

The Epithets For The Self Exercise

'Try not to exchange them for others. And if you should forfeit them, set about getting them back.'

- Marcus Aurelius



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Introduction

Do you have your own rules for life? Your own set of principles you steadfastly stick to in any situation and can default to when faced with tough choices?

You probably have a rough idea, but why not take the time to write them down? Having the main ones clarified and committed to paper will help you remember them. And remembering them can simplify your daily life. With a clear focus on your guiding principles you can quickly apply them and make decisions more easily. Decisions that reflect your character.

Marcus Aurelius called these “epithets for the self” and he noted his own in his Meditations: “Epithets for yourself: Upright. Modest. Straightforward. Sane. Cooperative. Disinterested. Try not to exchange them for others. And if you should forfeit them, set about getting them back.”

Try it yourself. Take a blank piece of paper, or [click here to download and print out the provided worksheet](#), and write down your own epithets. Then stick them up somewhere you’ll see them every day.

You don’t need to go into flowing descriptive detail about intricate aspects of the person you want to be. Keep it simple just like Marcus Aurelius did. Six words were enough for the most powerful man in the world at the time, the Roman Emperor, to define himself. Upright. Modest. Straightforward. Sane. Cooperative. Disinterested.

If we don’t define the qualities we want to have, how can we have them? How can we be the people we want to be? Plan then execute. First comes definition, then follows action. As Epictetus put it:

“First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.”

If you complete this exercise it would be great to see the epithets you come up with. Feel free to take a picture of them and post on social media (tag @whatisstoicism on Instagram, Twitter or

Facebook so I can see and share them!)



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Epithets For Yourself

"Epithets for yourself: Upright. Modest. Straightforward. Sane. Cooperative. Disinterested.

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-Marcus Aurelius

1. _____:

2. _____:

3. _____:

4. _____:

5. _____:

6. _____: