

Self Discovery Assignment: Your Personal Balance Sheet

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*Today you are You
that is truer than true.
There is no one alive
that is Youer than You.
~Dr. Suess*

OVERVIEW

We *all* need to know that we matter.

Each of us is unique. No one has ever been, nor ever will be, just like you. No one has your nature, your blend of skills, your experiences, your relationships, or your dreams. No one will shape the world and others like you. Your value is priceless and immeasurable, make no mistake about it.

Each of us has a unique destiny, too. We journey through life sharing ourselves with people and organizations as we pursue our dreams. We leave indelible impressions wherever we go. Some are immediately apparent, some surface down the road, and others we may never even know about. No one captures this better than Frank Capra in his film, "It's a Wonderful Life."

So, how do you know what *you* have to offer this world? Well, one way is to think of yourself as a treasure trove—a storehouse of all that is good and valuable about you. Some of your treasure might already be apparent to you—skills you possess or character qualities that others appreciate. But, in other cases, your treasure might be buried beneath the surface, waiting to be revealed—for example, skills you never knew you had! It follows that the better you understand yourself and your treasure, the more likely you will reach your full potential and make the most of your life.

This concept is especially important during the adolescent years when we experience some of our greatest change and make key decisions that affect our future. For example, questions we used to be asked like, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" are now staring us in the face.

Whether we realize it or not, at this stage of life, we are considering three fundamental questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I have to offer?
3. What are my opportunities?

Because our answers to these three questions guide our future, they deserve our best consideration. *Guesses*, so common at this time, often lead to confusion, frustration, and dead ends. (For example, a recent Gallup Survey revealed that the greatest regret of people with college degrees is the major they chose!) On the other hand, *clarity* and self-awareness help confidently guide us toward areas we're passionate about and where we can apply our talents to the fullest extent. This is the secret ingredient to a fulfilling life.

TAKING A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Unfortunately, when it comes to understanding ourselves and our value, our perspectives are limited and biased. We view ourselves through our own lens, which contains distortions and inaccuracies and doesn't reveal the total picture. Meanwhile, others who know us well see us through a different lens. Their perspectives often reveal assets we may not realize or fully appreciate—our treasure that lies beneath the surface out of view. Because some of our most valuable qualities come so naturally to us, it's easy for us to discount or “undervalue” them. Others help call them out.

But, our sense of worth is not only *incomplete, but also inaccurate*. Each of us holds “baggage” and burdens that distort our sense of value and diminish our self-confidence. For example, if our confidence is low, we become more critical of ourselves and hesitant to offer our assets. Anything that reduces our self-confidence is a barrier to success and happiness.

Therefore, it pays to be as comprehensive and accurate as possible when we explore who we are and the assets we have to offer. That means taking a holistic perspective of ourselves through self examination and the input of others. By taking these steps to “mine our treasure,” we become more aware of how we can contribute to this world.

BALANCE SHEET APPROACH

It may seem strange, but people share some similarities with businesses! We're both created for a purpose. We both serve others. We both have “assets” (things of value we can offer). And, we both have “liabilities” that hold us back (at a personal level, we'll term them “constraints” or barriers). In fact, businesses file reports called a “Balance Sheet,” which details their assets, liabilities, and net worth. Financial analysts use these reports to help determine a company's *value* or *worth*.

Can you see the parallels? Yes, we can borrow a page from the business world to help mine *our* treasure and more fully understand our assets and our value! This helps build a sense of hope, vision, and direction for our lives.

What follows is a brief overview of assets (i.e., treasure) and constraints at a *personal* level. This will set the stage for the assignment that follows.

Assets

Assets are useful, valuable, and desirable things we have to offer. In business, assets are valued in financial terms, but the value of a person's assets is a function of: 1) the *quality* of the assets, 2) how *well* they are used and 2) how *much* they are used. In other words, the impact of our assets is determined by the quality and quantity of their use. Assets that are not used have only *potential value*.

Now, let's review the seven categories of personal assets (yes, seven!) that are fully described later. Each of you has assets you might not have realized or fully appreciated, but they exist and are ready for use!

Foundational Assets:

- Physical
- Mental/Intelligence
- Behavioral/Psychological/Relational
- Spiritual/Inspirational/Values

Anticipatory Assets:

- Experiential
- Interests
- Passions and Dreams

As indicated, foundational assets are those you are already applying in your lives—they are an important part of who you are today. Anticipatory assets, on the other hand, will be more heavily utilized in future years as you plot your course.

Constraints

Unfortunately, each of us carries burdens or constraints that hold us back, distorting our view of ourselves, and our assets. They can damage our self-confidence, hope, vision, and sense of worth. If overwhelming, they can lead us into unhealthy behaviors and decisions that compromise our present and our future.

Some common constraints include fear of failure, guilt or shame, abuse and neglect, inability to forgive, difficult family circumstances, economic disadvantage, a lacking support structure, poor health, and low self-confidence. They can also be “offsets” to our assets. An example might be an athletic person who has asthma.

Constraints can cloud our ability to see or use our assets. This is why addressing them through personal care and development, mentoring, and counseling can have a huge impact on our spirit, productivity, and value. While we want to live according to our strengths, sometimes overcoming a constraint can have even greater impact.

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment is to “mine your treasure” by developing your own Personal Balance Sheet—a holistic vision of who you are and what you have to offer. Ideally, this comes from three sources: 1) self reflection, 2) other trusted people, and 3) independent assessments, where available. By having inputs from multiple sources, you will have a much more comprehensive and accurate appraisal of yourself.

First, conduct your own assessment of your assets and constraints by reviewing Appendix A and completing the blank form in Appendix B. Your school may facilitate some independent assessments to assist you in areas such as personality and aptitudes (e.g., free DISC personality tests are available on www.123test.com and elsewhere). This “phase one” Personal Balance Sheet form is simply from your own perspective. Appendix C contains a sample *abbreviated* Personal Balance Sheet to assist you.

Second, make a list of people in your life who know you well and have your best interests at heart. These may include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, mentors, youth leaders, and the like. Priority should be given to adults who can offer perspectives with the benefit of maturity and wisdom.

Third, seek their input by asking them to describe your special qualities and strengths, as well as constraints, in each of the seven asset categories. (Note: most will have greater perspective in certain areas than others so they may not answer for all segments) Hand out the asset category descriptions and interview questions in Appendix A and give them a blank sheet of paper to record their answers. You can also conduct this via a personal interview and record their answers if this is more convenient. It would be especially helpful for you to receive their comments in person so there is an opportunity for discussion and clarification. *Remember not to be defensive when it comes to their assessments of your constraints.* Their constructive suggestions can be especially helpful to you.

Fourth, for each asset and constraint category, create a consolidated list that combines your self-assessment with those of the other contributors (highlighting those receiving the most responses). This report is your **Personal Balance Sheet**.

Notice the difference between your initial draft and this new, wider ranging list. Notice how others see your value in ways that are not always obvious to you. You are much more valuable than you can possibly realize, and this “mining your treasure” exercise helps reveal exactly that!

Finally, write a summary report that contains the following:

1. A consolidated list of your key assets and constraints (your Personal Balance Sheet)
2. A summary of the insights you gained about yourself and the impact of receiving input from others. Were there any surprises or assets you previously didn't realize or appreciate?
3. Action steps for personal growth that arose from this assignment. Are there assets you can more fully utilize or constraints you can address/overcome?

Appendix A

Personal Balance Sheet Description and Questionnaire

Assets

Foundational Assets

Physical Assets

Summary

These assets involve our physicality and body and are used in our careers, volunteer opportunities (e.g., coaching), and recreation.

Examples:

- Strength
- Speed
- Power
- Endurance
- Coordination/agility
- Flexibility
- Dexterity
- Gracefulness
- Artistry—vocal, instrumental, dance, fine arts
- Appearance
- Sport-specific
- Visual/auditory acuity

Reflective Questions:

1. Which of the above stand out as physical assets you possess and can offer? Be specific and add others that may not be on the list.

2. How can/do you use these assets in life?

Mental/Intelligence Assets

Summary

These assets involve our mind and are used both professionally and personally in our education, career, relationships, decision-making, communication, knowledge and leisure pursuits, moment-to-moment thinking, interpretation, and analysis.

Examples:

- Intelligence/intellect
- Aptitudes (specific skills/talents)
- Analytical ability
- Creativity and ingenuity
- Conceptual thinking
- Decision-making/problem solving (applied reasoning)
- Concentration
- Memory
- Language/communication skill (written, oral)
- Comprehension
- Intuition
- Subject matter-specific (e.g., math)

Reflective Questions:

1. Which of the above stand out as assets you possess and can offer? Be specific.

2. How do you currently or plan to use these unique assets in life? Which career areas play to your mental strengths and talents?

Spiritual/Inspirational/Values Assets

Summary

These assets involve our unique spirit. They include our moral compass/core values, intrinsic worth, disposition, faith, and sources of inspiration and encouragement we can offer others. Spiritual assets are reflected in our behavior, thoughts, relationships with God (for believers) and others, and our daily decisions.

Examples:

- *Spirituality*
- *Values and Traits: (see P. 14)*
- *Inspiration (encouragement to others)*

Reflective Questions:

1. Which of the values and traits listed on P. 15 most characterize you?
2. In what ways can/do you encourage and inspire others?
3. How can you envision using these unique assets in life?

Behavioral/Psychological/Relational Assets

Summary

This highly diverse asset category reflects our personal nature and has the greatest influence on how we deliver our assets and relate to ourselves and to others. These assets encompass our personality, psychological attributes, attitudes, and emotions and are used constantly in our personal and professional lives. The Positive Values and Traits exhibit on P. 14 presents a variety of behavioral assets for your consideration. Three external and free self-assessments are also recommended: 1) DISC personality profiles, 2) Enneagrams, and 3) strengths identifiers (www.high5test.com).

The following offers an overview:

- Personality traits:
 - Fast-paced vs. slower paced
 - People-oriented vs. task oriented
 - Volatile vs. stable temperament
 - Introverted vs. extroverted
 - Optimistic vs. pessimistic
 - Serious vs. light-hearted
 - Driven vs. supportive
 - Creative vs. analytical
 - Adventurous vs. cautious
- Social attributes:
 - Manners
 - Professionalism
 - Communication
- Productivity:
 - Goal orientation (strategic/planner vs. tactical/opportunistic)
 - Decision-making ability (objective vs. subjective)
- Emotional Intelligence:
 - Self awareness and confidence
 - Self management and control
 - Social awareness
 - Relationship skill (teamwork, conflict management)
 - Stress tolerance—high vs. low
 - Self- vs. other-centered
 - Independence

Reflective Questions:

1. Which of the above personality, social, emotional, and productivity traits best characterize you and stand out as assets you have to offer? Which are areas for personal growth?

Interests

Summary

Through knowledge and experience, we're drawn to certain subjects and activities that stimulate us intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially, and recreationally. We use them both professionally and personally in our free time. Think of them as the "spice of life!" Our interests make us interesting, well-rounded, more fun, and more valuable!

Examples:

- Knowledge pursuits/subject areas for learning
- Career
- Activities
- Community service
- Faith
- Recreation and leisure
- Entertainment
- Hobbies
- Nature
- Travel
- Social
- Creative pursuits

Reflective Questions:

1. Review the above and identify your interests in each category? What do you most enjoy in your free time? Be specific.

2. How can you further develop and use these unique assets in life?

Positive Values and Traits

HEART TRAITS:

Kindness
 Sincerity
 Compassion
 Friendliness
 Helpfulness
 Generosity
 Empathy
 Patience
 Unselfishness

PRODUCTIVITY TRAITS:

Reliability
 High standards
 Purposeful
 Productive
 Disciplined
 Resourceful
 Ambitious/motivated
 Decisive
 Conscientious
 Responsible
 Curious
 Objective

NATURE TRAITS:

Cheerfulness
 Self confidence
 Positivity
 Enthusiasm
 Active
 Sociable
 Good humored
 Stable
 Expressive
 Politeness
 Cooperative

INTEGRITY TRAITS:

Honesty
 Integrity
 Honor
 Respect
 Loyalty
 Humility
 Courtesy
 Tact
 Obedience
 Courage
 Self discipline
 Authenticity

SPIRITUAL VALUES:

Faith
 Gratefulness
 Perseverance
 Resilience
 Contentment
 Grace
 Purity
 Dignity
 Modesty
 Forgiveness

Interview Questionnaire

1. Describe the student's **physical** assets. These assets involve our physicality and body and are often used in careers, volunteer opportunities (e.g., coaching), and recreation. They include strength, speed, endurance, coordination, agility, flexibility, dexterity, and gracefulness.
2. Describe the student's **mental/intelligence** assets. These assets involve our mind and are used throughout daily life in our careers, decisions, communications, and knowledge pursuits. They include: intelligence, aptitudes, analytical/technical thinking, creativity, conceptual perspective, reasoning, problem solving, attention, language/communications, comprehension, decision-making, and subject matter expertise.
3. Describe the student's **spiritual/inspirational/values** assets. They include our moral and emotional nature, character and disposition, intrinsic worth, values, faith, and sources of inspiration and encouragement we can offer others. Reference P. 14.
4. Describe the student's **behavioral/psychological/relational** assets. This is the most diverse of the asset categories. It has the greatest influence on how we *deliver our assets* and relate to ourselves and others. They include: disposition, personality traits, social/relational behaviors, communication, self-discipline, attitude, self-confidence, motivation, productivity, decision style, judgment, intuition, and emotional intelligence. Reference P. 14.
5. Describe the student's **experiential** assets/credentials (e.g., academic, career, service, and life skills). These represent the skills and enrichment we have gained through personal experience and illustrate our accomplishments and impact. They are of significant benefit to future employers and include: work, community service, life skills, leadership attributes, global perspective, credentials, accomplishments, roles, awards, and important lessons learned.
6. Describe the student's **interests** that stand out. Through personal experience, we're drawn toward certain subjects and activities that stimulate us intellectually, physically, or emotionally. They are used in the following arenas: activities, knowledge pursuits, faith, hobbies, community service, and recreation/travel/leisure/entertainment. Think of them as the "spice of life!"
7. Describe the **passions and dreams** you can envision for the student (e.g., cause-, interest-, and skill-related). Our passions and dreams offer vision, direction, motivation, and a sense of purpose. They are usually based on our skills, interests, or causes we care about and bring us fulfillment. They are also manifested in several life arenas including career, service, and family and shape our legacy.
8. Describe the student's **constraints** or barriers (things restraining the use of the above assets, interfering with reaching their full potential, or which could adversely affect their self worth, self confidence, and personal effectiveness).

Appendix B

Personal Balance Sheet—Blank Form

ASSETS:

Physical:

Mental:

Spiritual:

Behavioral:

Experiential:

Interests:

Passions and Dreams:

CONSTRAINTS:

Physical:

Mental:

Spiritual:

Behavioral:

Experiential:

Interests:

Passions and Dreams:

Appendix C

Sample Abbreviated Personal Balance Sheet

ASSETS:

Physical:

Speed, strength, agility, football

Mental:

Analytical, problem solving, math, science, comprehension, 3.7 GPA

Behavioral:

Leader, decisive, goal-oriented, mature, confident, even tempered, outgoing, persuasive, risk taker,

Spiritual:

Strong faith, kind, integrity, generous, loyal, service-minded, encouraging, genuine, overcame asthma adversity

Experiential:

Three part-time jobs, public speaking, youth mentor, Rotary leadership award winner, FBLA, football team captain, ASB

Interests:

Football, skiing, hiking, water sports, youth mentoring/coaching, electronics

Passions and Dreams:

Start an electronics business, Master's, married with a few kids, to serve on mission-related overseas trips to help people/businesses in developing nations, climb Mt. Rainier

CONSTRAINTS:

Physical:

Asthma

Mental:

Prone to excessive detail

Behavioral:

Perfectionist, demanding, highly opinionated

Spiritual:

Highly self critical when make mistakes, struggle with forgiveness

Experiential:

Limited travel/global perspective

Interests:

Disinterested in world affairs

Passions and Dreams:

Family finances may threaten college