and-error triggered me to go all-in. It ended my search, but on hindsight I noticed the approach doesn't have to be as radical as mine was.

Knowing how much I could have used a roadmap like this, I felt inclined to write one, for those of you on a similar journey with similar challenges. While my approach is a logical one, the starting point is that neither logic (or science) nor our feeling alone can show us what's the right approach for you. Neither can I or anyone else tell you which book or teacher is 'the best'. But I can help you in finding it out yourself.

It is an instruction manual. As such, it may feel a bit clinical at times. Nonetheless, keep in mind that it was written from the heart. Each part is structured into three segments: what to do, how to do it, and why doing it would make sense.

The "why"- segment is always optional; if the instruction resonates, you have the liberty to skip it and go ahead. It's only included for those with an eager mind that wants to understand everything - a group I believe is somewhat underserved when it comes to self-development. If that's you, you can read extensively about my line of reasoning. Don't take it for granted; convince yourself by seeing the connection between the proposed actions and the problem of finding a suitable book or practice for your self-development.

Either way, I hope you'll find something of value in it.

Richard van der Linde  
February 2020

## Introduction to the three steps

**"Ours is in the trying. The rest is not our  
business"**

*~T.S. Eliot*

Every decision we make, from deciding what to eat to choosing a book for self-development, is based on how we believe it will make us feel. That makes two things very relevant: how would we *ultimately* prefer to feel and how do we believe this comes about? Every writer, every teacher and in fact every person has an answer to it. And whether or not these beliefs are correct, to act upon your *actual* beliefs is what I prefer to call **authenticity**.

Logically, it makes perfect sense to act upon our own beliefs, as after all, that's what we really believe would give us the best outcome. Then why doesn't everybody always act authentically? The premise of this guide is that not being fully aware of your beliefs make it more difficult to act upon them. And moreover, acting upon your beliefs doesn't necessarily mean your decisions are always pleasant or comfortable – it can be (too) challenging to do so. As such, you may recognize there's also an emotional incentive to not being fully aware of your beliefs.

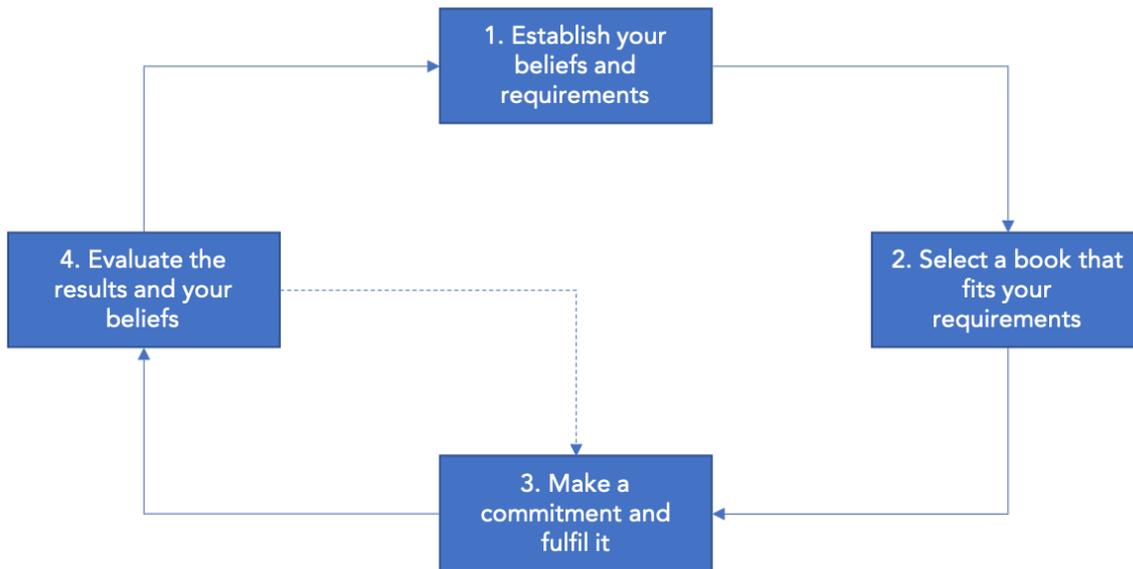
Since you're reading this, it's safe to presume you've not arrived at what you believe to be the ultimate achievement in life *feeling-wise*. Regardless if you're just starting this journey or have tried many books and practices already: your challenge is to either become more aware of your beliefs and/or to act more upon them. Even if you have an intuitive approach to life. Because, again:

*Those beliefs are what **you really believe** to be the best approach to get the most desirable result.*

That's why no book or practice has proven to work for everybody, including the popular disciplines such as yoga, mindfulness or positive thinking. What will work for you, depends on your beliefs – either directly, or indirectly by refining those beliefs.

The next chapters provide a method to a) increase your awareness of your beliefs (and show you how to keep increasing it further) and b) how it becomes easier to act upon those beliefs. Furthermore, we'll zoom in on finding the essence of books and practices, to select a suitable one and how to commit to it in a safe and fruitful manner. It's presented as a cycle of steps, to refine your beliefs, if necessary, but ultimately always ending at the point of satisfaction.

## The Self-Development Cycle



Just like any method, this is only a tool to make a little head start in the process of acquiring a certain ability – in this case the ability to live by your own beliefs. After a while you can *drop it* as it will be ingrained and happens intuitively. And just like learning to drive a car or playing golf, you can do self-development without instructions either. It just becomes a different kind of process – one that may get stuck, sometimes forever.

So, I guess it depends on your beliefs if it feels right to take in the advice in the next few chapters. It worked for me and many others, but like with any methods or practice you'll choose:

*It depends on your beliefs if this guide will work for you too.*

You may use the following challenge, the first out of five, to decide if this is for you:

**Challenge #1:** now that you know what this book contains, will you commit yourself to try the following for at least one full cycle of the three steps involved? If you do, write it down somewhere you can see it.

## Step 1 of 3 – becoming (more) aware of what you believe

**"To know thyself is the beginning of all wisdom"**

~Socrates

### What:

This chapter explains how you become more familiar with your own beliefs, in order to put them into practice with selecting the right approach for your self-development.

### How:

Before looking at books and practices, answer the "Key Question" for knowing the beliefs you (knowingly or unknowingly) try to act upon in life.

*Key Question: "What would be the ultimate achievement from your self-development, why is that so and how do you believe this comes about"*

You can answer this as specifically as you like. Every person will have their own answer. But in self-development there are only two directions: towards Improvement (or more control) or towards Acceptance (of letting go of control). Which direction is the right one for you, hinges on your belief in free will, which answers the "why is that so"-part of the Key Question.



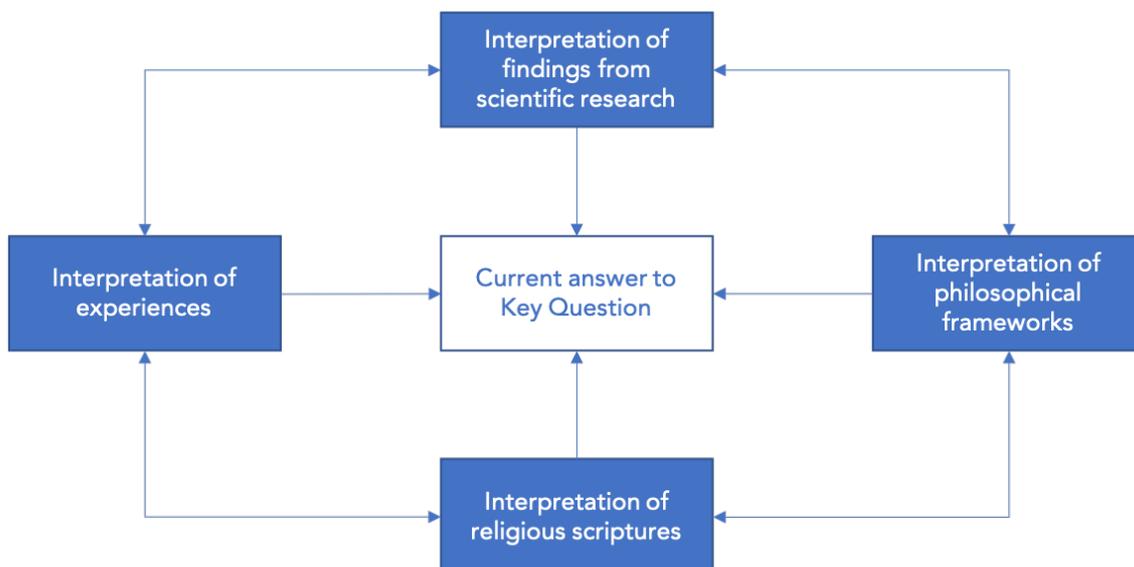
### Instruction:

1. On my website you'll find a [free test](#) that provides you the general direction of your beliefs and of your self-development. Use it as a starting point.
2. If you will, expand your self-knowledge by using the sub-questions in the appendix. The more you elaborate on your answer to the Key Question,

the easier it becomes to refine your beliefs after fulfilling your commitment and evaluating those beliefs specifically.

3. Any format will do, but it won't hurt to be inspired by one. My personal preference is a visual representation, by means of a flow chart. You may consider if this is for yourself too. See if you can convert your answers into such a "Belief Map".

### Belief Map



In the appendix you'll also find an elaboration on why this step would help you in getting more out of your self-development. Download it ([here!](#)) and read it, should you feel the need. Otherwise take on the next challenge right away. Upon finishing it, then and only then, move on to step 2.

**Challenge #2:** take at least 10 minutes to write down your answer to the Key Question. Use all the tools you like, including the test, the sub questions and my personal example. There's no right or wrong, just write down the beliefs you really have.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/s/qy2oIn9ltv3rx24/?dl=1>

## Step 2 of 3 – Choosing the right approach for you

**"None are so enslaved as those who believe  
they are free"**

~Goethe

### What:

Making use of your insight into your beliefs to choose a book or practice that is currently suitable for you.

### How:

Like you, any writer or teacher has an answer to the Key Question from step 1. As such, their advice is either in the direction of Improvement or Acceptance. You can find this direction by scanning these elements of a book:

- Back cover, Introduction & Index
- A summary or conclusion(s), if provided
- First and last paragraphs of each chapter
- Every highlighted part in the chapters

Scan the book, or a teacher's program, with the direct aim to answer the Key Question for them. When you do so, you'll learn if it's ultimately about Improvement or Acceptance.

You could say it makes sense to choose among writers or teachers that point in a direction you're going in. But in reality we may sometimes be attracted to sources of the other kind and it could actually pay off to move in that direction. Like how solving a Rubik's cube sometimes require we apparently mess up the coloured squares only more so. For example, when on a path of self-improvement, we may have to accept that one of our goals became unattainable. Or, when on a path of acceptance, we may get stuck on our inability to calm the mind and need to *accept* that our path requires *improvement* by for example meditation practice. It's the *intended ultimate direction* that counts.

Therefore, there are two ways to find the right books or practices for you:

- a) You could choose to pick up a book of any kind from suggestions or a general search, scan it to see if you like it, and if so, clearly outline how that fits into the ultimate direction of your self-development – the more daring and sometimes rewarding approach.
- b) You start from this list of self-development books and an indication of the direction they ultimately point and choose among the books that have a similar direction as you do.

Like with step 1, you'll find an elaboration in the appendix on why this step would help you in getting more out of your self-development. If you feel the need to read this first, go ahead. Otherwise take on the next challenge. When finished, then and only then, move on to step 3.

**Challenge #3:** choose the approach that appeals most, pick out a book and see if you can find its essence by answering the Key Question for its writer.

## Step 3 of 3 – Committing in a safe and fruitful manner

**"Wow, I really regret stepping out of my  
comfort zone"**

*~No one. Ever.*

### What:

This chapter explains how you can commit to a practice in a way that makes your efforts always lead to something of value, whether the approach works out as expected or not. This helps to get beyond the moments of doubt that always come with progress, while minimizing the risk of getting stuck on a practice that won't work for you.

### How:

Just like with the unsuitable approaches, those that work always bring along some tension when we reach the limits of what we're already capable of. That's equally so for practices about improvement and acceptance. Therefore, we should make a clear commitment before we engage in a book or practice, as we can't think clearly when we're halfway in the practice.

Instruction:

1. Write down what could be a clear and realistic commitment. This can be anything, from reading at least till a certain chapter to a certain duration and frequency of a practice.
2. Write down what you do it for;
  - a. In case of a book: what decision do you want to make, based on the output of your commitment?
  - b. In case of a practice: what result do you expect from your commitment to this practice?
3. Write down your commitment to your evaluation;
  - a. Which pitfalls may your commitment bring along? Could it impede your ability for critical thinking?
  - b. If so, how can you overcome this? (E.g. pre-define a cooling down period at the end of your commitment.)
4. Write a note to yourself on why you should not evaluate during your commitment and neither go an inch beyond your commitment without evaluating. (E.g. the "why"-segment of this step provides some inspiration.)

Like with the previous two steps, you'll find an elaboration in the appendix on why this step would help you in getting more out of your self-development. If you feel the need to read this first, go ahead. Otherwise take on the next challenge. When finished, then and only then, move on to the final instruction in the conclusion.

**Challenge #4:** Set the intention to execute the instruction above before a certain date.

## Conclusion – three steps, for as many cycles as you need

**"If you got the message, hang up the phone"**

*~Alan Watts*

When you follow these steps, it is not a guarantee that you'll end up straight away with whatever it is you desire. Still, you may share my view that this is the logical approach to get most out of self-development, because whatever the outcome: you'll be acting authentically. Logically, that should pay off, either directly or indirectly.

Especially when you incorporate your findings in your model of beliefs, results will get better and better. Sometimes by fulfilling desires, other times by dissolving them. Because when your beliefs are made explicit, it's easier to see which are validated and which are falsified when you evaluate.

Therefore, I like to end with a final "what", for evaluating your beliefs and setting a new cycle of the previous three steps in motion.

### What:

1. Write down your general feeling about the experience from your commitment (e.g. I really like the book and feel like trying out the practice, or after 10 days of practice I feel some change, but not like I expected it)
2. Have a look at your answer to the Key Question and write down how your experience relates to it – does it confirm or contradict (parts of) it? (This comes down to a repetition of the process in step 1)
3. Ask yourself if you feel you want to continue this Self-Development Cycle or self-development in general. Then either:
  - a. If you want to continue self-development, and intend to continue the practice, first have a look at your commitment and write down if there is a theoretical (not actual) possibility that your intention is the result of one of the pitfalls. Regardless, commit yourself to any safe guards you set up for yourself, to overcome any blind spots (e.g. the cooling down period). If you still feel like it, set a new commitment by the instructions of step 3.
  - b. If you want to continue self-development, but don't intend to continue the practice: start again with the instructions in step 2.
  - c. If you don't want to continue self-development: let go of the cycle and/or self-development, and simply live.

## Parting words

So much for it. I wish you well. Of course there is a 'why' section in the appendix for the closing chapter as well. As stated at the end of step 1, you can download it [here](#)<sup>2</sup>. It was separated for practical reasons.

This guide is intended to be sufficient on its own, but in case you require any assistance with one of these steps - for example with answering the Key Question or to check your commitment before you engage - have a look at my website for the options I offer.

Best of luck,

Richard

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/s/qy2oIn9ltv3rx24/?dl=1>