

# CHAPTER 1

## **Assessing Your Skills, Abilities, and Goals**

Whenever you are lost, the first thing you look for is a map. Once you finally get it unfolded, you look frantically for your destination. This is an important step, but it overlooks an even more important step: looking for your current location (that’s why you always see those big YOU ARE HERE marks on public maps). If you don’t know where you are, you can wander for a long time without truly knowing whether you are getting closer to your destination or farther away.

This is true if you are looking for a store in an unfamiliar mall, for a street in an unfamiliar neighborhood, or for your “true vocation.” In the latter case, it’s particularly important that you take the time to determine your current location.

### **Exercises for Self-Assessment**

In order to help you begin this journey of self-exploration, several exercises have been provided here for you. Keep these completed exercises, because you will use them later as you begin your job search.

#### **Write Your Career Autobiography**

Get a binder (or a computer disk) and write your career autobiography. This autobiography should include recollections about your education. What courses have you taken? Which courses did you like? Which did you dislike? What do you remember learning in those courses? What have your long-term goals been? What were some of the things you said you wanted to be when you grew up?

Your autobiography should include a section on the projects you have worked on as a part of your jobs, internships, or volunteer experiences. Again, it should include

your memories of what was fun or enjoyable about the projects, as well as the parts that you remember less fondly. Take the time to reconstruct in your mind the successes you had. Remember the feelings you had as you tackled the projects. Frustration? Exhilaration? Pride?

Part of this effort should include an inventory of the skills you have developed and any special skills that you have picked up along the way. Also, record those bumps you have felt, and failures or difficulties you have experienced. If you overcame those setbacks, recall how you did it and write it down. If you walked away at the first sign of failure, record that. If you tried repeatedly without improving your result, record that as well. This exercise is extremely valuable, because it forces you to think about valuable experiences you have had in your life, probably jogging some old memories that you might otherwise have forgotten. This kind of introspection, if approached seriously, will give you a keener insight into what you have to offer an employer. It will help you observe your personal character from a more objective distance.

When you have a disability, it is extremely important to take the time to examine your strengths and weaknesses. The fact is that everyone, regardless of whether they have a disability, can score themselves on a variety of different skills and abilities. The most important thing you can do is to identify honestly what your strengths and weaknesses are, and to focus on the strengths. That is not to say that you should ignore all of your weaknesses; in fact, my suggestion is that you do quite the opposite. Take the time to identify your weaknesses, and then look for ways to address them.

It is quite likely that if a weakness is related to your disability, you have already begun to find ways to make accommodations for it. Perhaps you have a reading disability. If so, you may have already developed strategies for addressing that disability. If you haven't, it may be worth discussing with a rehabilitation counselor how you can learn to use some of the available computer technology or text-taping services so that you can access information that is currently in text (printed) form. Another resource available to you to help identify possible accommodations is the Job Accommodation Network, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13.

### **Identify Your Skills and Traits**

The list in Table 1.1 can help you identify your skills and traits. Consider the following skills and rank yourself on a scale from 1 to 5.

Table 1.1 Skills

Weak 1	Some Skill 2			Average 3		Good 4	Outstanding 5				
Abstract thinking	1	2	3	4	5	Customer service	1	2	3	4	5
Accounting/ bookkeeping	1	2	3	4	5	Dancing	1	2	3	4	5
Acting	1	2	3	4	5	Data entry	1	2	3	4	5
Analytical	1	2	3	4	5	Decorating	1	2	3	4	5
Assembly	1	2	3	4	5	Delegating	1	2	3	4	5
Athletic	1	2	3	4	5	Desktop publishing	1	2	3	4	5
Attention to detail	1	2	3	4	5	Drafting	1	2	3	4	5
Carpentry	1	2	3	4	5	Driving	1	2	3	4	5
Cashiering	1	2	3	4	5	Editing	1	2	3	4	5
Choreography	1	2	3	4	5	Electrical	1	2	3	4	5
Coaching sports	1	2	3	4	5	Entertaining	1	2	3	4	5
Collaboration	1	2	3	4	5	Experience with various software	1	2	3	4	5
Complex decision making	1	2	3	4	5	Fashion design	1	2	3	4	5
Computer programming	1	2	3	4	5	Fine motor	1	2	3	4	5
Conceptual	1	2	3	4	5	Flexibility	1	2	3	4	5
Conflict resolution	1	2	3	4	5	Following complex directions	1	2	3	4	5
Cooking	1	2	3	4	5	Foreign language fluency	1	2	3	4	5
Counseling	1	2	3	4	5	Fund raising	1	2	3	4	5
Courage	1	2	3	4	5	Gardening	1	2	3	4	5
Critical thinking	1	2	3	4	5	Grammar	1	2	3	4	5

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