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Dear Yale SOM Class of 2020,

As part of the Fall 1 Power and Politics course, you will complete the Reflected Best-Self Exercise (RBS). The RBS is designed to help you understand and see yourself at your best, based on your reflections on feedback from a diverse set of people. This multi-step process involves gathering data in the form of short anecdotes about times when you were at your best from a diverse set of your family, social, and work relationships. In the Power and Politics course, the RBS will be used to encourage you to develop a leadership style that is informed by and engages your own unique strengths as revealed by those who know you. For several years now, alumni have noted that this exercise was one of the most powerful experiences they had at SOM.

Please review carefully the following pages that detail how you will gather and analyze your RBS feedback. I look forward to discussing your key insights from this feedback and self-reflection experience during the Power and Politics course this fall. ***Before the class begins on August 27<sup>th</sup>, you need to complete Steps 1 and 2 of the Reflected Best-Self feedback exercise. Please read the instructions to ensure that you are on track for gathering your feedback and preparing to analyze it during the course.*** In the meantime, if you have any questions about the goals or implementation of this exercise, do not hesitate to contact me via email or telephone. My contact information is listed above.

Sincerely,

Michael Kraus

## Orientation to the Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise

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### **How will completing the RBS Feedback Exercise benefit my career?**

The RBS Feedback Exercise will give you an opportunity to (1) identify your personal strengths and capability to add value to organizations, (2) create a personal path to achieving power in organizations based upon the insight that your RBS feedback provides and, (3) enhance understanding about what kinds of work situations bring out the best in you.

### **How does the RBS Feedback Exercise differ from other forms of evaluation?**

The RBS Feedback Exercise is not a standard performance feedback evaluation. It differs from other performance feedback mechanisms in its explicit focus on understanding how people experience others when they leverage their strengths constructively. Traditional models of performance evaluation (such as 360-degree feedback and one-on-one performance appraisals) typically focus on identifying performance deficits and competency gaps, with action recommendations for eliminating or compensating for weaknesses and limitations. The RBS is deliberately positive in focus so that it encourages people to create a developmental agenda for leveraging their RBS in organizations, and team environments where others can engage their best-self, performing maximally from positions of strength.

### **What is the process for completing the RBS Feedback Exercise?**

You will complete the RBS in seven steps which are summarized here and explained in greater detail below:

**Step 1 (by August 1<sup>st</sup>):** Identify feedback providers for your RBS from diverse domains of work and social life.

**Step 2 (by August 3<sup>rd</sup>):** Solicit feedback from these relationship partners that will bring into focus your RBS portrait.

**Step 3 (~ August 27<sup>th</sup>):** Generate a self-portrait or description of your RBS, based on personal reflection.

**Step 4 (~August 27<sup>th</sup>):** Remind feedback partners about providing your RBS feedback.

**Step 5 (by September 7<sup>th</sup>):** Review RBS feedback, reflect, and generate themes for your RBS.

**Step 6 (by September 11<sup>th</sup>):** Revise your RBS self-portrait based on the feedback.

**Step 7 (on September 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>):** Debrief the RBS exercise in class.

## The Seven RBS Steps in Detail

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### **Step 1: Identify Best-Self Feedback Providers (by August 1st)**

The first step is to identify the individuals from whom you wish to solicit reflected best-self feedback. You may solicit feedback from whomever you choose. Those you ask for feedback may be classmates, work or community service colleagues, clients, personal friends, mentors and/or family members, at your discretion. **I recommend getting feedback from at least one person in each domain of your life**, so that you may receive well-rounded feedback. I do not stipulate how many people you should ask from each category. You may wish to consider whether you believe these people know you well enough to provide such feedback, but keep in mind that many people have observed you at your best when you didn't even realize that they were paying attention. This exercise works best when you have several examples of your best-self, so you can see what patterns emerge. We find that receiving feedback from 10 people is certainly ample, so be sure to ask enough people so that you will receive *at least* 10 responses. It is best to invite your respondents as early as possible. **Please note that I do not read or receive the feedback that is sent to you.** Rather, you receive the feedback and analyze the patterns, building your assignment from the relationship between your own best-self portrait and the one that is suggested by the set of feedback you received. This means that you can solicit feedback in several languages if that facilitates completing the exercise. I read the assignment, but not the specific feedback. Communicating this to your feedback providers will result in much more candid and frank feedback. If feedback providers think they are writing something for your professor, they tend to write something that sounds much more like a recommendation letter, and this is not at all helpful to you (or me). It's also not as much fun for them.

A few students panic at this point in the exercise, worrying that they'll be burning bridges if they go back to the same people who just wrote their business school recommendations to ask them to provide this very different kind of feedback. My advice is to cast a wider net – leave your manager and recommenders alone, if you prefer, but go to the person who worked on a team with you or to a person you've managed who you think knows you well. There is no need to tap the same small cadre of people for endless feedback involving recommendation letters and this – go to others instead. Think creatively – old friends from school, camp, or sports, childhood friends, colleagues from former jobs, a random uncle or aunt – students have even had their parents, siblings, partners, or in-laws write – *the broader you go, the richer the feedback.*

### **Step 2: Solicit Feedback from Others (by August 3rd)**

Send your selected contacts a personal request for reflected best-self feedback. You may include a personal note as well as the official request letter from me. In case they're helpful, sample letters are included in **Appendices 1 and 2**. We recommend allowing at least 21 days for people to respond to your request. Please personally handle any hard copy correspondences by mail or fax. **Again, their feedback goes to you, not me.**



### **Step 3: Create a Best-Self Portrait (~ August 27th)**

While you are awaiting your feedback, I ask you to engage in deep personal reflection about times when you were at your best. Specifically, I ask you to complete the “**RBS Self-Portrait**” assignment below. This page will guide you through the process of creating your own RBS Self-Portrait based on your conception of how you add value and make positive contributions. You will write three stories that stand out as times when you were at your best. Next, you will identify patterns or commonalities that arise across those incidents. You then use these observations of the patterns to compose a one- or two-paragraph best-self portrait. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU COMPLETE THIS STEP OF THE EXERCISE BEFORE YOU READ AND ANALYZE YOUR FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS.** Please refer to **Appendix 3** for an example of a Reflected Best-Self Portrait and for directions on how to format this assignment. While you won’t hand in your RBS self-portrait in class, you will draw on it for the leadership essay assignment.

### **Step 4: Feedback Check and Reminders (~ August 27th)**

Take the time now to complete a status check on the responses you have and have not received. At your discretion, call or email your contacts that have not yet provided feedback to remind them that the due date for their responses is nearing. Depending upon the circumstances surrounding particular response providers, you may decide not to send a reminder to certain people. If your responses are thin, invite others to participate so that you end up with enough feedback. **Please refrain from reading the feedback that you have already received until you reach Step 5!** This is the best way to preserve the impact of your feedback, by allowing you to take a “deep dive” into how others experience you at your best. Use your willpower – instead of reading responses as you receive them, hold off and immerse yourself in the feedback all at once.

### **Step 5: Review your Best-Self Feedback & Look for Themes (by September 7th)**

The next step involves analyzing your best-self stories to compose the Reflected Best-Self portrait. The feedback will include short descriptions of when the feedback provider saw you make positive contributions. Here, you will look for commonalities in your data across your feedback providers. Analyzing these critical incidents to identify commonalities will enhance your appreciation of the interaction between your personal characteristics (e.g., strengths and talents) and the situational features that enable you to achieve high performance. **Please refer to Appendix 4**

### **Step 6: Revised Best-Self Portrait (by September 11th)**

The sixth step involves revising the portrait of who you are at your best, incorporating others’ feedback with your own reflections. Your revised portrait should pull together the themes you identified in your feedback into a written description of the essence of your best-self. **Please refer to Appendix 4**

### **Step 7: Debrief Reflected Best-Self Exercise (on September 12th or 13th)**

Barring a schedule change, we will debrief the Reflected Best-Self Exercise in class on September 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>. During the class, you will have the opportunity to share your observations in large and small group discussions.

## RBS APPENDICES AND EXAMPLES

### APPENDIX 1 Sample Emails Requesting RBS Feedback

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- *You can get back in contact with old friends:*

Dear Sheila,

It's been a few years since we worked together on the Junior Achievers fundraising project. Can you believe how fast the time has passed? How are you and what have you been up to? I am taking a course on careers as part of my Yale SOM MBA program this fall. As part of the class, one of our assignments is to complete the "Reflected Best Self" Exercise. The exercise is part of a personal development theory that focuses on a person's strengths, and helps identify when and where these strengths come to light. Because this exercise requires input from people who know me and who might be able to recall a few moments where they saw me at my best, I thought I'd ask you if you might be able to help me with this assignment. Will you take a look at the "official" letter from Professor Michael Kraus that gives more details on how this exercise works? You would have until September 7th, 2018 to provide me with feedback. Please let me know as soon as you can if you think you will be able to help. Either way, I hope we can get back in touch soon!

All the best,

Karen

- *You can refresh connections with your mentors:*

Hello Dr. Jones,

I hope this message finds you well. Exciting things are happening with me. I am about to begin the MBA program at Yale School of Management. Thanks again for all of your support, encouragement and for the opportunities you gave me to grow and take on greater responsibilities. This fall, I am taking a course on careers. As part of the class, one of our assignments is to complete the "Reflected Best Self" Exercise. The exercise is part of a personal development theory that focuses on a person's strengths, and helps identify when and where these strengths come to light. Do you think you might be able to spend a half hour to write down three incidences where you saw me doing well—possibly what you might thought to have been my best? The idea of the project is to help us understand our talents and learn how to more deliberately use them to make a contribution. It's not just about getting people to tell us how great they think we are!

Thank you, Dr. Jones. You would have until September 7th, 2018 to send me your reply. Please let me know if you can provide me with your feedback in this time frame. I know your



schedule is quite busy, so I will certainly understand if you aren't able to help. I have attached an official email from Professor Michael Kraus to give you more details in case that's helpful.

Best,  
Jia Wei

## APPENDIX 2 Official Request for RBS Feedback

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You should send this letter to each person you would like to provide you with Reflected Best Self feedback.

<Date>

Dear <Respondent's Name>,

<Student's Full Name> is taking 'Power and Politics,' a core first-year MBA course at the Yale School of Management. As part of this program, <Student's Name> is required to complete the Reflected Best-Self Feedback Exercise. This exercise is designed to help <Student's Name> learn more about <his/her> best-self, so that <he/she> will be able to leverage <his/her> strengths and make positive contributions within and beyond <his/her> career. The exercise is quite different from other performance review mechanisms because it focuses on an individual's strengths and contributions, not weaknesses. This has proven to be a powerful tool for helping managers to know how to best use their strengths constructively. In order to complete this exercise, <Student's Name> must solicit feedback from several people who know <him/her> well.

I would like to invite you to help <Student's Name> with this exercise. This should not take more than 30 minutes of your time. We are requesting that you provide three stories of when <Student's Name> was at <his/her> very best in your eyes. This will require you to think about your interactions with <Student's Name> and to identify those incidents when <Student's Name> added value and made important contributions. In writing, please be sure to provide examples so <Student's Name> can understand the situation, behaviors and characteristics you are describing. I have attached an example of what these stories could look like. Please use this only as a guide. You may provide examples from work or non-work related incidents. *Please note that your feedback will only be read by <Student's Name> and not by me.* Please be as candid, personal, and honest as you can; this is not a letter of recommendation nor is it an official document.

Feedback Example:

1. One of the greatest ways that you add value is: Through your ability to get people to work together and give all they have to a task.

For example, I think of the time that: We were doing the Alpha project. We were getting



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behind and the stress was building. We started to close down and get very focused on just meeting our deadline. You noticed that we were not doing our best work and stopped the group to rethink our approach. You asked whether we wanted to just satisfy the requirements or whether we wanted to really do good and important work. You reminded us of what we were capable of doing and how each of us could contribute to a better outcome. No one else in that room would have thought to do that. As a result, we did meet the deadline and created a result we all feel proud of.

2. One of the greatest ways that you add value is: Helping others to think clearly and make good decisions.

For example, I think of the time that: We were talking about my plans for the future. You listened as I described a few possible scenarios and then helped me weigh each option relative to the others. I hadn't thought about many of the pros and cons that came up in our conversation. Because you took our conversation seriously and encouraged me to consider many alternatives, you helped me move closer to a decision that I could be confident about.

3. One of the greatest ways that you add value is: Through your capacity to persist in the face of adversity.

For example, I think of the time that: You were applying to colleges. In your heart, you knew you wanted to attend Harvard, but you were worried that you wouldn't be admitted. You worked very hard on your application, asking many people to read your essays and provide you with feedback. You worked extra hours at your job after school to pay for a visit to Cambridge, so you could meet with the Admissions officers. All the while, you stayed actively involved in your little sister's life, making sure she knew you cared and paid attention to her. You also stayed on the honor roll for the entire year! When you found out you were accepted to Harvard, you worked even harder to make sure you would have enough financial aid and work study to cover your tuition and living expenses. I have always admired your determination.

This feedback is most effective when communicated in writing, rather than orally. As such, we ask that you please write your feedback letter and send it to <Student's Name> directly at <his/her> email address <Insert email address here> or mail your feedback letter to <Insert mailing address here>.

**In order to complete this exercise as assigned, it is critical that <Student's Name> receives your feedback no later than Friday, September 7th, 2018.** Please let <Student's Name> know as soon as possible if you will not be able to assist with this exercise. Thank you so much for your help.

If you have any questions about this exercise, please contact me at [michael.kraus@yale.edu](mailto:michael.kraus@yale.edu) or (203) 432-6034.



Sincerely,  
Michael W. Kraus, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, Yale School of Management

**Best-Self Reflections**

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**Your Name:**

**First Name, Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Feedback Provided For:**

**First Name, Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_



1. One of the ways that **(Participant)** adds value and makes important contributions is:

Type below a story that illustrates this contribution.  
*For example, I think of the time when:*

2. One of the ways that **(Participant)** adds value and makes important contributions is:

Type below a story that illustrates this contribution.  
*For example, I think of the time when:*

3. One of the ways that **(Participant)** adds value and makes important contributions is:

Type below a story that illustrates this contribution.  
*For example, I think of the time when:*

**Additional Comments:**



**APPENDIX 3 Create your own Reflected Best-Self Portrait**

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*All of us can recall our own extraordinary moments, those moments when we felt our best-self was brought to light, affirmed by others, and put into practice in the world. These memories are seared into our minds as moments or situations in which we have felt alive, true to our deepest selves, and pursuing our full potential as human beings.*

Think about three times in your life when you were at your very best. For each best-self episode, write the story of what happened, including how the episode got started, what kept it going, and how it came to an end.

**Best Self Episode #1:**

**Best Self Episode #2:**

**Best Self Episode #3:**



**APPENDIX 3 (Continued) Characteristics of your Best-Self**

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**Review the three episodes you just described and search for patterns of behavior and experience that emerged in the episodes.**

What strengths did you display during these episodes?

What emotions did you experience during these episodes?

Were other people involved in any of your episodes? If so, how did they experience you during these episodes?



**APPENDIX 3 (Continued) Composing your Best-Self Portrait**

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Combine your observations about the three episodes into a written portrait that captures what you are like when you are at your personal best. If in one story you notice you did something that seemed important, ask yourself if you also did that in the others and just forgot to include it. Be sure to incorporate the characteristics you listed above.

Here is an example of what a best-self portrait might look like:

*At my best, I am a visionary. I create a vision, and then I develop the roadmap for achieving that vision. Being a visionary is not an isolated, lonely process. For me, it is an inherently social process of co-creation. In planning and executing, I incorporate others' strengths and talents, so that they will be constantly reminded that their presence and their contributions are valued. My vision creatively weaves together systems, emotions, and experiences, such that the tiniest details will fit together in a coherent whole.*

*When it is time to fulfill my vision, I commit myself fully to the vision. I do not linger in my comfort zone. I give 100% of my time, mind, heart and strength to my vision, so that it will be fulfilled in the spirit of excellence. Even in the face of disappointment, I persist, searching for newer, even better ways to achieve the desired outcome. I don't make a big deal about confronting adversity; I just do it.*

Write or type your best-self portrait here.



**APPENDIX 4 How to Analyze your Reflected Best-Self Feedback (A Guide)**

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- (1) Make sure you have completed your initial Best-Self Portrait.**
- (2) Find a quiet, private place. Reading best-self stories can be an emotional experience.**
- (3) Before looking at your feedback, predict what you think other people will say about you.**
- (4) Read and reflect upon each piece of feedback you have received.**
- (5) Search for patterns across your feedback.**
- (6) Incorporate new insights or modifications into a *Revised Reflected Best-Self Portrait*.**



**APPENDIX 4 (Continued) Predictions about your Best-Self Feedback**

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**Take a few moments before you read your feedback to quickly note a few of your predictions. What do you think others will say about your best-self? How do you add value and make important, positive contributions in their eyes? What types of stories might they tell about your best self?**



APPENDIX 4 (CONTINUED) Patterns across your Best-Self Feedback

Read all of your feedback and take notes on the key insights. Look for commonalities across the responses. Create themes where you find a commonality and link any relevant examples to it. The themes can include: strengths you displayed during these episodes, emotions you experienced during these episodes, and how others experienced you at your best.

You may find it useful to fill in the table below.

Commonality/Theme	Examples Given	My Interpretation
<i>Creative</i>	<i>1. Innovative builder of new projects for education. 2. Find new solutions for old problems in department relationships with my boss. 3. Guided company in transforming itself.</i>	<i>My ideas tend to be bold and creative. I am an innovative builder of the new. I tend to bring a new vision to the old.</i>
Commonality/Theme	Examples Given	My Interpretation



**APPENDIX 4 (CONTINUED) Revising your Reflected Best-Self Portrait**

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Capture the wisdom in your data in a new best-self portrait. This portrait should incorporate your interpretation of the data you received from others about your reflected best-self, as well as the insight gained from your personal reflections of times when you were at your best. You may start with your initial best-self portrait and make additions, deletions or modifications to it. You may also create a brand new portrait if you would like.

Write/type your best-self portrait here.