

Coaching Exercise:

Creating a Life of Your Own Design

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This activity is designed to help you classify your day-to-day tasks according to how well you perform them and how much satisfaction they bring you.

Step 1: List all of the activities you perform in a day, both work-related and personal.

Create the most comprehensive list possible. Break large tasks into smaller activities, but don't get caught up with daily necessities like showering/brushing your teeth. An easy way to compile this list is to carry a notebook around with you for a few days and write down new activities as you perform them. Use a chart like the one listed below to capture your activities. (See Appendix A for a version of the chart you can fill in yourself)

Example - My Activity Inventory

Work	Home
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow up Emails• Client Correspondence• Internet Research• Writing Status Reports• Scheduling Appointments• Coordinating Team Members• Giving Presentations• Team Strategy Meetings• Solving Client Problems• Business Reading• Managing Greenwood Project• Training New Hires• Regular Client Meetings• Filing• Tracking Billable Time & Invoicing• Organizing My Projects• Planning My Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing Finances• Paying Bills• Fixing Things Around the House• Errands• Yard Work• Keeping in Touch with Friends• Cleaning Out the Garage• Leading Charity Meetings• Hosting Dinner Parties• Coordinating Family Events• Planning Vacations• Grocery Shopping• Reading for Pleasure• Reading to the Kids• Helping Kids with Homework• Preparing Meals• Exercising

Step 2: The four types of activities.

Your Unique Ability doesn't show up in a vacuum. By looking at your whole life and identifying which activities engage it, you can see what other demands might be getting in its way. We'll begin by establishing four categories of activities – Unique, Excellent, Competent, and Incompetent. Everything you do can be categorized this way.

From "Unique Ability: Creating the life you want," by Catherine Nomura & Julia Waller with Shannon Waller (2009)

After reading the following descriptions, you're going to place the letter U, E, C, or I – representing the appropriate category – beside each activity on your Activity Inventory list.

Here are the descriptions for each category:

Unique Ability Activities

Superior skill – Energy – Passion – Never-ending improvement

Of the activities on your list, which ones are your favorites, the ones you love to do? Others agree that you show superior skill in these areas. These activities create more energy than they use up. When you're engaged in them, you lose track of time. As a test: Could you do this all day long and still keep going? If it's part of your job, would you still want to do it even if you didn't get paid for it? If you've received any training or instruction in this area, you were probably a star student because you've got a natural ability here. There are always new and exciting possibilities for improvement, no matter how good you get.

Excellent Ability Activities

Superior skill – Reputation – No passion – Teamwork

Of your activities, which do you recognize as something you do better than most people? You've got a superior skill in this area, so you find these activities satisfying, and you find the results you can create rewarding. People count on you for what you're able to do in this area. You may have developed a reputation for your ability. Many people may want you to work with them or for them, and they provide you with opportunities to do these things. There's a great sense of teamwork: People want to work with you because your abilities meet the highest standards. But deep down, you don't have a real sense of passion for this activity. In fact, you may not even like to do it. For all the external pulses, these activities don't tap into your internal motivations. This lack of passion is what differentiates Excellent from Unique Ability activities.

Competent Activities

Meet minimum standards – Anxiety – Competition – Repetition

There are other activities on your list that you're merely adequate at – you reach minimum standards. You're simply okay, and a lot of others could do these activities with much greater success or a lot less effort. Because you aren't distinct from others, you face a lot of competition. You may worry about falling behind, failing, or becoming obsolete. The activity seems the same, day after day, which leads to boredom. You don't feel particularly inspired to get better, and your efforts don't bring you any kind of growth. There is little or no improvement in your performance over time.

Incompetent Activities

Failure – Frustration – Conflict – Stress

It's often very clear where your Unique Ability isn't. Which activities on your list make you feel frustrated or stressed because you're just not good at them? Which activities would you be happy never to do again? You might have put a lot of time and effort into these, but you still don't get a good result. Nothing seems to work,

and you can't make headway. If you were going to be good at them, you would be by now – but it's just not happening. You might also find yourself in conflict with others when you're doing these things because of your low skill level. Breakdowns in communication occur frequently. Everything is difficult.

**A word on "hobbies"*

Occasionally, someone will come across an activity that they love to do but would only categorize as Competent or Incompetent in terms of skill. Some of our clients have put activities like golf in this category. Though they may not be great golfers, they do gain enjoyment from being out on the course, from the social aspects of the game, and from the relief it gives them from their busy lives. If you find that you have an item like this on your list, you may want to redefine it to break it down into its component parts and try categorizing those. However, if skill really isn't an issue, either because the activity requires no skill or because you don't strive to develop your capabilities since it's a hobby that you do for other reasons, this activity may not be a useful addition to your list.

Step 3: Categorize your activities

Go through your Activity Inventory list now, and categorize your activities according to the descriptions above. Mark each item as follows:

- U for Unique Ability activities
- E for Excellent activities
- C for Competent activities
- I for Incompetent activities

It's important to tell the truth about your ability level or lack thereof. You don't need to be good at everything. Operating in a Unique Ability framework means finding ways to let go of what you're not good at. Give yourself permission to delegate things that are not your Unique Ability, but understand that labeling something as Incompetent or Competent activities is not an excuse for being irresponsible about your commitments.

Work		Home	
• Follow up Emails	C	• Managing Finances	E
• Client Correspondence	E	• Paying Bills	C
• Internet Research	U	• Fixing Things Around the House	I
• Writing Status Reports	E	• Errands	C
• Scheduling Appointments	C	• Yard Work	C
• Coordinating Team Members	E	• Keeping in Touch with Friends	I
• Giving Presentations	U	• Cleaning Out the Garage	I
• Team Strategy Meetings	E	• Leading Charity Meetings	U
• Solving Client Problems	U	• Hosting Dinner Parties	U
• Business Reading	E	• Coordinating Family Events	C
• Managing Greenwood Project	U	• Planning Vacations	C
• Training New Hires	I	• Grocery Shopping	C
• Regular Client Meetings	U	• Reading for Pleasure	U
• Filing	C	• Reading to the Kids	U
• Tracking Billable Time & Invoicing	C	• Helping Kids with Homework	C
• Organizing My Projects	E	• Preparing Meals	I
• Planning My Time	E	• Exercising	I

Step 4: The Activity Snapshot

Finally, take the categorized activities from this list and group them into 4 quadrants (see below) to better view which activities fall into each category. (See Appendix B for a chart to fill in on your own)

Unique	Excellent
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Researching• Managing Projects• Client Communication• Problem Solving• Hosting Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writing• Managing Money• Team Management• Research
Competent	Incompetent
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Routine Activities• Scheduling• Administration• Paperwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anything Mechanical• Cleaning• Training• Preparing Meals• Exercising

Appendix A – Your Activity Inventory

Work	Home

Appendix B – Unique Ability Snapshot

