Selfhood & Individuation · About 4 minutes

Keep the Strength, Make Room for Yourself

When a valued role needs more of you inside it

What would you miss about being the dependable one if you stepped back? It is worth hearing that answer alongside the exhaustion.

That can become the painful question when a valued role begins to cost too much. You have enjoyed helping, organizing or making things easier for others. Now resentment appears, and you start wondering whether any of your generosity was genuine.

A strength can be real and overused. You may care about people while needing them to ask less of you. You may love being competent and still want a place where you can be a beginner. A role becomes restrictive when those other experiences have nowhere to go.

Leena, in this fictional example, organizes a monthly neighborhood meal. She likes bringing people together and is good at planning. This month she is working extra hours. Shopping, cooking and cleanup feel like too much, but she still wants the gathering to happen.

Calling her effort self-erasure would miss the pleasure she takes in it. Calling her resentment selfish would miss the workload. Both wishes belong: she wants the meal, and she wants to be part of it without managing every detail.

Choice can include staying involved

Ryan and Deci describe autonomy as acting with a sense of volition, which can include dependence on others and participation in community.[1] A freely chosen contribution can be generous, demanding and deeply important. Distance from others is not the measure of whether a choice is yours.

For Leena, there are several possible changes. Someone else could shop. The gathering could be smaller. She might decide to do more this month while asking for support elsewhere in her week. She could also decline to organize it. Each possibility needs to be considered against her actual wishes and capacity.

The neighbors have capacities, too. Someone may appreciate the meal and be unable to cook. Another may welcome a clear request. The work changes hands only when someone accepts it and follows through. Leena cannot rest on an imagined offer of help, however reasonable it seems that others should notice.

Keep the quality; reconsider the arrangement

It may help to ask what you want to retain about a role before deciding what needs changing. Leena wants the gathering and enjoys connecting people. The part that no longer fits is sole responsibility for its preparation. That is a more workable problem than deciding whether she is a generous person or a people-pleaser.

Sometimes the answer will be that the role has become untenable. Sometimes a modest practical change restores pleasure that was being buried under obligation. Where requests for support bring intimidation or punishment, private support and protection may matter more than greater openness with the group.

The dependable person may have something they genuinely love about helping and something they have grown tired of carrying.

© 2026 Brian Kennedy. All rights reserved.

There may be something you still want to give. It can come from a life that has some room in it for you.

Companion reading · The Self You Became to Belong

Full pathway companion · included with paid learning
Pathway introduction: Selfhood & Individuation (public introduction; full modules require access).

Sources and further reading

[1] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78. Source.

© 2026 Brian Kennedy. All rights reserved.