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**DISCOVERING
THE SKILLS
THAT
ENERGIZE
YOU**



The Skill Clusters Exercise

**SELF ASSESSMENT FOR
RESUME CRAFTING, NETWORKING
AND INTERVIEWING**

So you've decided to enter or re-enter the marketplace and can't quite get a grip on how to recognize or describe your best skills? You're not alone. This can be a rough task to do well, whether doing it for the first or tenth time. Whether through personal reflection or a structured exercise, you'll need to assess your life experiences in order to

- ◆ accurately identify your skills,
- ◆ recognize where they came from, and
- ◆ understand how they work together effectively.

Who knows this information? You do. But identifying it is not easy. When we try to do a personal skills survey off the top of our head, or even through more extended reflection, we're likely to miss a few, if not many of our marketable skills. Or, we become confused about which skills we want to highlight. Another pitfall is inaccurately identifying some skills as our best, when they are simply skills that other people, say are important to have.

What follows are exercises designed to help you recognize your best skills, their relationships with one another, and the experiences that gave rise to and developed them. This information will give you a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of yourself in relation to your work. These insights can be used to

- ◆ craft or modify your resume,
- ◆ hone a dynamic and concise networking presentation, and
- ◆ prepare for an interview.

The exercise will reveal the range of skills you already possess. But more significantly, it will reveal *the skills which rejuvenate your energies* and, therefore, significantly point the way toward employment options you'd enjoy. Once you discover the skills which energize you, it's a matter of searching for the kind of work which will harness that energy. That's key for engaging and leveraging your productive forces.

Doing the Skill Clusters Exercise gives you a relatively quick and integrative method for a skills self-assessment in this process, you will dip into your memory bank, and allow connections between skills and experiences to emerge. Once you've focused on skills and experiences that have been organized in a meaningful way it's like being at the center of a traffic circle from which you can

see many directions in which to travel. As a result, with extended reflection and exploration, you should be able to see and map out various paths which correspond naturally to your unique pattern of skills and experiences. This is information you'll be able to present more clearly and confidently in the marketplace. Since the words listed in the clusters relate to skills with a functional value in the marketplace, you will find that employers are already attuned to their relevance and value when applied in their organizations.

As a potential employee, employers are interested in knowing about the skills, experiences, special knowledge, and enthusiasm you can bring to their organizations. Yet, most of us find it hard to say what we do well or what kinds of work we'd enjoy. And that's the challenge here--to identify words that fit you like a glove; they're pragmatic, dynamic, connected, and resonate with a deep sense of who you are. Here's how to do it.

STEP ONE

Atached is a list of 32 skill clusters. As you breeze through each cluster, allow the words to bounce off all of your experiences: paid or unpaid jobs, volunteer work, community service, academics, extracurricular activities, internships, group projects, hobbies, cultural activities—all of your experience is relevant for these exercises. (For example, coordinating a school play, managing a soccer team, writing articles for the local paper, or volunteering at a soup kitchen - each involves a number of important skills.) With these experiences in mind, try to think flexibly about the skill cluster headings. If half or more of the words in a cluster "click" with an experience, circle that entire cluster. If you're ambivalent, go ahead and circle it. Don't circle or put check marks next to individual words within the clusters at this point. Push yourself to go through all the skill clusters in about four minutes or so, trusting your reflex responses.

Circle as many clusters as you like based on your life experiences up to this point in time (don't project into the future), and don't be modest. (Most of us have a tendency to underestimate and understate what we have accomplished.) You should identify at least six clusters, but circle as many as you want - 10, 15, 20 or more. If you circle less than six, you aren't taking nearly enough credit for the skills you've developed; you may need to ponder and appreciate more of your experiences to

grasp a fuller picture of your skills. Think creatively about what you've done. For example, you've coordinated a community bake sale or car wash—that's *fundraising*, you've revamped a haphazard set of donated books into a small library for a homeless shelter – that's being *innovative* in the *managing of resources*.

Take about four minutes to do this part of the exercise now.

STEP TWO

Go back to the clusters you've circled and rank them in order of enjoyment by considering which is more enjoyable than the next, gives you more energy, is engaged in with less effort, etc.—put a number next to each circled cluster until you have numbered them all. (What? You have three ties for the number one position? Break the ties and number them accordingly.)

Finished? Think about the significance of what you just did. 1) Recognize the range of skills you have identified. Broader than you thought? All closely related? Surprisingly different? 2) Notice that you have identified skills you're good at but don't necessarily find engaging. In fact, they may actually drain your energies. 3) Now, look at the clusters you ranked #1-#6 and see if any are skills you really want to keep separate from your professional life. For example, "Craft/Artisan" may be something you love doing as a hobby, but not something you'd love as a career. Or you might enjoy managing the books for your community organization, but wouldn't "want to pursue applying this skill in the marketplace. If so, exclude it (or them) and change your numbers accordingly, moving #7 up to #6; etc.

What remains is a rank ordering of your skills showing which ones are especially energizing (#1-#6), and the remaining ones in which you may have competencies but enjoy less. Making this distinction early will allow you to focus your attention on marketing the skills which you're good at and find rejuvenating. (As a further step, you might consider the degree to which each of your skills is animated when applied to: 1) working with people; 2) working with data and information; 3) working with ideas and concepts; and/or 4) working with things (technology, natural resources, the human body, animals, etc.). Ultimately, much of your work-related mental health will ride on being hired for the skills that continually make you feel alive. The varied energy levels associated with your different skills are worth thinking about. Remember,

natural enthusiasm goes a long way in getting chosen for a job, and helps sustain your productive capacity and interest once you've landed it.

STEP THREE

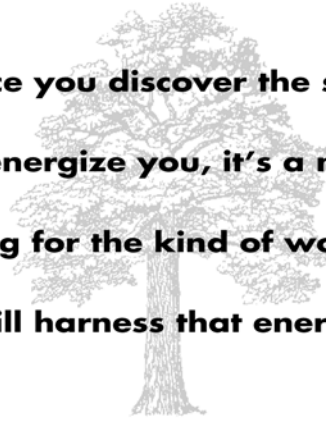
At the bottom of the skill clusters page, write down your top six cluster choices. Now take those same six clusters and write them again inside the inner rim of the circle. (In the Sample Skills diagram these words are in capital letters.)

Once you discover the skills

which energize you, it's a matter of

searching for the kind of work which

will harness that energy.



STEP FOUR

Return to the complete list of skill clusters and start with the one identified as #1. Quickly go through that cluster again, this time putting check marks next to every word that clicked with some experience you've had. After doing that, jot down next to that cluster what those experiences were. (Write brief notations or words you'll recognize later when you come back to retrieve those memories for the next section.) Complete this process for each of your top six clusters.

STEP FIVE

Take the words you checked off under each skill cluster and write them in the pie slice section of the circle. (In the sample skills diagram these words are in lower case letters. Write all the words on a horizontal plane so you can easily read each skill cluster's words without having to rotate the page. Next, going outside the circle, in the proper section, insert all the experiences you jotted down beside each cluster. (In the Sample Skills diagram these are written completely outside of the circle.)

When completed, you should be able to look at the circle diagram and see the heart of your professional life from a marketplace perspective: your six major skills (in

the rim), the component parts that make up each of those major skills (in the pie pieces), and the experiences which developed those skills (outside the rim).

STEP SIX

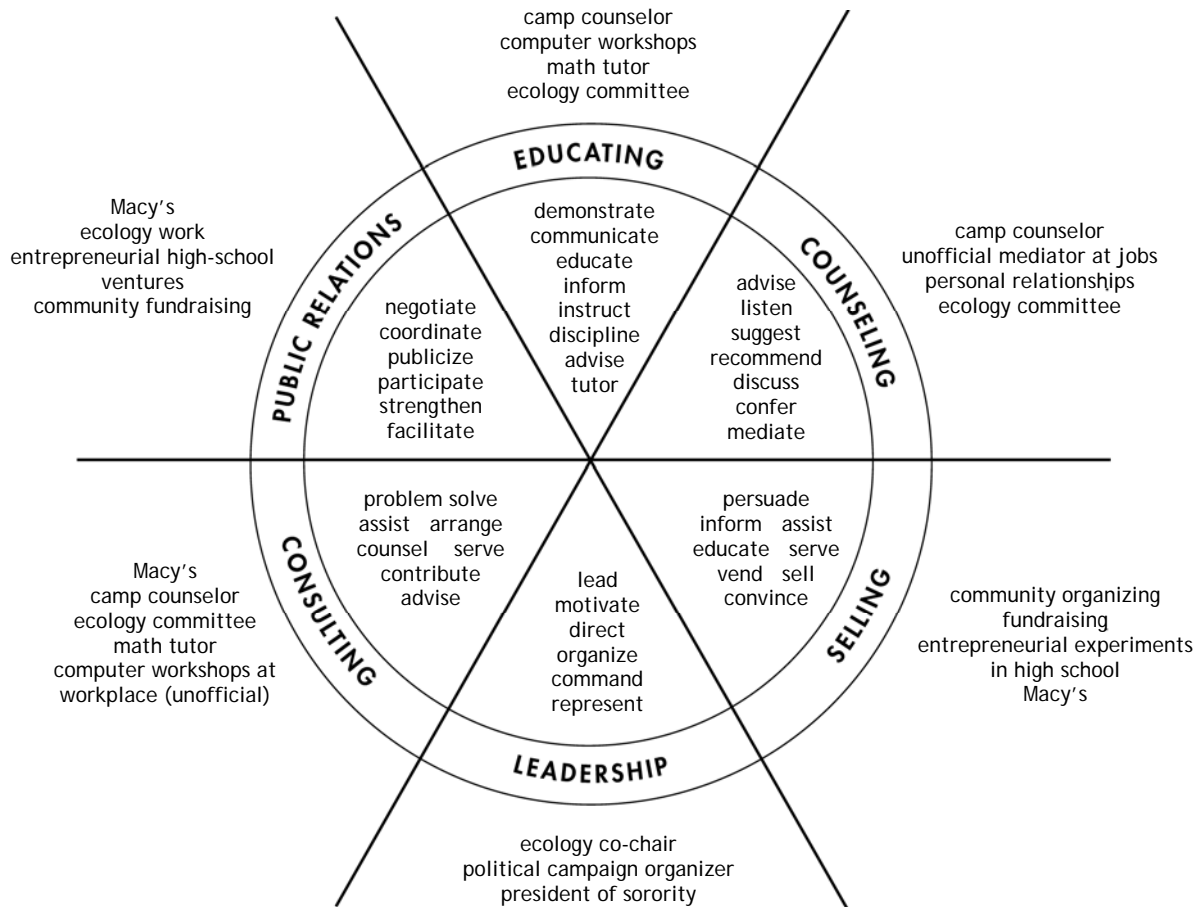
As a final exercise, look at your six major skill clusters in the rim of the circle. Which ones seem to be "close cousins" to one another—related in complementary ways, one helping the other? At the top of the page, write down any and all of these combinations (e.g., Educating/Counseling/Consulting or Selling/Educating/Public Relations). They may come in combinations of twos, threes, fours, or even five.

This is a way for you to see how your skills are related symbiotically, and how they've developed in your life with a deep connectedness. One skill is rarely used by itself; rather we usually employ one in combination with others. Combining skills you enjoy has a synergistic effect and buoys your energy level as well. Discovering

these connections helps you see the chemistry of your draw a tree trunk beneath the circle, and imagine your life's development as symbolized by a tree with six major branches of skills. All of the branches are outgrowths of the trunk, and commonly rooted and nourished by your entire life's experiences.

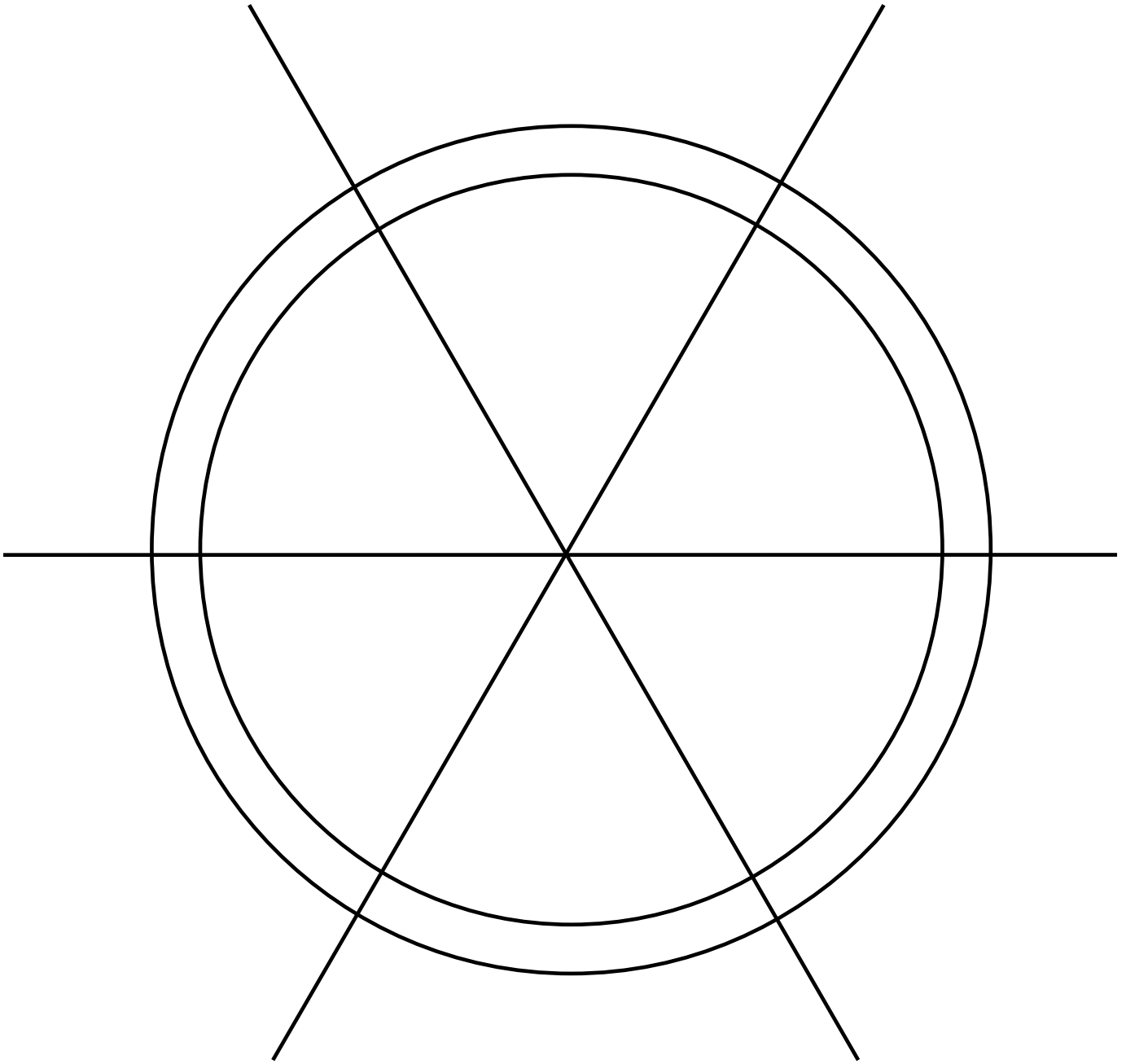
Trust this about yourself: you are integrated in these ways already. Once you see and understand this information, it grounds you in your self-knowledge and allows you to apply it to your job choice or development. Learning these connections, and the language to express your diverse yet closely woven skills and experiences, will provide a coherent and flexible basis for assessing the appropriateness of the full range of jobs and careers in the marketplace. If the job or career stimulates core parts of your chosen skills, then you are more likely to find that work satisfying and rejuvenating.

Sample Skills Diagram



SKILL CLUSTERS

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| Fundraising/ Development research analyze identify contact purpose present strategize develop coordinate raise inquire motivate | Product Development identify evaluate interpret review assess design build develop experiment prepare recommend conclude | Program Development analyze design construct develop prepare strategize coordinate formulate recommend persuade implement monitor | Marketing review assess survey analyze quantify identify develop announce promote advertise advance boost improve | Public Relations assess prepare coordinate present negotiate publicize strengthen promote handle participate facilitate troubleshoot | Human Resources assess analyze recruit survey screen interview select train mediate appraise coordinate align | Information appraise analyze inventory structure design categorize document process manage program link coordinate organize | Administration monitor track assess coordinate organize requisition access receive process serve furnish respond oversee |
| Accounting record assess audit prepare maintain forecast calculate estimate figure appraise examine measure verify | Finance analyze invest budget inventory value appraise construct develop acquire deploy manage project | Management/ Supervision coordinate facilitate plan schedule delegate mediate evaluate strategize develop listen consult monitor | Collaborating/ Facilitating listen network focus coordinate systemize negotiate prioritize arbitrate harmonize integrate liaison complement | Service/ Hospitality serve assist troubleshoot present maintain help coordinate prepare create welcome enhance anticipate | Leadership create empower motivate encourage manage organize listen inspire interpret envision direct advise facilitate lead | Research/ Analysis assess observe review interpret discern conceptualize discover infer illuminate clarify quantify qualify conclude | Design organize explore formulate sketch draw draft layout create plan style pattern build display |
| Persuading present articulate clarify challenge negotiate inquire reason influence convince arbitrate mediate reconcile | Writing conceive create construct craft integrate interpret capture abstract express inform summarize conclude | Editing read review analyze check compare comment correct rewrite revise rework amend approve | Technical/ Technology design analyze troubleshoot inspect locate edit link coordinate implement construct modify operate | Mechanical design analyze construct craft troubleshoot create engineer repair manipulate align coordinate balance | Craft/ Artisan design create build sculpt entertain perform draw render illustrate compose construct conceive choreograph | Presenting/ Performing create present improvise interpret act sing dance perform model entertain inspire moderate | Consulting troubleshoot problem solve assess assist arrange guide counsel survey serve contribute initiate investigate advise |
| Selling inform educate persuade provide assist serve trade vend handle present sell convince | Investigating pursue interrogate question analyze intuit seek search probe examine explore evaluate corroborate depose | Innovating create modify change upgrade improve design activate restructure establish stimulate implement transform | Educating present educate tutor stimulate inform challenge facilitate teach explore advise counsel motivate awaken | Organizing/ Logistics classify organize plan assist maintain liaison support arrange systemize schedule coordinate streamline simplify | Counseling/ Healing listen sense intuit assess analyze assist align coordinate understand inform facilitate help | Language translate interpret lecture converse negotiate compare understand comprehend proficiency fluency teach tutor | Cross Cultural Communication listen facilitate interpret empathize help understand inform respect appreciate guide bridge embrace |



PART TWO:

STEP ONE

Take another look at the full page of 32 skill clusters. You've marked them with circles and numbers so far—determining how they rank with one another in terms of their giving or taking energy. This time, look at them *from a workplace point of view*. Do this: put a **rectangle** around the six cluster headings that reflect the skills most used in your current (or most current) leadership experience. On a daily basis at work as a leader, generally speaking, what six skill clusters defined the bulk of what you did? Complete that selection process now.

Afterwards: Survey those six clusters you just put a rectangle around, and look at their numbers (in terms of their energy levels). What information does this provide for you in terms of understanding your energy flow as a leader? Where might you be gaining and losing energy in the way you lead? What does that tell you?

STEP TWO

For this last exercise, you have a chance to step back and take a fresh look at all that you've come to learn about your skills so far. One last time, look at the full page of 32 skill clusters. Ignore the markings, rankings, circles, and rectangles. Even consider any skill cluster that may not have any markings whatsoever. Think about this, and take your time. What six skill clusters would you most like to be engaging and developing (deepening or broadening) over the next 3-5 years? In other words, what skills do you find yourself drawn to, intrigued by, or motivated to learn because you know it would be good for developing your overall capacity as a leader and your growth as a person? Simply follow your instincts here—and put a **triangle** around those six skill clusters.

STEP THREE

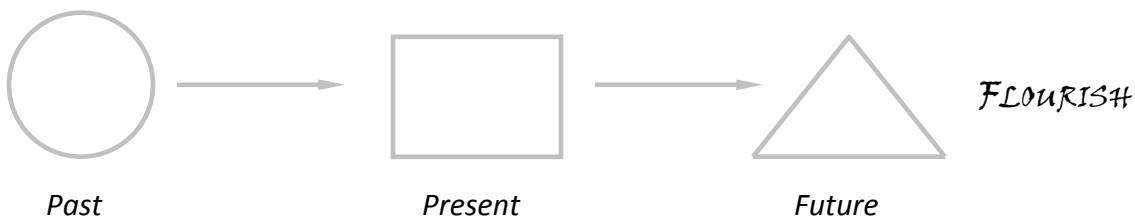
Putting it all together, here's the progression you've gone through:

Skill clusters with **circles** = skills developed from your past and up to the present

Skill clusters with **rectangles** = skills predominantly used in the present

Skill clusters with **triangles** = skills that pull you towards future development & growth

With a sense of where you've been, where you are, and where you want to go—you have a way of looking at your natural progression. Pay attention to it and the skills that bring energy into your life. Play with the possibilities of taking these developments into the marketplace, connected with organizations that are doing the kinds of work you respect and value. Merging your most energizing skills with your values and seeking out organizations (or your own entrepreneurial ventures) for mutual benefit are the intersections to pursue. The more you come home to this fundamental awareness of how you enjoy producing value in the marketplace and world, the easier it will be to cultivate a rejuvenating flow of energy in your work. That's where you will work and play passionately, and flourish.



This tool is offered free to interested users. Pass along to any who may benefit. Thank you.