



Learning and Growing: Using Your Talents

We may have assumed that we would have ourselves figured out by the time we got to adulthood. However, our knowledge of what our talents are and how we can best use them continues to grow through adulthood. There are things we can do to make our journey through adulthood more productive.

We all have talents. Sometimes we admire certain people who seem especially smart, kind, or fun. Sometimes we feel that we have no talents. But everyone has talents. It is helpful if we know what our talents are. Maybe you are good at fixing things. Maybe you are gentle. Maybe you are helpful. Maybe your gifts seem like small, unimportant things; but, well used, your talents can make a big difference for the people in your life.

Notice what things you enjoy. The things we enjoy give us the most important clues as to what our talents are. Do you love to read, talk, learn, be with people, draw, sing, fix things, organize, laugh, teach, help, cook . . . There may even be things that are difficult but bring you a lot of satisfaction. Pay careful attention to the things you enjoy; they will teach you about your talents.

No one has all talents. Some people may seem truly amazing; they seem to be able to do everything. That is not possible. The person who is superb at enthusiasm usually struggles with patience. The person who is creative probably has difficulty with routine tasks. Our strengths are also our weaknesses since being good at something makes us weak at its opposite. The goal of productive adulthood is to use our talents well while managing our weaknesses.

Sometimes we feel intimidated by certain people and their amazing gifts. That may tell us important things about talents we wish we had or talents we would like to develop. But every solid building must rest on a foundation. We are wise to start by understanding and appreciating the talents we have.

You might be surprised to know that many of the people you admire most also feel inadequate. Many of them wish they were better at certain things. The journey of self-discovery and productive self-acceptance lasts a lifetime.

We find life most satisfying when we **use our gifts to make life better for people.** Whatever our gifts may be, life is best when we can use our gifts to help people. Our opportunities to use our gifts may be at work, in community service, or in our families.

Since no one can do it all, **we can work with other people to accomplish the work that needs to be done.** Rather than try to do everything ourselves, we can invite others to work with us. Knowing our weaknesses becomes a strength when we use that knowledge to combine our talents with other people's talents to accomplish worthwhile goals. If we are wise, we get other people to help us in important tasks like raising our children. For example we can get grandparents, scoutmasters, and teachers involved in our children's lives.

Our lives are richer when we continue to discover our talents, work cooperatively with other people who have different talents, and use our talents to make life better.

Applications:

List some things you loved to do as a child, as a teenager, as a young adult, and now. There are probably important differences at each stage of growth. There are probably important similarities. See if you can discover the common theme that hints at your talents.

Talk with a friend about the talents that he or she sees in you. Listen carefully. A caring outsider may see us more clearly than we see ourselves.

When you discover that you are inferior to someone in something, turn that discovery into appreciation. Enjoy the gifts that others have even if you do not have the same gifts. After all, no one of us has all gifts. If we try to be good at everything, we will only become frustrated and unhappy.

Who are your heroes? What is it they do that you appreciate most?

There are personality tests that help us understand how we are unique. Consider the four ways (listed below) that many people are different from each other. Some people have nearly equal amounts of the two traits, but most of us favor one side or the other. In each of the four areas, which of the descriptions best describe you?

Energy and people: Some people get energy by being with other people. They like being with people much of the time. We call them extraverts. There are other people who get energy from quiet time or being alone. We call them introverts. Both extraverts and introverts are valuable. Extraverts can enjoy hours of work with people. Introverts are more likely to be able to work quietly for an extended period without social interaction. Which best describes you?

Ways of thinking about things: Some people are dreamers. They focus on possibilities. Some people are practical. They live in the here-and-now. Each has advantages. Dreamers are good at inventing new possibilities, being creative. The practical are good at seeing the immediate needs and providing for them. Which are you?

Ways of deciding: Some people make decisions based on feelings. Other people prefer to base their decisions on facts. Each has advantages. The feeling types may better understand how decisions affect people. The thinking type (those who prefer the facts) may be more objective. You can see the advantages of considering both in making a decision. Are you more a feeling or facts person?

Decision making: Some people like things settled. Others prefer to wait and see. The first can be seen as outcome-oriented. The latter can be seen as process oriented. Understanding those differences can help us better work with each other. Which style do you favor?

Each type of personality has advantages and disadvantages. How can you use an understanding of your unique style to be more effective? How can you use an understanding of your limitations to better work with others in making decisions and living life?