**PUBARFS 6890**

**Strengths Reflection**

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I had never taken the StrengthsQuest assessment before, and the results were interesting. My strengths in order were:

1. **Learner** – People exceptionally talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. The process of learning rather than the outcome excites them.
2. **Achiever** – People exceptionally talented in the Achiever theme work hard and possess a great deal of stamina. They take immense satisfaction in being busy and productive.
3. **Intellection** – People exceptionally talented in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.
4. **Context** – People exceptionally talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.
5. **Ideation** – People exceptionally talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

I think this test got pretty close on my strengths, but there are a couple of things I didn’t see in the Top 5 that I think should be there. But first on what it got right. Learner is right on – that probably is my top strength. One reason I like working at Ohio State is that I get to take classes for free. I have been taking advantage of that benefit since 2008. Finally in 2014 or so, I decided if I’m going to take a lot of classes, they need to count toward a degree. I decided to do a dual master’s in public policy and environment and natural resources, due to my interest in climate change. Climate change has been the centering point of my academic and volunteer work for the last five years. It has substance – there’s a lot of learn – but it’s also important. If we do not get carbon emissions under control over the next 12 years, we will not have an inhabitable planet. My volunteer work, where I find the most meaning in my life, is literally centered on trying to save the planet by getting governments to mitigate carbon emissions.

Achiever is also a good descriptor, though I might not have ranked that as high as No. 2. This is what drives me to get things done, even if it requires using skills that are not necessarily my strengths. Four of my top five skills fall under strategic planning, but sometimes when you are trying to make a difference for the climate, you also need to use influencing and relationship building. It takes me a lot more effort – and at times courage – to try those things, but I force myself to do them because they need to be done to make a difference.

Intellection is a skill that I would have set high for myself in high school and college, but at this age I am more interested in making my life count for something, and too much intellectual discussion that has no basis in the real world can detract from that. I used to love to have theoretical debates, and had a hard time finding people to have them with growing up. But now I am not as interested in that, though I end up getting sucked into it sometimes on social media. Be that as it may, apparently this is an underlying skill I have that came out on this assessment.

Context makes complete sense because I have a master’s degree in history. As an undergraduate I was an English major. Then my senior year I started taking history classes. Suddenly the literature I had been reading made a lot more sense in historical context – however literature classes never discussed that. It made no sense to me to study literature or art devoid of the historical context – the context is what explained everything about them. So after undergrad I continued with studying history so I could start to understand human civilization and put all of human history in context. The best context for human history is geological history, climate, and environment. The environment determines everything about a civilization, from what people eat to what their buildings look like to diseases they deal with, etc. It determines a lot about current migration crises. This is another reason I keep working on climate change.

My fifth strength was Ideation. This seems like basically a repeat of Intellection, though maybe with more creativity. I’ve always been a big thinker, trying to draw different strands of history and knowledge together. I just didn’t have a good way of doing that in history grad school, so I didn’t stick with the subject for a Ph.D. I was in history grad school in the early 90s, before environmental history as a field got started. Had that been an option at the time I was in school, I probably would have pursued it.

One strength that I didn’t see in the Top 5 that I wish I would have was Belief, which is about finding core values that give your life meaning. That is really where I’ve been at for the last several years. I want to use the last third of my life to make a material difference in the world, and right now there is no issue more pressing that climate change, because without an inhabitable planet, nothing else is possible. People really have no idea how much trouble we are in and how quickly we must take strong comprehensive action to avoid the worst impacts. The next 12 years – which happen to correspond with my last 12 years in the working world – will be crucial to determining whether people still alive in 2050 have a decent place to live, or whether their world will be so ravaged by famines, mass migrations, storms, droughts, fires, and sea level rise as to threaten the survival of human civilization. Climate change and other human activity also threatens the survival of most other species on earth. Just in my lifetime humans have wiped out 60 percent of wildlife populations, and if we keep going, we will render them extinct. I have a strong sense of justice for the other creatures who we share this planet with who can’t speak for themselves, as well as for the environment itself. I am not sure what I will end up spending the next 12 years on, but it will be something to address these issues in some way to the most of my ability.

I looked through the career advice for each of my five strengths, and it all points to one thing – college professor. My dad was a professor and my mom was a college administrator, so that makes sense. When I was in college in the 80s I took a career assessment that also rated me at 90-something percent suited for college professor. However that has not materialized in my life for any number of reasons. I ended up taking out a lot of loans for my history degree and couldn’t keep going to grad school, so I switched to journalism as a way to find a job. I liked journalism because it let me follow news on a wide range of subjects, but it never got deep enough into the underlying causes of things for my satisfaction. Corporate media today is a joke – there’s no way I would work for most news outlets. I ended up leaving journalism for a communications position at a nonprofit health care plan that served Medicaid patients. This was a mission-driven organization, which I liked, but health care isn’t my calling. I want to be working on the environment.

The reason I started the dual master’s program I am now in was to possibly transition into a career working for an environmental organization such as Sierra Club. I have done a huge amount of volunteer work with Sierra Club over the last four years – at least 20 hours a week – and I now chair the Ready for 100 Columbus campaign trying to get the city to commit to 100 percent renewable energy. However, I am not sure I want to make this transition after all. If I were staff working for Sierra Club, I would be given a lot of goals I had to meet for number of letters to the editor published, number of people turning out at events, number of signatures on petitions, etc. I would also be sent to work on political campaigns of candidates that the national political group chose whether I personally supported the candidate or not. It’s a high pressure field with a lot of uncertainty. One staff member here just lost his funding and is looking for another job. Now I am thinking I might just keep working at Ohio State but keep volunteering for environmental causes. As a volunteer I can do what I want and not do things I don’t 100 percent believe in. So as of now, that’s where I am at.

This assessment is also making me think about possibly doing a Ph.D. I had ruled that out, despite the fact that temperamentally I am well suited for it, for a number of reasons. The main reason is that right now I feel the world needs doers and activists, not so much thinkers and ideators. We know what the problems are in the world, and we know what the solutions are. Renewable energy is fully developed and cost effective. The problem is getting it through legislators such as those in our federal and state governments where so many elected officials are bought and paid for by fossil fuel interests. The situation is not that difficult to understand. The solution requires activism, engagement, and persistence. Unfortunately these are all skills that didn’t land in my Top 5 strengths – Influencing, Executing, and Relationship Building. They take a lot of effort for me to do, but I am trying. I am doing that because it’s what I have determined the world needs. Leading the Ready for 100 campaign has been a learning experience. For the first time, I am not trying to develop knowledge and skills in myself but in others. I need people who are good at the things I am not as good at to make this happen. Being an introvert, it’s not always easy for me to reach out. But our campaign has made a lot of progress. When we started, city officials were telling people that our carbon emissions could not possibly make a dent in the grand scheme of climate change. Now Mayor Ginther is sending out emails telling people we have to cut emissions in half by 2030 and to zero by 2050 in line with the United Nations reports. That is going to require a transition to 100 percent renewable energy, and I hope we can help make that happen.