

LOOKING FOR A COACH OR MENTOR? TRY THIS FIRST.

A COMPANION TO “BEFORE YOU HIRE A COACH”

THREE PRACTICAL EXERCISES

You may be looking for someone because something has stopped working, or you're overwhelmed, or you just need independent support from someone with depth and experience.

You think you want to leave your job. You can't really talk to anyone about what's going on. Or the more awkward truth is that, deep down, you might not even know what you want.

A coach can ask great probing questions. A good mentor can give you the benefit of decades in a particular field. I've been both, and both can be useful. But before you appoint anyone to help you move forward, it's worth checking whether the direction you're about to take is actually yours — and whether the problem you think you have is the real one.

So here are three things you can do. No acronyms, no personality test, no heroic 4am routine. Just do them properly and see what happens.

You do not have to complete all three.

Start with the one that sounds most like you if that is all you have time for.

But the three together do something more useful. They give you three different views of the same landscape: what you say you want, what changes when you change where you are standing, and how much of what you are carrying is actually yours.

One exercise may shift something. Do all three and you may start to see a much clearer pattern.

That is the point: change the vantage point, widen the context, then let your own judgement work with better information.

If you would rather talk before doing any of this, that is completely fine. The workbook is not homework and you do not need to complete it before speaking with me.

Book a Private Conversation

<https://leocunningham.com/conversation>

THE THREE EXERCISES

1	I think I want to leave my job
2	I can't really talk to anyone about this
3	I don't know what I want anymore
→	Put The Three Views Together

Your notes are yours. You do not need to send them to me or anyone else.

Leo Cunningham

Private Direction

1. "I THINK I WANT TO LEAVE MY JOB"

"I want to leave" sounds pretty clear, doesn't it. It feels like the decision is just sitting there waiting to be made.

Maybe. But maybe you've locked yourself into a solution for the wrong problem.

Take a sheet of paper and write at the top:

"I want to leave my job."

Circle it. Draw a short line down and label it:

"What would that give me?"

Write the first honest answer, not the best-sounding one. It might be freedom. Relief. More control. Time. Respect. It could simply be: I'd stop dreading Monday. Or: I wouldn't have to put up with my boss, or the board.

Circle it. Draw another line down, same label: "What would that give me?" Answer it.

If your first answer was "more control", the next might be "I could decide how I spend my time." Ask again.

Perhaps: "I'd feel as though my life was mine again."

Keep going until the answers stop sounding like job descriptions and start sounding like something that actually matters to you. Three to five rounds is usually enough. Don't force more just because somebody once invented a method with ten steps.

Then stop.

You should have a descending list that looks like a ladder. Your original statement at the top, and an underlying need nearer the bottom.

YOUR LADDER

I want to leave my job

↓
What would that give me?

↓
What would that give me?

↓
What would that give me?

↓
What would that give me?

NOW GO BACK UP THE LADDER

Go back to each rung, just under the problem statement, and ask:

What else could give me some of this?

If the real need is authority, could you renegotiate your remit, remove a layer of interference, lead a new division or build something alongside the current role?

If the need is relief, is the job the problem? Or is it one client, one relationship, the travel, the debt, or the way you've made yourself permanently available?

If the need is respect, would a new employer solve it? Or would you carry the same arrangement into a more expensive office?

Write at least three alternative routes. One may still be leaving. Fine. But now leaving has to compete with other ways of meeting the actual requirement.

THREE OTHER ROUTES

1.

2.

3.

SO WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

You separated the stated objective from the result you want it to produce.

Capable people are very good at executing a decision once it's been named. I include myself in that, we've been doing it for years, haven't we. And we can become extremely efficient at solving the wrong problem.

You can still leave your job. But if you do, you'll go with a reason that's genuinely yours, not "I need to get out" and a hope that things change.

WHAT DID I NOTICE?

2. "I CAN'T REALLY TALK TO ANYONE ABOUT THIS"

Sometimes the difficulty isn't a lack of people. You have colleagues, friends, a partner, maybe even advisers. The difficulty is that everyone is already inside the situation.

They know you as the boss, the provider, the dependable one, the difficult one, the successful one, the man who always sorts it out. Their questions arrive with history attached. And so do your answers...

Try this physically. Not in your head, and not by shuffling between three chairs in the same room.

Choose three genuinely different environments:

- Your usual place of work — or the exact place where the issue lives.
- Somewhere busy, where nobody knows you. A station, a shopping centre, a packed coffee shop. The requirement is people and a bit of chaos.
- Somewhere open and quiet. A park, an empty library, a hilltop, a large church, the coast. Not sat in a car in the countryside — you get out and you move.

Each one must be genuinely different in character, not just in postcode.

Choose one question and keep it plain:

What is the real problem here?

Or:

What am I not saying about this?

Go to each place with a notebook. Ask the one plain question and make a few short notes — including how you felt about the problem in that spot. About twenty minutes in each. Ideally, get them done within 24–48 hours.

PLACE ONE — WHERE THE ISSUE LIVES

What did I notice?

PLACE TWO — BUSY / ANONYMOUS / A BIT OF CHAOS

What changed?

PLACE THREE — OPEN / QUIET / EXPANSIVE

What changed again?

THEN LOOK BACK AT YOUR NOTES

Underline what stayed the same and what changed. Mark what felt more important in one place and less in another — or what strangely became irrelevant.

One final question:

Which of these feels closest to what I actually know about the problem?

SO WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

The facts stayed the same. Your position changed.

The environment affects your attention, your language, your sense of scale, and what feels permissible to say. In the office you think operationally. In a busy public place you're less contained by the suit you've been wearing for too long, and less inside the sense of your own importance. In the open, the thing that filled a room becomes one part of a much larger picture.

This isn't theatre or novelty for its own sake. Much of my working life has been about helping people see problems differently and make better judgements. Movement gives you information and context that more thinking, from the same contained position, simply cannot.

So if you'd stayed where you usually sit to think about this — which answer would you have given?

And what would you have missed?

3. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT ANYMORE"

I've seen this one many times and it's usually after a man has decided that he knew exactly what he wanted, and found out later it was ill-conceived.

It tends to arrive after years of wanting and getting things quite effectively.

You wanted the role, the business, the house, the reputation, the security, the numbers in the bank. You got some of it. Maybe rather a lot of it. But your operating system kept running long after the original reason had disappeared.

So firstly, let's remove the audience.

This is an exercise you might want to do at home, unless you fancy explaining to the office why you're loading dumbbells into a rucksack.

Get a backpack, satchel or bag you can carry comfortably.

Make a list of what you're carrying. Expectations. Responsibilities. Duties. People you are trying to impress, reassure, protect or prove something to. Your father. Your wife. Your children. Your business partner. Your boss. Your reputation. The standard of living you've created. The man everybody expects you to remain. The expectations you've placed on yourself.

Assign an object to each one and put it in the bag. Don't be silly with the weight, this isn't a fitness test.

Put it on and walk around for a few minutes. Notice what happens to your posture, breathing, stride and attention. You compensate automatically because of what you're carrying.

Then put the bag down.

The point isn't that a rucksack is some profound metaphor for life. It isn't — that's just a cliché. The useful part is simpler: load changes how we move. Not rocket science really is it? Unless you're a rocket scientist who's reading, then change the metaphor for brain surgery.

Now empty the bag one item at a time. For each one ask:

Is this something I have consciously chosen to carry with me, or is it something I have just adopted, inherited or simply continued carrying?

MAKE THREE PILES

MINE

BORROWED

NOT SURE

Let's not throw anything away just yet. Duties can be chosen. Responsibility can be deeply yours too. But you must separate the ones you truly own and the ones you obey, even partly.

Now go for a walk alone.

No phone. No watch. Nothing measuring the time, distance, heart rate or whether you've been productive.

Don't try to solve anything.

Just walk and notice what changes when, for half an hour, nobody is evaluating you and nothing is asking you to perform.

Then ask:

WHAT DO I WANT WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING?

How much of your present direction is yours, and how much comes from the accumulation of load?

This isn't Shangri-La, reach-for-the-sky life coaching. It is the questioning of an operating system that may have been running your life for years, and the beginning of taking control of it once more.

Now you have context.

PUT THE THREE VIEWS TOGETHER

You may have completed one exercise, or all three.

One is enough to tell you something.

But if you have done all three, don't rush past the fact that you have just looked at your life from three quite different positions.

The first asked whether the thing you say you want is actually the result you're after.

The second changed where you were standing and watched what happened to the problem.

The third removed some of the audience and asked how much of the load is genuinely yours.

Together they begin to widen the picture.

Not so somebody else can give you the right answer.

So your own judgement has more context to work with.

WHAT STAYED TRUE ACROSS ALL THREE?

WHAT CHANGED WHEN I CHANGED THE CONTEXT?

WHAT AM I ASSUMING THAT I HAVEN'T ACTUALLY CHECKED?

WHAT SEEMS GENUINELY MINE?

WHAT NOW DESERVES MY ATTENTION?

WHAT IS ONE SMALL, REVERSIBLE MOVE THAT WOULD GIVE ME MORE INFORMATION?

SO WHY PRIVATE DIRECTION?

These exercises may give you answers. What they cannot do is make the decision for you.

Their real value is that they give your judgement better ground to stand on — more context, more perspective and more than one way of looking at the same problem.

The laddering tests whether your declared goal is a stand-in for something deeper. The movement tests whether your judgement is being pinned by the position you keep viewing it from. Removing the audience tests whether the direction is genuinely owned.

Framing. Position. Influence. All three can bend your judgement before you've even started making the decision.

Coaching can be useful — it creates focus, accountability and movement. Mentoring can be useful when someone else's experience helps you dodge a known mistake or read unfamiliar ground. But if the outcome you actually want is stronger independent judgement, coaching or mentoring may not be enough on their own.

Private Direction brings the coaching and mentoring experience together with strategic planning, behavioural understanding, systems, lateral thinking, framing, physical perspective change, movement and real-world testing.

That might sound like a lot of engineering apparatus but in practice the purpose is simple: to improve your ability to see what's happening, judge it properly, and direct yourself.

There are times I'll tell a client what I think. My experience is there to be used. But if I become his answer machine, I make him more dependent at exactly the moment he needs to recover his own authority.

Good coaching can strengthen independent judgement. Private Direction makes that purpose explicit, combining conversation with strategic perspective, movement and real-world testing so the judgement is yours to take away.

Good help should leave you better able to see and decide for yourself.

That's the rock that Private Direction stands on.

You may now see more than you did at the beginning and still find it difficult to challenge your own interpretation, decide what deserves attention, or work out which thread is actually worth pulling.

That is where another person can be useful. Not to interpret your answers for you, but to challenge the frame, notice what you may still be missing and help you test what matters in the real world.

IF YOU'D RATHER TALK

If something here has raised a question you'd rather explore with me, you can book a private conversation.

Twenty minutes. Free, private and without obligation. Telephone or video. Nothing to prepare, and no requirement to finish the exercises.

Book a Private Conversation

<https://leocunningham.com/conversation>

How Private Direction Works

<https://leocunningham.com/how-it-works>

Leo Cunningham