

# Exploring Your Potential



## Survey Report

(Church & Community Outreach)



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## What Matters Most?



my gloves together and punched and jabbed at the air. I was nine years old.

The crowd of 15 to 20 neighborhood kids cheered as I stepped out of my dressing room—our basement—and walked across the yard to the makeshift ring. Cast in the image of a pro, I stood opposite my opponent, donned in a white robe with my gloves laced tight for battle.

Now just seconds remained before the bell would signal the start of round one. A quick motion of my arms to shed the robe, however, was thwarted by those oversized gloves—much too big to fit through the sleeves. I felt the blood rush to my face as energetic efforts to remove the robe served only to turn it inside out. Against a background of laughter, a grinning referee stepped forward to disentangle my arms and untie my gloves.

No matter, dreams are often bigger than the obstacles they encounter. The fight came off as planned and my passion for becoming a professional fighter lived on for still another year.

Consider what is said about you by your responses to the *Major Life Themes* and *Motivational Themes* areas of ***Exploring Your Potential***. The charts reflect something of your personal values, needs, and aspirations. As you reflect, consider how you spend your time each day. Are you, through your life-style and your moment-by-moment choices, actually doing what matters most, or are you somehow getting sidetracked? Intervarsity Press published a little booklet some years ago entitled “The Tyranny of the Urgent.” It points out that most of us don’t get

to the really *important* things in life because we are caught up in responding to things that, at the time, seem *urgent*.

## Exploring Your Potential

There are many *tests* for assessing ability:

- Select candidates for the National Football League Draft are invited to *The Combine* to be examined for potential career-limiting injuries, and are tested for speed, agility, and skill.
- Most colleges still require high school students to achieve a high or relatively high score on a national exam.
- Businesses require applicants to take tests to measure aptitude for certain tasks.
- Law enforcement agencies and others require job candidates to take tests that provide psychological measurements in order to predict whether or not a person can function successfully in a job.
- Tests for parts in movies and plays, to dance with the ballet, or play with the symphony are conducted in the form of auditions.
- Students of the martial arts test for each belt level—color belts, and then eventually the black belts.



*Exploring Your Potential* is designed to stimulate your thinking about your talents and how they might best be applied in the home, church, community and

in the workplace.

## About What Your Profile Does and Doesn't Do

*Exploring Your Potential* is not an intelligence test or a psychological test.; it is a system for creatively organizing and applying what you already know about yourself. It does not determine if you have a particular talent or quality or trait. It may provide a way of labeling and organizing what you already know about yourself with regard to intelligence, interests, motivational themes, and other personal qualities.

### Talents hidden by inexperience will not show up in your profile

If Harry Lieberman had taken the survey at age 79, he would have marked himself low for most of the artistic items. At age 80, though he had never held a paintbrush before, Harry discovered a wonderful talent for painting. He soon launched an art career that made him famous; a career that spanned two more decades! By the age of 101, he was still painting 3 to 4 hours a day, and had been featured at 22 art shows across the nation. No test told him he had potential as an artist; he had to pick up the brush and paint. You may not be aware of a particular talent because the talent lies in an area where you've had no experience.

### Talents may lie hidden because you have not stuck with a task long enough

Though he has described himself as somewhat slow to master complex physical skills, Matt White won the Pennsylvania Junior Olympic Wrestling Championship at age 14 and, in spite of being plagued by serious injury, twice earned All-American honors in wrestling at Penn State University. Now, retired from wrestling, Matt can look back on the gold medal he won in the Pan American Championships, and being a high finisher in world competition.

Matt's college major was art, with ceramics as his primary focus. One of his professors—himself a ceramist of international fame—initially had serious doubts concerning Matt's potential as an artist. Over time, however, the professor totally changed his view as he saw Matt's talent grow far beyond his first impressions. Some folks who are a little slower in the *process* of learning, through perseverance in practice, are able to achieve a higher

level of mastery in the *end*. Are you like Matt? Has your ability been underestimated because you have not had the opportunity to pursue a particular skill *long* enough to develop your true potential?

### Talents may be masked by failure or by negative feedback from others

John, a bright young 3rd grader, lagged behind his peers in math and reading. One day, while his classmates were out on the playground enjoying recess, John was still at his desk trying to catch up on an assignment. His teacher walked into the room and said, "*John, why don't you go out and play with the other children. You're never going to get this stuff anyway!*" Disheartened and angry, he quit trying, falling further and further behind. He was eventually placed in a special school in a distant community. At the new school he would receive a certificate at the end of 11th grade, but there would be no high school diploma.

By age 16 John had advanced only to the 8th grade. Over time, however, one of his teachers was able to get John to challenge the "mentally retarded" label that had been placed on him. By the spring of that year John had gained enough confidence to request an interview for admission to his local high school. With "fear and trembling," and with the guidance and support of an excellent staff in the high school, he was moved out of the special school and promoted to the 10th grade. With hard work and the continued support of his teachers and counselors, he steadily improved, successfully completing 10th, 11th, and 12th grades and earning his diploma. Have failures or negative feedback masked *your* potential?

### Keeping Your Profile in Perspective

This survey will not tell specifically what job or volunteer role to choose. Your profile is designed to be a tool to stimulate thought and exploration of talent. It is not the final or complete word on your abilities, but it can provide a frame of reference for exploring your talents in greater depth, for appreciating future successes, and for looking into some of the vocational and service opportunities available to you. A thorough approach to making vocational choices will include not only your abilities and qualities of character, but also your interests, your unique combination of personal characteristics, and the motivational themes that are the driving force behind your day-to-day decisions. As stated previously, this survey is *not* a test; it is a tool for

stimulating your thinking, encouraging exploration, and creatively organizing and applying what you already know about yourself.

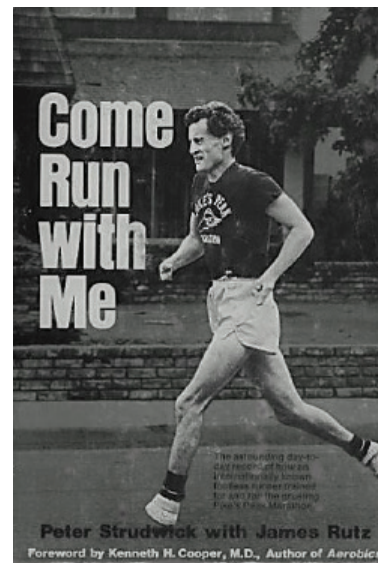
If you would like additional help in choosing a vocation, you may want to consult with a specially trained counselor, and to inquire about tests designed to measure your abilities, to assess your interests, and to highlight various dimensions of your personality. Each resource has a special contribution to make as you continue on your career path; no one resource is, by itself, an adequate source of information about you or about the possibilities that are out there.

### About Disability: A Challenge

Do you have a disability? In our school systems, and life in general, the normal path taken is to compensate for a limitation by pursuing options that allow one to avoid confronting the disability. If, for example, you have a learning disability that makes it seem impossible to tackle certain academic subjects, the difficulty can be avoided by choosing a vocational path that does not require them. Current brain research, however, suggests that many of us can actually overcome, rather than compensate for, disability with the right training strategy. The brain is much more malleable than the “old,” outdated science realized (i.e., scientific opinion prior to 1980). Two evidence-based books you might find inspiring and informative are the following: *The Brain That Changes Itself*, by Norman Doidge, and *The Woman Who Changed Her Brain*, by Barbara Arrowsmith-Young. About Arrowsmith’s book, Norman Doidge says: “. . . this is a unique and very personal book. Arrowsmith-Young has been able to describe, in a poignant and often unforgettable way, what it feels like to have a devastating learning disorder - but also what it’s like to leave it behind.” Both books, by the way, are available on Kindle.

Another inspiring story is that of Peter Strudwick. Peter’s mother, under pressure in Germany to abort her child because she contracted rubella during pregnancy, fled to France. The child, Peter, was born without hands and feet, and with one leg shorter than the other. In his 30s, feeling miserably out of shape,

he decided to begin an exercise program. He fitted himself with special shoes, and walked on the stubs of his legs. Walking soon led to jogging, and jogging led to entering marathons, including the Pike’s Peak Marathon. You can read Peter’s full story in his 1976 book entitled, *Come Run With Me*. He talked about the marathon he didn’t complete—the one he he quit before making it to the finish line. He said, “You don’t know how close to success you were until you quit, and look back. You know that you could have succeeded—you could have finished the race.” (Paraphrase)



Explore all of your options, considering every possible avenue and resource: Is there some way, not only to go around the obstacle posed by the disability but, like Barbara Arrowsmith-Young, to overcome it? If not, then consider what is the best way to compensate for the disability. For example, a person with a passion for writing, who is sightless, or does not have use of her hands, may be able to put her thoughts on paper by using one of the more sophisticated voice recognition computer programs available today. A proofreader, under the direction of the writer, could be recruited to make any corrections.



## ***Comparing Major Areas of Skill***

Each bar represents an area of personal success. The longer bars represent those areas in which you say you have had the greatest concentrations of successful experience in performing corresponding tasks. The shorter bars may represent areas of hidden or undeveloped potential.

***Physical Abilities (Bodily-Kinesthetic)*** is the form of intelligence that addresses fine motor skills and large muscle activity—flexibility/range of motion (plasticity), strength, speed, power, endurance, and skilled movement. Skilled movement includes balance, coordination and agility. A fine athlete, dancer, or craftsman is an intelligent athlete, dancer or craftsman.

***Language Abilities (Linguistic)*** is comprised of foundational skills in language - reading, speaking, and writing.

***Relational Abilities (Interpersonal)*** includes key skills necessary for relating well to other people.

***Logical, Reasoning, or Academic Abilities (Logical-Mathematical)*** refer to key skills in reasoning (including common sense), critical-thinking. It also applies to statistical analysis, theology, philosophy, the sciences, and philosophy of science.

***Artistic Abilities (Artistic-Spatial)*** concerns your ability to exercise your mind to recall, create, harmonize, and modify visual images. In multiple-intelligence theory, the artistic and spatial areas are united under the heading of spatial intelligence. Navigation - finding your way around - is also a type of spatial intelligence.

***Musical Abilities*** includes the foundational skills that a good musician, composer, or singer, or instrumentalist would have.

Be thoughtful as you apply the charts to your own abilities. The individual bars are not to be considered to be direct measures of your intelligence, as though you could assign some sort of score or intelligence quotient. Success in a job or in life is

*never* built on just one ability or quality, and some extraordinary things have been achieved by so-called ordinary people. Your intelligences, character, and unique personality can blend to bring success that neither you nor anyone else would have predicted by simply looking at each core area separately.

Traditional intelligence tests, and achievement tests such as the SAT, tend to limit their focus to linguistic (language) and logical-mathematical ability. This survey takes its cue from multiple-intelligence theory which says that you have a *wide range* of intelligences, all working together, but each one standing independently of the others. Unfortunately, some folks feel “dumb” because they have not considered and explored the full range of their abilities. An athlete, dancer, trades or crafts person, artist or musician who does well, or a person who has strong relationship and communication skills *is* intelligent, totally apart from grades earned in school, or scores achieved on an IQ test or achievement tests such as the *Scholastic Aptitude Test*.

Howard Gardner and other leading proponents of multiple-intelligence theory have taken great pains to point out that we should not focus our attention on the separate intelligences, but rather recognize the *integration of intelligences* required by the myriad of tasks we must perform to be successful in this world. Their intention is neither to assess nor train the student by presenting the intelligences one at a time. By creatively offering complex, multi-dimensional learning assignments to the student, two major objectives are achieved: <sup>1</sup> Several areas of intelligence can be addressed at one time. <sup>2</sup> The student’s learning experience more closely approximates the kinds of skills and knowledge needed to function well in the real world.

## *Work and Community Service in Perspective*

### Seven principles for job choice, career planning, and community service

1) **Your paths of work and service are to line up with your capabilities.** Know yourself well, and then choose a career path that lines up with your abilities, interests, and what you value most. It is surprising how many people overlook this very basic principle. Most jobs, when considered individually, are rather limited in scope: they do not allow for a full expression of all of our abilities and interests.

An avocation, hobby, or community service role can complete the vocational picture by allowing areas of expression that complement our full-time jobs. Consider, for example, the accountant whose full-time work is mentally challenging, but requires little or no physical activity. Can he/she engage in a physically expressive avocation, hobby, or form of recreation to complement the more sedentary work role?

2) **Your work or service is to be balanced with other important areas of life.** Harry Chapin's 1974 recording, *Cat's in the Cradle*, describes a well-intentioned father who kept promising to spend time with his son, but never quite got around to it because he was too busy. Work within the context of a balanced life means that you have time for all of the important things outside of work—intimacy with special people of your life, recreation, sleep, exercise, spiritual life, and for applying your talents in home and community.

3) **Be discerning as you consider how you can best serve your community.** When it comes to people's needs, the saying, "*the squeaky wheel gets the grease*," tends to be true. Sometimes we are wise to gently push our way past the squeaky wheels of this world—the people who yell loudest—to reach out to those quiet persons whose cries for help can barely be heard. A study of adolescent girls who had attempted suicide revealed that every single one *felt* a strong need to go to others for help in times of emotional stress, but only 4% of them were willing to go to others and *ask* for help.

4) **Respect every type of work and service.** How easy it is to place one person or job above another.

On what basis can we honestly say that one job is superior to another? There are jobs with greater responsibility, greater visibility, and greater financial reward, but there are no *inferior* jobs; each has an important place in our world.

In one research project people were asked about the level of job satisfaction they experienced based on the work itself—based on the tasks they performed. It was not the lawyers, doctors, and corporate executives who reported the highest levels of job satisfaction, but rather the craftsmen and tradesmen—people who could see the fruit of their labors—who said they were happiest with their work.

5) **When you have a worthwhile goal, take action, give it your best effort, and don't give up without good reason for doing so.**

"Action is eloquence." (William Shakespeare)

"80% of success is showing up." (Woody Allen)

6) **Stay off the shelf.** Due to age, health, or other factors, folks sometimes assume that they no longer have anything to offer in the way of work or service. Our society's notion of retirement is not based upon the potential of older adults, but refers back to an economically-based decision regarding retirement made in Germany in the mid 1800s. As long as we are breathing and conscious there is a place for us in this world—regardless of seeming limitations due to age or disability. Recall Harry Lieberman who began a career as an artist at the age of 80. Mavis Lindgren had run a dozen marathons by the time she was 72 years of age; Noel Johnson authored a book at the age of 80, and ran the *New York City Marathon* at the age of 92. Peter Strudwick, referred to earlier, has run in countless marathons, including the grueling *Pikes Peak Marathon*, in spite of the fact that he has no feet.

7) **Consider your purpose.** Whatever the nature of your work, why are you doing what you do? What is your purpose? Do you have a sense of purpose and calling that extends well beyond merely putting bread on the table?

# About Spiritual Gifts and Natural Gifts

Over the decades there has been a strong emphasis among Christians on the spiritual gifts. Scripture makes it clear that all believers are gifted by God to serve those who make up the community of believers. Consider Paul's statement in his first letter to the church at Corinth, and his statement to Christians in Rome:

For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. (1 Corinthians 7:7)

. . . I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance of the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:3-8)

The approach here is to recognize that the spiritual gifts referred to in Scripture do not constitute an exhaustive record. Further, God the Holy Spirit not only supernaturally gifts believers to serve, but that same Holy Spirit sets apart and commissions the so-called "natural" aptitudes we were born with, and the abilities that grew from these aptitudes over time. It is this range of abilities that are the primary focus of Exploring Your Potential.

Vocation, occupation and job are related concepts, but there are important distinctions to be made. Vocation or calling is me, who you are—your talents, gifts, passions, interests and personality characteristics that can be expressed in your work. Your vocation is always intact. Occupation is the particular line of work you engage in for your vocation. It has a label—homemaker, artist, musician, craftsman, tradesman, laborer, educator, politician, physician, psychologist, scholar, writer, theologian, pastor, etc. Your occupation is your title or "handle." Your job is the particular focus and setting for your work. You can lose your job, yet your occupation and vocation still be intact. For a season you may have to commit to a job that is not your preference. Your job is defined by what you do—not always by who you are. Ideally, vocation, occupation and job all line up. The expectations of others, insecurity, the need for status and recognition, and vigorous pursuit of wealth, however, can throw us off track. In addition, sometimes it is just not possible to take the more ideal path due to conditions such as a poor economic climate that are not under our control.

It is important to note that every vocation is to be offered as service to the Lord. In Scripture, there is no distinction between secular and sacred in the area of work. It is true that those with certain responsibilities and roles will be judged by a higher standard (e.g., the teacher—James 3:1), but the homemaker, laborer, artist and physician can all work to the glory of God.

We were made for meaningful work. The model presented in the Bible is that God calls us in accord with how He has made us – our work is to be a self-consistent expression of our aptitudes, talents, gifts and passions. Consider three examples from the Bible: 1) The 70 elders called to be come along side Moses to serve. 2) Those assigned various roles in the building of the temple. 3) The brilliant mind that God called to write the heavier theological books of the New Testament.

God called and empowered 70 elders—“men of reputation”—who had demonstrated qualities of maturity and judgment to work alongside Moses.

“I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!” So the LORD said to Moses: “Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.” (Numbers 11:14-17)

God called and empowered talented people to be engaged in building the temple. There were laborers who were physically strong, working under capable overseers: “Solomon selected seventy thousand men to bear burdens, eighty thousand to quarry stone in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred to oversee them.” Gifted artists and craftsmen were recruited to work on the temple. When it came to the timber cutters, they were brought in from Lebanon because there were no skilled timber cutters in Judah or Jerusalem:

“Therefore send me at once a man skillful to work in gold and silver, in bronze and iron, in purple and crimson and blue, who has skill to engrave with the skillful men who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided. Also send me cedar and cypress and algum logs from Lebanon, for I know that your servants have skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and indeed my servants will be with your servants, to prepare timber for me in abundance, for the temple which I am about to build shall be great and wonderful.” (2 Chronicles 7-9)

It was Paul—a brilliant, highly educated Jew, that God called and empowered to write the didactic New Testament books that included Romans, Ephesians, Galatians and 1st and 2nd Corinthians. A quick survey of the New Testament books, while they are all inspired—God-breathed—reveals contrasting levels of vocabulary and sentence structure in the writings of Paul, say, compared to the writings of John, or even the physician-historian, Luke.

Do you want to know God’s will for your life in the area of work? Then, know yourself—your aptitudes, talents, gifts, personality, enduring passions and interests. Overall, the most satisfying work is found in that which is a good fit, done out of a love for God and a sense of gratitude, recognizing that we have been adopted in to His family as brothers and sisters of Christ, and in His service.

Do you think you’ve missed your calling? The question to ask is, “Are you dissatisfied?” If your work does not line up with your talents and interests, it is quite possible that you are to find an honorable way to change direction so that you are more in line with the way in which God has made you.

Pray fervently, study diligently, dream boldly, seek feedback from those whom you trust and who know you well. Examine yourself through the window of things you have done well and enjoyed in the past, and survey what is out there in the world of work—until God gives you a new way to go. In the meantime, continue to do what you do with energy and integrity “as unto the Lord” for this is pleasing to Him.