

[Home](#)

Dear Reader,

A friend of mine used to say that we don't own objects, they own us. This month's issue reflects on what we build our identity on. Food for thought, and you're invited to participate in this exercise.

Enjoy,

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

### **Important Note to Readers: LIM News goes LIVE!**

This month we are piloting a new interactive experiment with our LIM News readers. Dr. Isabel Rimanoczy will share her thoughts on the topic of the month, and we will open the microphone to have a dialogue with and among participants. Go to <http://www.limglobal.net/events.html> and register for a session on February 15 (February 16 for our friends in Asia-Pacific).

#### Quote of the Month

*"Learn from yesterday,  
live for today,  
hope for tomorrow."*

Author unknown

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## **What Is In Your Backpack?**

**by Isabel Rimanoczy**

A few days ago I went to the movies and watched "Up in the Air", a movie starring George Clooney, whose character, among his other responsibilities, runs a workshop-lecture entitled "What is in your backpack?" As part of this work, he invites the audience to follow him in doing an inventory of the things that they value and that they carry in this imaginary backpack. It contains your profession, your family, your car, your books, your house, your pet, your friends, your gadgets, your TV... The point he was trying to make is that this backpack can become a very heavy load to carry. His personal life in the movie role is an example of a life with a rather empty 'backpack': he spends most of his time traveling, so much that he has a minimalist apartment, no tight family relationships, no life-partner, no pets, no car, etc.

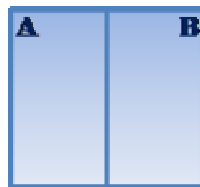
The movie made me reflect on an exercise I've been using in workshops to get clarity around our identity anchors. In the exercise, I begin writing a list of things that are normally an important part of our identity, things that play a role in who we are, how we think we are seen, or want to be seen.

This list includes, in no specific order:

House — life partner — car — neighborhood — job — profession — body — health — food — fashion — clothing style — sports — money — knowledge — authority — books — play — children — family — music — friends — pets — objects — citizenship — religion — spirituality — fame — authority — internet — cell phone — vacations — nature — hobby — camera — etc.

It's not an exhaustive list, and I invite the people in the audience to add to it.

After doing this list, I invite everyone to take a piece of paper and to draw a vertical line, forming two columns, A and B. (I invite you to do this exercise now!)



From the list I've written—plus any additions you wish to make—select those that are the most important elements for you personally, those which will make the "A" List. Include all the ones you consider important, those that really play a role in who you are, without which you wouldn't be you. Then select those that are important but not "A" list items, and place them in the "B" column, which now comprises the 'nice-to-have-but-I-won't-die-if-I-don't-have-them' items. Only write down those that mean something to you; you don't have to use items that don't apply to your case.

After everyone has completed the two lists, I invite them to review their "A" list, and to take out items that they consider should probably be on the 'nice-to-have' list. This requires them to ponder what is really important to them, to prioritize their list, and to identify what—on second thought—is actually a 'nice-to-have'. (If you're doing the exercise, take your time now to go through this step).

Depending on the size of the group, I will invite people to share their lists either in a small group, or to share it in the larger group.

Then I lead a discussion based on the following questions:

- How did it feel for me to do the second step?
- What did it mean to me to do the second step of the exercise? What were my thoughts as I moved specific items from A to B?
- What thoughts induced me to move them, and why did I not move the remaining ones?
- What other thoughts did this exercise generate?

If you're doing the exercise, I suggest you pause, take your journal and write down your reflections answering those questions. You will be surprised at your own discoveries.

### **Analysis**

This is a simple yet powerful exercise that challenges our beliefs, our unchecked assumptions and our personal value system. It also takes us into a journey of exploration of the "anchors" of our identity. People, objects, habits, and activities are part of our life, and they help us define who we are. We cling to them, we cherish them, we defend them, and we may even get into arguments or conflict fighting for them. We may feel offended when others attack some of them, because we feel they are what constitutes "me". We may even get into a depression when we lose some of these things to the "B" list, and feel that "there goes part of me"!

While this is merely an exercise, it frequently elicits passionate and emotional reactions. Just the thought of having to give away or to do without some of the items can be psychologically perturbing. What makes it worse is to realize that moving the car, our children, our job or our life partner into Column B may confront us with the fragility of our identity. We become aware of the degree to which we have become dependent on them. What is left of me if I don't have this job? What if I had amnesia and forgot everything I know? What if my partner vanished? If I lost my health?

The exercise also generates further reflections. What about the items we left on column A? What are they, and why did we defend them from migrating to column B? What does it mean that I made those choices? How is who I am rooted in those items? Since there are no guarantees in this life, it could happen that I would have to do without certain of them, God forbid. But if that happened, would that indeed mean the end of me? What of me would remain, if I could no longer have those items in the revised A list?

This exercise has the effect of pushing our imagination to the edge, of challenging our imaginary anchors and attachments, which we take as real components of our self, of our identity. What is our identity if not an aggregation of those items?

As a result of these reflections, sometimes the insight arises that we are more than a collection of belongings or a set of relationships. When this occurs, it can result in a profound experience of the deeper being, something transcendent, strong and powerful, yet quiet and silent at the same time.

### **Flying is not floating**

Going back to the movie, as Clooney's character gets to look deeper into his life, he becomes aware that his lack of physical and emotional attachments do in fact point up the emptiness of a shallow life, one with no meaningful connections to other people. His main focus has become a preference to stay "up in the air", ungrounded, and traveling from state to state. Gradually and painfully he recognizes the lack of balance and peacefulness in his existence, that something may indeed be missing in his life.

Having run my exercise several times, his recognition caught my attention. Is it possible to let go of the imaginary attachments — objects, habits, people — and still miss the more profound sense of being? Is it possible that our lives can remain empty and shallow even when we let go, when we reorder important aspects of our lives? Are we guaranteed to get in touch with the deeper and fulfilling experience of being?

I asked myself what shifts us in one direction, or in the other? Why is it that some people can achieve heightened awareness? Of touching their soul or having a transcendent glimpse of transcendence, floating at least for a moment in the essence of being, while others, like the person in this movie, just experience life as a void?

One of the answers may lie in the sense of interconnectedness. When we realize that we are not the objects we own or the relationships we have, it may be a shock, but another understanding may emerge: that even without those "attachments" there is something that remains, solid and meaningful. This experience of 'being' is broad because it is at the same time an experience of connectedness with all beings, and with nature. At that level of being, we can sense that we are all part of one whole. And this is what makes the first difference. We can experience the lack of attachments as a disconnect that creates feelings of emptiness, of something meaningful missing in our life. Or it can be experienced as a profound connection to everything that is. This is similar to certain meditative practices where the aim is a state where we are observing our thoughts but do not center on any particular one, where we are absolutely alert without being focused on anything in particular.

Now you may find that this has been a big leap, from an exercise to review what is important for us to meditate and experience the connection with all that is. Well, I find it interesting when I hear people say "I'm too busy to do meditation". It makes me wonder what treadmill we caught on, that we find it difficult just to sit and to be, for a few moments? After all, are we human doings or human beings?



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If you want more triggers for reflection, visit <http://isabelrimanoczy.blogspot.com>



LIM News is published by LIM LLC  
Editor: Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editing Support: Tony Pearson  
21205 Yacht Club Drive, Suite 708  
Aventura, FL 33180, USA  
Ph/Fax: +1 (305) 692-4586  
E-mail: [newsletter@LIMglobal.net](mailto:newsletter@LIMglobal.net)  
<http://www.LIMglobal.net>

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