



Connect: Explore Your Gifts, Aspirations and Role in Changemaking

Note: [Click here to submit your work anonymously](#) for your mentors to read. This will help us improve our program for future students and track your volunteer hours, which will be added to your certificate at the end of the program.

Purpose:

Explore your gifts and your aspirations for your development, and consider how they can help you discover your role as a changemaker.

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1. Introduction

What is a gift?

Every person possesses many gifts: qualities, talents, specialties, natural abilities and natural interests. Our gifts can be found in the things which give us the most energy, are connected to our passions and sense of purpose, or the things we value most in life. They are usually found where our passions, values and strengths intersect. In this exercise, we will begin to explore, uncover and own the gifts we possess. We will also explore the areas where we seek to grow for our own development – the areas where we hope to become skillful or masterful. Keep in mind, finding and developing your gifts is not always a straightforward, linear process. Our understanding and application of the gifts we can offer the world will forever fluctuate through our experience, so there is no pressure to “get it right,” at first, it’s just about starting to ask the right questions.

Protecting, nurturing and offering our gifts to the world helps us live happier lives. Our gifts are meant to be shared, as they are rooted in our passions, the things that make us feel good, and call on our strengths. Everyone's strengths are needed by someone or many people where they have weaknesses or needs. Your life and your gifts matter to the world and uncovering them so you can protect and grow them is one way to live a life that both brings you joy and provides an important service to people in your life. Sometimes, our gifts will come out at unexpected times. Maybe you are a skilled public speaker and the right person at the right time hears something that changes their perspective and activates them to live a more empowered life. Maybe you are an artist and the creation you make that means the least to you, actually meant the most to someone who needed to see it at the right time. Even if we cannot see how our gift can be of service to others, it doesn't mean that it is not. Trust that you have something to offer, even if it is not obvious.

In the examples above, the gifts of the public speaker and artist are connected to a skill. This is common, but not all gifts manifest as skills alone. Consider, for example, a grocery store clerk, who is skilled at stacking fruits and vegetables, cleaning the floors, or managing orders, but doesn't find joy in these tasks. However, they often find themselves singing in the back of the shop and the people around enjoy it. While the clerk has come to hate the thought of seeing any more produce, when they get the chance to help a customer find something, they feel

energized! The true gift this clerk offers the world goes beyond their skills at the job.

The lesson is that gifts are not always found in our skills, but more so what we are naturally drawn to, naturally strong at and what we get curious about. And, in places we wouldn't expect to find a gift, like working a produce job you don't love, we might find them happening organically - like making people happy with your singing voice, or making a person feel good by helping them or making connections with people because you enjoy hearing about the lives of others. Sometimes our gifts are not yet being applied through our passions and callings.

Lastly, when you find your gifts and they become clearer, be sure to protect and nurture them. Here's one final example, this coming from the voice of a Program Coordinator at Be the Change Earth Alliance. This example will be referenced in subsequent sections below.

"One of my gifts is organizing people to come together to take action against climate change. I am a good speaker and can access my passion to help others feel motivated to take action. However, I was giving this gift all the time, offering all my energy out to thousands of people, with only a few who actually wanted to take action. Over time, this depleted my energy and I burnt out. I was unable to offer that gift for a while. This happened because I wasn't finding ways to refill my energy. Because I loved motivating others and speaking, I was giving this gift more and more even though I had less and less energy. But in the end the world missed out on my gift because I didn't protect and nurture it.

I realized I needed to find things to fill my energy back up again, so that offering my gift to the world can be sustainable. For me, playing and recording music was my source of energy and recharging!"

The takeaway here is to maintain an awareness of how you are using your gift, when you need to protect it, when you must nurture its development and make sure to find enjoyable ways to replenish yourself.

2. Instructions

Find a time and place where you can work in your journal undistracted for at least 30 minutes. Being undistracted will help you make connections that are deeper than the surface. You might decide to do this exercise over a few days.. Take some time to make that space extra nice while you're in it - turn on music, light a candle, make a nest of pillow, etc. Once you are ready to begin, follow the process below and write down your answers and reflections to each question. At the end, you will have some clear insight into your unique gifts and your opportunities for growth. As you answer, write freely - do not place too much judgement or pressure to write the "right" things, allow yourself to write whatever comes up.

2.1 Part 1: Uncover Your Gifts!

1. **In the past, what experiences were you naturally drawn to?** What types of things did you do often, because you felt called to them? *Sometimes these happen unconsciously over our lifetime, but when we look back we can see patterns. Consider the things you did often growing up or in the more recent past.*
2. **List some times in your past where you felt most passionate, inspired or energized.** What were you doing? Where were you? Who were you with? Why did it feel good? Maybe you completely lost track of time while doing it.
3. **What were you naturally good at in your past?** Look for any strengths, big or small you can identify, we all have strengths. This can be something like an obvious talent (e.g. singing, art) or something less obvious to you, like being good at organizing events for friends, building relationships, learning from books, managing your emotions or navigating through the forest while hiking. List anything and everything you can think of.
4. **Where do your natural strengths overlap with what you identified you were naturally passionate about, inspired or energized by?** Where can you see your strengths as showing up while doing any of those things? Write down each strength that you have applied while doing something you are passionate about.

2.2 You found your gifts!

Your gifts are where your strengths align with what you feel most passionate, inspired and energized about. Even if your gifts do not feel totally clear yet, that's OK! You are asking the right questions and over time you will find more clarity.

Applying our gifts in ways that align with our passions and callings helps us lead a fulfilling life. This alignment of passion, calling and gift also helps offer that gift in the best way for the world. You have so much to offer. Now let's examine where your gifts are already leading to positive change, and where you can further apply them.

5. **When have the gifts you have just named contributed to something positive in your life or the lives of others?** Did they make a positive impact on people in your life, your community, or the natural world? What was that impact, big or small? Write down as many examples as you can for each of your gifts.

To help you answer this question, consider our Program Coordinator's answer, building on the story described above.

"I realized that I valued people coming together to make change and in the past, I often found myself organizing events for my friends. In that, I found that one of my gifts is bringing people together for positive experiences and that I could use my gift by bringing people together to positively impact the world, through community organizing. Step one to using my gift in this way was looking at my past and seeing that I enjoyed bringing people together and did it often because I like creating positive experiences for others. I used that gift to make a positive impact through bringing people together for changemaking."

6. **How could your natural strengths or aptitudes be applied to do something positive in your life or the lives of others in the future?**
7. **How can you offer your gifts, through your changemaking work?** Name some ways your gift can bring value to your team, community or project. Remember, gifts like building relationships or bringing smiles to others' faces

are just as important as a gift like leading a group. Your gifts always have value. Own that value without self-judgement and don't compare to others.

3. Nurture Your Gifts: Explore Your Areas of Growth

When we get clear on how we would like to grow and develop our skills, we begin to see more opportunities to do so. Often, the areas where we would like to grow are areas where we might have some level of fear or aversion involved, because growing in that area requires us to go outside our comfort zone. Everyone has different comfort zones, fears and has at one point or another avoided activities where those fears are present. The voice of fear is there to protect us from a sense of danger, physical or emotional. In the absence of physical danger, overcoming the fear by taking risks can widen our comfort zone and help us grow. From this perspective, that voice of fear and feelings of resistance that help us see where we have an opportunity to grow. The more we choose growth over fear, the less power fear has over us. Resistance becomes an opportunity, rather than a limit to our potential.

“One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.” -Abraham Maslow (Good Reads, web)

8. **What are some areas where you would like to build skills, knowledge or mastery?** This includes areas where you don't feel you have a strength or a gift (yet).
 - a. List some areas and opportunities for growth related to the gifts you highlighted above.

To help you answer this question, consider our Program Coordinator's answer, building on the story described above.

“I knew I valued bringing people together for climate action, but I wasn't very organized as a person. So I sought to intentionally build skills in my personal organization, which made me more effective and less stressed.”

9. How could you consciously look for opportunities, including in your changemaking work, to try new things, take risks and push yourself to grow in these areas? For each area of growth in question 1 (growth in general/outside your gifts) and 1a (growth of your gifts), list opportunities to take any step, big or small, toward growing in that area. Ideally, this opportunity can be connected to your changemaking work or a team project. For example, if public speaking is an area you would like to grow, you could volunteer to make presentations, facilitate team meetings, or to recruit people in your school to your team. If doing these things is really scary to think about doing today, list them anyway, and find a smaller step to take. Have compassion for yourself - It's OK if something is scary for you. By being honest with yourself when you face resistance and discomfort, you'll start to see areas for growth.

4. Articulate and Apply Your Gifts

We've done the hard part. The last thing you need to do is clearly articulate your gifts, your areas of growth and how you can apply your gifts. Clearly writing your gifts down is about *owning* your gifts as part of who you are and your journey of growth. If thoughts arise that make you feel your gift isn't worth anything, or you doubt that your gift truly does have value or has 'less value' than the gifts others might have, it's time to let that pass and own your gift without judgement.

Here's an example, building on Be the Change's Program Coordinator's story above.

"One gift that I am working on is sensing and working with energy in the human body. But energy work can feel unfamiliar, intangible or ethereal to others. I felt like an imposter: how can I say I possess this gift if I can't show it and don't feel good at it yet? Once I started owning it as a part of me, even if I was still learning what it meant for myself, the opinions of others stopped mattering and I gained confidence. As a result, I took more risks like getting a Reiki certification, doing energy work on my friends, and began learning and improving much faster. Once I started owning my journey, suddenly all that mattered was my own curiosity to learn more at my own pace."

In using your answers from above, write clear statements for each of your gifts in the structure below:

10. My unique gift is (question 3, 4)...This gift can make a positive impact by (5 and 6)... I can offer this gift through changemaking by (7)... I can grow my gift by (8)...

Affirmation: *My life and my gifts are unique and offer value to others and the world. I will own my gifts and my journey of growth, embracing the resistance may I face. With my gifts, I have something important to offer the world.*

5. Dive Deeper

The links below are complementary resources for you to explore topics of interest in greater depth.

- [Ted Talk: Jearlyn Steele, Find Your Gift and Give It](#): A story-based talk on finding our gifts, accessing them and offering them to others.
- [Steve Harvey talking about gifts](#), how they can be elusive and how they don't always connect to our passions.

6. References

Good Reads, Web, Retrieved from

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/118145-one-can-choose-to-go-back-toward-safety-or-forward> on Sept 19, 2020