IS THIS MINE, OR DID I ABSORB IT?

A Truth-Claiming Checklist

NANCY BOYD

What This Is

A filter you run in the moment.

Not a practice, not a program — a set of eight questions you ask when you can't tell whether the thing you're feeling is yours or something you picked up somewhere and have been carrying ever since.

Why it matters. Most of what runs your decisions was installed, not chosen. A rule about what's selfish. A conviction about what you're capable of. A certainty about how people will react if you say the true thing. These arrive early, from people who mattered, and they don't announce themselves as opinions. They present as facts about reality — and you never examine a fact.

The trouble is that absorbed material and genuine knowing feel almost identical from inside. Both arrive fast. Both feel true. Both come with total conviction. There is no difference in the sensation, which is why you can't sort them out by consulting how strongly you feel.

But there is a difference in the behavior. Absorbed beliefs act one way. Genuine signal acts another. And once you know the tells, you can tell them apart in about ninety seconds.

That's what the eight questions do.

When to use it. When you're stuck and can't say why. When a decision that should be simple isn't. When you notice a rule operating in you that you never remember agreeing to. When someone asks what you want and something in you says *don't be difficult.*

How to use it. Take the specific thought, rule, or resistance you're examining and put it into words — one sentence, out loud or on paper. Then run the eight questions against that sentence. You don't need all eight to agree; you're looking for the weight of the answers.

Then turn to the back and do what the answer tells you.

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This checklist pairs with *The Self-Trust Diagnostic*, which finds where your self-trust breaks down. This one handles a different question: whether a particular belief was ever yours to begin with. They work well together, and neither requires the other.

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The Eight Questions

First, name the thing. Write it as one plain sentence.

THE THING I'M EXAMINING:

Examples of what belongs on that line: I can't say no to this. · Wanting more would be greedy. · If I leave, I'm abandoning them. · I'm not the kind of person who does that. · Something about this is wrong and I don't know why.

Now run it through the eight.

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1. CAN I REMEMBER A TIME BEFORE I BELIEVED THIS?

☐ Yes — I can locate roughly when it started. ☐ No — it feels like it's always been there.

The tell: genuine conclusions have an origin. You learned them from something that happened to you, and you can usually find the seam. Absorbed material has no origin story. It feels like weather — a permanent condition of reality rather than something you arrived at.

"It's always been there" is not evidence that it's true. It's evidence that it arrived before you were old enough to have a say.

2. WHOSE VOICE IS IT IN?

☐ Mine. ☐ Someone else's — and I know exactly whose. ☐ Nobody's — it's just a flat fact.

The tell: say the sentence out loud. Actually out loud, not in your head — the mouth catches what the mind smooths over. Many people are startled to hear a parent, a teacher, a first boss, an ex.

"Nobody's voice" is the most suspicious answer of the three. Truly absorbed material has usually shed its source. It doesn't sound like anyone anymore, which is precisely what makes it so hard to argue with.

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3. DOES IT GET LOUDER WHEN I'M TIRED?

☐ Louder. ☐ About the same. ☐ Quieter, or it goes away.

The tell: this one is unusually reliable, so pay attention to it. Absorbed material amplifies under fatigue, stress, hunger, and illness. It's loudest at 3 a.m. It gets deafening when you're depleted.

Genuine signal doesn't do that. It's steady. It says the same thing at 3 a.m. that it said at noon, at the same volume, without escalation.

If it screams at you when you're exhausted and goes quiet when you're rested, you did not think it up.

4. DOES IT TELL ME WHAT I WANT — OR WHAT I SHOULD WANT?

☐ What I want. ☐ What I should want. ☐ Honestly, I can't tell.

The tell: genuine signal is oriented toward you. It reports on your condition — this is right for me, this is wrong for me, I want this, I've had enough.

Absorbed material is oriented toward a standard. It doesn't report; it evaluates. Listen for the grammar of obligation: *should, ought, supposed to, a good person would, any reasonable adult.* Those words are fingerprints. Genuine signal rarely uses them.

5. IF NOBODY WOULD EVER KNOW, WOULD IT STILL MATTER TO ME?

☐ Yes — it would matter in an empty room. ☐ No — most of its force comes from being seen.

The tell: run the thought experiment honestly. If the decision were made in total privacy, with no possibility of anyone ever finding out — would the thing still hold?

Absorbed rules are almost always audience-dependent. Their whole function is managing how you appear. Strip the audience and they deflate. Genuine values survive the empty room; they're what you'd do if nobody clapped and nobody objected.

6. DOES IT ALLOW ANY EXCEPTIONS?

☐ Yes — I can imagine circumstances where it wouldn't apply. ☐ No — it's absolute.

The tell: genuine conclusions are contingent. They come with conditions attached, because you built them out of actual experience and experience is specific.

Absorbed rules are total. Never. Always. Not ever, under any circumstances. That rigidity is the giveaway. Nobody arrives at an exceptionless rule by living; you can only be handed one.

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7. WHAT HAPPENS IN MY BODY WHEN I IMAGINE BREAKING IT?

☐ Something like fear — dread, tightening, a sense of punishment coming. ☐ Something like grief or gravity — heavy, sad, but not afraid. ☐ Relief.

The tell: this is the hardest one to fake, which is why it's here.

Absorbed rules are enforced by fear — usually the fear of a specific reaction from a specific person, even if that person has been dead for twenty years. The body braces for a consequence.

Genuine values feel different when violated. Not fear. Something more like weight, or sorrow, or a quiet no. You're not afraid of being caught; you simply don't want to be someone who did that.

And if imagining breaking it produces relief — you already have your answer, and you've had it for a while.

8. WHO BENEFITS FROM MY BELIEVING THIS?

☐ Me. ☐ Someone else — and I can name them. ☐ Nobody. It just costs.

The tell: the coldest question on the list, and the most clarifying. Follow the function. Every belief you carry is doing a job for somebody.

Some absorbed material was installed by people who needed you to be a particular way — smaller, more available, less trouble. That's not always malice; often it was just convenience, and often they were carrying it too and handed it on without ever examining it.

But if the honest answer is "nobody, it just costs" — that's the loudest result on this page. A belief that serves no one, including you, is not a conviction. It's an artifact.

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Reading Your Answers

Don't count. Weigh.

There's no score here, and any scoring system would be lying to you — one strong answer can outweigh five weak ones. What you're looking for is the direction the answers lean.

LEANING TOWARD...	WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE
It's mine	An origin you can find. Your own voice. Steady under fatigue. Reports rather than evaluates. Survives the empty room. Allows exceptions. Breaking it brings weight, not fear. Serves you.
I absorbed it	No origin — it's always been there. Someone else's voice, or nobody's. Screams when you're tired. Full of should. Collapses without an audience. Absolute, no exceptions. Breaking it brings dread. Serves someone else, or no one.

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THE THREE MOST RELIABLE QUESTIONS

If you only have ninety seconds, use these. They're the hardest to fool.

Question 3 — does it get louder when you're tired? Fatigue is a truth serum. It doesn't amplify what you actually think; it amplifies what was installed.

Question 7 — is it enforced by fear? The body knows the difference between *I don't want to be that person* and *I will be punished*. It has always known.

Question 8 — who benefits? Function is harder to argue with than feeling.

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What if it's mixed?

It usually is, and that's not a failure of the instrument.

Most beliefs worth examining are composites: a real conviction of yours, wrapped in absorbed packaging. The core is genuine; the absolutism around it isn't. Or the value is truly yours, but the punishment attached to breaking it was installed by someone else.

When that happens, don't try to render a verdict on the whole thing. Separate the two. Ask: *what's the smallest true version of this?*

"I don't want to let people down" — probably yours, and worth keeping. "...and if I ever do, I'm a bad person and something terrible will happen" — installed. That part can go.

You're keeping the belief. You're taking off the part that wasn't yours.

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ONE WARNING

Absorbed material fights back when examined. That's not a metaphor; it's what you'll actually experience.

The moment you turn attention on it, expect a surge of reasons why this whole exercise is self-indulgent, why you're overthinking, why some things simply are true and questioning them is a form of weakness. You may feel a flare of something close to panic.

That reaction is data. Genuine convictions don't panic when you look at them. They can be examined at leisure; they hold up fine. Only installed material has to shout you away from the inspection — because inspection is exactly what it can't survive.

If asking these questions made you want to stop asking these questions, note which question did it, and go back to that one.

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If It's Yours

Good. Then the work isn't removal — it's standing.

Here's the thing nobody tells you: knowing a belief is genuinely yours doesn't automatically make it easier to act on. Plenty of people can identify their own values with perfect accuracy and still fold the moment someone confident disagrees. Knowing isn't the same as holding.

So do these three things.

Write it down, in its smallest true form. Not the elaborated version, not the defended version — the plainest sentence that's actually accurate. *I don't want this job. I need more time alone than I've been taking.* Absorbed material is verbose because it's arguing. Truth is usually short.

Stop defending it. This is the hard one. You do not owe anyone a justification for a preference, and the moment you begin building a case, you've conceded that your knowing is insufficient on its own — that it becomes valid only if you can persuade someone. It doesn't. "I don't want to" is a complete sentence, and the fact that it feels wildly insufficient is exactly the measure of how long you've been over-explaining yourself.

Expect the discomfort not to resolve. Holding a genuine position while someone is disappointed in you feels almost identical to being wrong. That feeling does not go away with practice; you simply get better at continuing anyway. Anyone who told you it starts feeling good was selling something.

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If You Absorbed It

Then you have a decision to make, and it's not the one you'd expect.

It's not "how do I get rid of this." You can't delete a belief by deciding to. That's not how any of this works, and every attempt to do it by force ends the same way — the belief goes underground and keeps operating where you can't see it.

The decision is: *do I still choose it?*

Because here's what people miss. Some absorbed material is good. You picked up plenty of things you never examined that happen to be right, and finding out that a belief was installed rather than reasoned tells you nothing about whether it's true. *Don't lie to people who trust you* is absorbed for nearly everyone alive. Keep it.

So the question isn't its origin. The question is whether, examining it now, as an adult, in possession of your own experience — you'd choose it again.

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Three outcomes.

Keep it, knowingly. You look at it, you see where it came from, and you take it as your own anyway. It's yours now, by decision instead of inheritance. Nothing changes except that you're the one holding it.

Keep the core, drop the enforcement. The most common outcome. The value is sound; the terror attached to violating it isn't. You can keep *I want to be someone who shows up for people* and let go of *and if I ever fail anyone, I'm worthless.* One is a value. The other is a whip that was handed to you, and you have been holding it for someone else this entire time.

Set it down. Some of it was never right, and was never yours, and does nothing but cost you. Setting it down is quieter than people expect — there's no ceremony, no breakthrough. Mostly it means: notice it, name its origin, and stop obeying it. Then do that again next week, because it will be back. It has decades of practice and you have a Tuesday.

And know this: setting something down takes far longer than seeing it clearly. Seeing takes ninety seconds. Setting down takes months, and it isn't linear, and you will catch yourself obeying the thing you decided to stop obeying — probably while tired, probably while someone is disappointed in you.

That's not failure. That's just what the process looks like from the inside.

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What Happens Next

Three choices. Take the one that fits where you actually are — not the one that sounds most impressive.

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ONE: USE THE FILTER AND SEE WHAT SURFACES.

Keep this somewhere you'll find it. Run it on the next thing that stops you — the rule you notice operating, the resistance you can't explain, the *should* that shows up uninvited.

That's a real use of this document, and for some people it's enough. Nothing here expires.

If that's you, stop reading and go do it.

For everyone else, there's a limit worth naming — the one this checklist can't get around.

> **THE LIMIT**
>
> You are using your own judgment to examine your own judgment.
>
> That's not a flaw in the questions; it's the geometry of the situation. The eight questions are good, and they'll catch a great deal. But the material that installed itself deepest is precisely the material that doesn't look like a belief at all — it looks like the floor. It's not a thought you're having. It's the thing you're standing on while you have thoughts.
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> You cannot examine the floor by standing on it.
>
> That's why the last question is *who benefits* — because when introspection can't reach a thing, sometimes function still can. But even that has a limit, and the limit is that some of this only becomes visible when someone else is looking.

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TWO: HAVE SOMEONE LOOK WITH YOU.

Check Your Soul Light Session

This is for a specific situation you're inside right now — a decision you can't make, a conversation you keep not having, a rule you can feel operating but can't name.

You bring it. I look at it with you and tell you what I see, including the part you can't see because you're standing on it. One private hour. Not advice, not a program.

If you want help seeing what's actually going on in your situation, I've opened a small number of private sessions.

→ Book a Check Your Soul Light Session
brightwings.com/product/check-soul-light-session

THREE: PRACTICE IT WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

The Living Truth Circle

This is for when the problem isn't one belief but the habit of deferring — when it keeps happening, in one room after another, and what you need isn't a single clear look but repetition, in company.

Especially relevant here: absorbed material was installed by other people, and it activates most strongly around other people. Which means you cannot fully practice against it alone. You can identify it alone — that's what this checklist is for. But holding your own truth while someone confident is in the room is a thing you can only rehearse in a room with someone confident in it.

The Circle is a small group, capped at twelve, doing exactly that.

→ Learn about the Living Truth Circle
brightwings.com/living-truth-circle

And if you haven't taken the diagnostic

This checklist tells you whether a particular belief is yours. It doesn't tell you where your self-trust breaks down in general — whether the trouble is that you can't hear yourself, or can't hold what you hear, or can't act on what you hold.

The Self-Trust Diagnostic does that. Fifteen questions, three scores, four patterns. It came in the same bundle as this one. If you skipped it, it's worth the fifteen minutes — the two are built to work together.

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AND ONE MORE THING — THE BOOK

Both of these come out of a book called *A Living Truth*, which goes much deeper: how your own knowing gets overridden, what it costs, and what it takes to live from it under real pressure — with people who have opinions, in a life already in motion.

It's available now, in paperback.

→ Get *A Living Truth*
brightwings.com/product/a-living-truth-a-practice-for-becoming-despite-turbulence-and-chaos

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About Nancy Boyd

Nancy Boyd has spent more than twenty-five years doing one thing: helping people hear themselves accurately. She works as The Soul Mechanic — a name that started as a joke about diagnostics and stayed because it turned out to be exactly right. Most of what arrives at her door isn't a mystery. It's a person who already knows, and has known for a long time, and needs one honest conversation to stop pretending otherwise. She was named International Coach of the Year in 2009, which was gratifying, and which changed nothing about how the work is done.

She is the author of *The Code of the Soul*, *Lessons From the Edge*, *Unblockable*, and the *Healing the Wanting* trilogy. *A Living Truth* — the book this checklist comes out of — is available now. She writes from Eugene, Oregon.

She is not going to tell you what your life should look like. She will tell you what she sees.

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Check Your Soul Light Session → brightwings.com/product/check-soul-light-session
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The full menu — The Soul Mechanic's Garage → brightwings.com/soul-mechanics-garage

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A note on how this was made

I used AI as a drafting tool for parts of this document, then rewrote it until it said what I actually meant. The ideas, the framework, and the judgment are mine.

The AI didn't coach, counsel, or fix anyone. We leave the fixing to your capable hands and brains — and the coaching to mine.

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