

Choices Regarding the Empowerment of Others

Directions: This assessment is designed to make you aware of the assumptions and values that underlie your choices. First, in the space below, name the ways in which you help others, either directly or indirectly, with your time or money. List as many areas as you can think of, especially those you spend the most time thinking about or acting on. (If you have already completed the *Helping Inventory*, starting on page 64, you can draw from it.)

More directions: Go through the following list to learn more about the choices you've made above. If you wish, you can check more than one item in a list, but if you do, star the option(s) that are most prominent or more frequent. Don't let yourself get bogged down by any question; just give your best answer, or put a "?" if you're completely stumped.

1. Choices about what's seen as a problem.

a) The root cause of the worst problems are:

- Physical—lack of resources (food, money, land)
- Intellectual—lack of information, inaccurate information, ignorance, wrong-headed thinking and decision-making, poor planning, poor evaluation
- Natural—such as disease, birth defects, natural disasters, etc.
- Interactive—poor communication, miscommunication
- Normative—people have different values that conflict
- Moral—people don't live up to their own values; selfishness
- Emotional—negative feelings, lack of caring and compassion, lack of motivation
- Behavioral—lack of skills
- Social/Relational—lack of relationship and support structures, ineffective structures
- Spiritual—evil, lack of faith in or relationship to God, no connection to oneself or one's own spirituality
- Other _____
- I'm not really sure

An additional note: The above question had to do with what you *understand*. In contrast, all of the following questions should be answered not based on what you think but on what you *do*, your regular actions and behaviors. For instance, in answering the next question, if your main volunteer work involves helping a food bank you would check "it involves physical suffering" and if your favorite charity involved a tree-planting organization you'd check "resources are wasted." For all the following questions then, keep in mind that you are summing up your *active* concern—what you're doing—not of what you think or have been taught by your parents, teachers, religious leaders, or anyone else.

b) Criteria: I address a problem if

- It involves loss of life
- It causes physical suffering
- It causes mental suffering
- It causes spiritual suffering
- It happens in relationship, between people
- Something is unjust or unfair
- Resources are wasted
- Potential is lost
- Other: _____

c) I prefer to address:

- Short-range and immediate problems
- Problems that are small now, but could be large later
- Large problems that need continued effort
- Other: _____

d) On what level do you like to have an impact? I prefer to address:

- Personal problems
- Problems of people I know
- Problems of people I don't know
- Problems of organizations
- Local or community problems
- Area or city problems
- Regional or state
- National
- International
- Spiritual
- Theoretical

2. Choices about solving problems: Please choose based on what you've actually done, not how you would like to be.

a) I usually volunteer time or donate money most often because:

- Someone asked me to give.
- I felt an emotional pull to a certain cause.
- I made a systematic assessment of the available options
- Intuition

- A sense of duty
- It gives me pleasure
- Other _____

b) I prefer to approach problems:

- From the heart, using intuition and feelings
- From the head, using logic and reason
- From the gut, using experience
- Other _____

c) I tend to act mostly on the following level(s):

- Direct service (“give someone a fish”)
- Teaching a single skill, or providing an ongoing solution in one area (“teaching someone to fish”)
- Teaching someone how to meet most of his or her needs
- Teaching someone how to learn to meet most of his or her needs and then teaching them to teach others in a chain reaction fashion.

d) I lean toward:

- Helping as a volunteer
- Helping as a professional
- Helping informally
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

e) Breadth: I prefer....

- To focus on one issue or problem
- To address a few issues or problems
- To address a wide range of issues or problems
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

f) When I help another person, I typically:

- Present my own solution(s)
- Support the person to solve their own problems
- Support the person to find the right expert or resource
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

g) Means of addressing problems. (Note: This question has to do with the means, not the end goal. For instance, you could have a national impact from the individual level, or a have a regional impact using the Federal government.) I prefer to work from the following level:

- Individual (for example, by changing my own lifestyle, or working one-to-one)
- Small group
- The local level (community organizations, local media and businesses)
- Area or city problems
- Regional or state
- National (national media, influencing the Federal government or large corporations)
- International (influencing the United Nations or multinational corporations, etc.)
- Spiritual (for example, prayer to God)
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

h) If I help through institutions, my preference is:

- Schools
- Religious (churches, temples, etc.)
- Government
- Business
- Other: _____

i) Time-frame: I prefer to:

- Work on short-term projects
- Be part of ongoing solutions
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

j) In helping, I lean toward being:

- Inclusive of people of all religious, racial and economic backgrounds
- Exclusive, working with or for people of only one faith, race, economic class, etc.
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

k) I lean toward giving help:

- Without asking anything in return (unilateral)
- And asking for something of equal value (reciprocal)
- And asking the person to make a reasonable stretch first (reciprocal)
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

l) I prefer to pass on information or resources by:

- Teaching or mentoring individuals
- Teaching groups (classes)
- Using mass media (articles, books, tapes, bulk mail)
- Via a chain reaction, teaching individuals to teach others to “pass it on.”
- Other _____

m) Regarding helping relationships, I prefer:

- Personal helping relationships
- Impersonal helping relationships (anonymous, one-time, or long-distance)
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

n) If empowerment is looked at in terms of an oppressor and a victim, I tend to focus on:

- The victim
- The oppressor
- The relationship between the victim and oppressor
- My relationship to the victim
- My relationship to the oppressor
- It depends. (Describe:) _____

o) I prefer to address problems that are:

- Physical—lack of resources (food, money, land)
- Intellectual—lack of information, inaccurate information, ignorance, wrong-headed thinking and decision-making, poor planning, poor evaluation
- Interactive—poor communication, miscommunication
- Normative—people have different values that conflict
- Moral—people don’t live up to their own values; selfishness
- Emotional—negative feelings, lack of caring, compassion or motivation
- Behavioral—lack of skills
- Social/relational lack of relationship and support structures, ineffective structures
- Spiritual—evil, lack of faith in or relationship to God, no connection to oneself or one’s own spirituality
- Other _____

p) I prefer to help by: *(Circle the forms of empowerment that you regularly do.)*

Giving time, giving money, giving authority or freedom, information or knowledge, praising, appreciating, affirming, encouraging, active listening, giving feedback,

witnessing or modeling, story-telling, praying, or challenging.
Other _____

q) Timing: I tend to address problems:

- Early, when I notice them, before they become too big
- Only after someone else has noticed, otherwise they will reject my help
- Late, only after it becomes a requirement or a necessity

r) The feeling that usually causes me to help or empower others is:

- pity, compassion or empathy for someone oppressed
- anger at injustice
- hatred toward the oppressor
- guilt for having so much more than others
- loneliness or a desire to connect with others
- pride or a desire to show off or dominate
- other _____

3. Go back to each item, and where appropriate, to the left, mark the choice as CD, if you made a conscious, deliberate choice in that area, or UA if it was an unconscious or automatic choice, or a choice made by others for you.
4. Go back to each item, and where appropriate, to the right, mark who or what most significantly influenced you in making this choice. Your answers could include the name of a parent or relative, a teacher, a book, etc.
5. Now that you have a sense of your choices regarding the empowerment of others and the other available options, are there any changes you could make that would result in a better use of your energy, money or time—and ultimately in a better world? What are these choices?

Summary

There are several conclusions that I'd like you to draw from taking this assessment:

1. There are *many* ways to help people, and some are more effective than others. This is one reason why there is so much confusion regarding the best ways to help others.

2. You have already made many choices about your preferred way of helping others.
3. Sometimes your choices of how to help were well thought out, but at other times no conscious decision or attempt to make the best choice was made. You probably had no idea that you were making all these assumptions about how to help others.
4. Other people have other preferences and have made other choices.
5. If you become conscious of your choices and *why* you made the choices, you may make better choices in the future. You can also develop a broader repertoire of ways to help, becoming more flexible and more loving.
6. Under certain conditions, some choices are objectively better than others. A case in point is that, when someone is ready to learn on a higher level, it's better to "teach someone how to fish" rather than "give them fish." This is common knowledge for most people, but climbing to the next level, teaching people how to learn, is not familiar to most people. And making the next jump, one to a chain reaction of learning, is even more rare.

To these conclusions I would add a personal opinion. I don't think that doing good is best thought of as if it's a math problem with one right answer. I prefer to think of it as an artistic self-expression blended with a practical focus. Architecture would be a good analogy. If you are designing and constructing a building, there is room for artistic self-expression, but it must be functional. In the same way, the good actions you choose can reflect your unique talents, values and style, but it must be of service to somebody. So there can be more than one right response to the question, "What is the best, most loving use of your time?" and each person's response will be unique. But, as with architecture, the good you do can be built out of straw, benefiting one person and lasting a day, or out of stone, benefiting millions and lasting many lifetimes. Goodness requires both kinds of structures as well as all those in between, but I think that there is greater value and beauty in structures that endure.

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