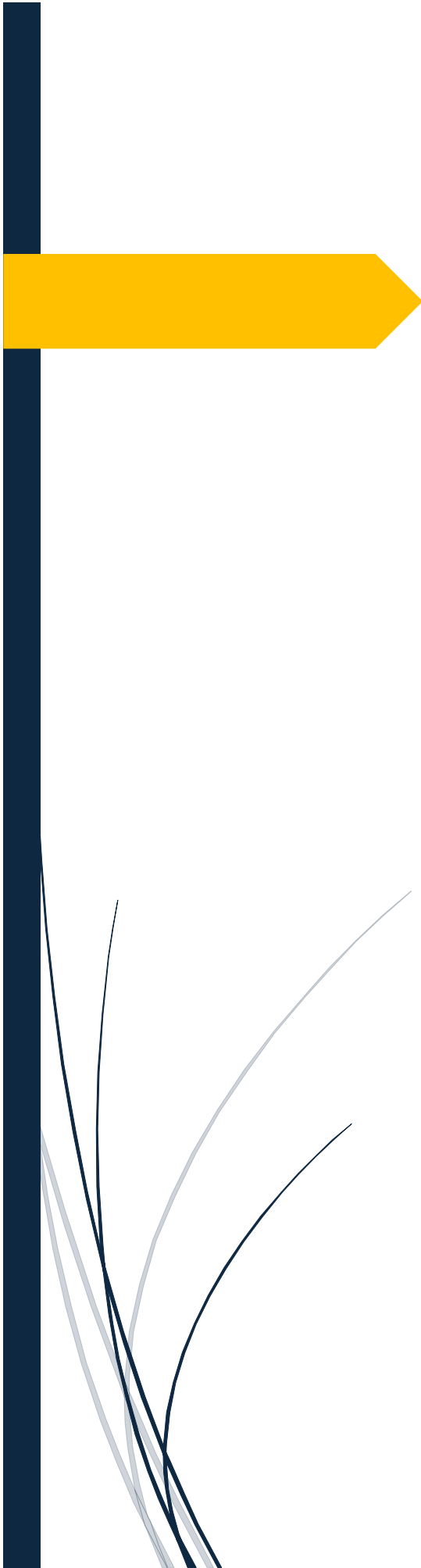




Capabilities

Discover You...

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Ask someone about their weaknesses, mistakes, insecurities, or things they wish they could do better, and they can often generate a list fairly quickly. Ask the same person, “**What are you capable of?**” and the answer may be much harder to find.

We often have a much easier time identifying what we struggle with than recognizing what we are capable of.

Part of the difficulty is that we tend to have a narrow definition of capability. We think about accomplishments, professional skills, education, talents, or things we do exceptionally well. But our capabilities are much broader.

A capability is something you have developed or are developing that helps you navigate yourself, other people, situations, challenges, and life.

Capabilities can include things you know how to do, but they also include how you think, how you relate to people, how you solve problems, how you respond when things go wrong, and how you take care of yourself and others.

You may be capable of:

- Learning new information
- Solving problems
- Making people laugh
- Listening to someone who is struggling
- Cooking
- Parenting
- Organizing
- Leading
- Teaching
- Fixing things
- Managing money
- Creating
- Exercising or using your body
- Connecting with people
- Navigating conflict
- Making difficult decisions
- Asking for help
- Advocating for yourself or someone else
- Tolerating discomfort
- Recovering after disappointment
- Adapting when something does not go according to plan

Some capabilities are highly developed. Others are emerging. Some may be so familiar to you that you no longer recognize them as capabilities at all.

Why Capabilities Matter

Knowing what you are capable of provides evidence about who you are.

That evidence can contribute to **self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-trust**. It reminds you that you have resources available to you and that you have developed abilities through experience.

This becomes particularly important when something is not going well.

We can easily allow difficulty in one area of life to influence how we feel about ourselves everywhere else.

A difficult day at work can become: **“I'm not very good at anything.”**

A relationship struggle can become: **“There must be something wrong with me.”**

A parenting mistake can become: **“I'm a bad parent.”**

A poor performance can become: **“I'm a failure.”**

The event may be real. The disappointment may be appropriate. There may even be something that needs to be repaired, changed, or learned.

But the conclusion we make about ourselves is often much larger than the event itself.

Recognizing the breadth of your capabilities helps maintain perspective:

Something didn't go well today. That is different from believing that I am not capable.

The more ways you have of experiencing yourself as capable, the less pressure any single area of life has to determine how you feel about yourself.

What Are You Looking For?

Discovering your capabilities isn't simply creating a list of things you are “good at.”

Instead, look for **evidence**, look for **facts**.

Look across your life for situations in which you have learned something, handled something, figured something out, helped someone, created something, adapted, persisted, recovered, or grown.

Look at What You Do.

What can you actually do?

Think broadly. Consider work, home, relationships, hobbies, sports, parenting, school, travel, finances, technology, cooking, creativity, communication, physical activities, and everyday life.

Don't dismiss something because it seems basic.

Something that feels ordinary to you may only feel ordinary because you have been doing it for a long time.

Ask yourself:

- **What do I know how to do?**
- **What can I figure out?**
- **What do I do that other people sometimes struggle with?**
- **What have I learned how to do over the course of my life?**
- **Look at How You Think**

Not every capability produces something visible.

Some of your most valuable capabilities may involve how your mind works.

Perhaps you are good at seeing patterns, understanding systems, noticing details, generating ideas, anticipating problems, thinking strategically, making decisions, learning quickly, or seeing multiple sides of an issue. Neurodiversity is a superpower. Not a deficit.

Consider:

- **What kinds of problems am I good at solving?**
- **How do I approach something when I don't know the answer?**
- **What do I understand particularly well?**
- **What do people ask for my opinion about?**
- **Look at How You Relate to People**

Relationships require capabilities too.

You may be someone who listens well, makes others comfortable, brings people together, notices when someone is struggling, communicates clearly, makes people laugh, encourages others, teaches, mentors, negotiates, advocates, sets boundaries, or repairs relationships after conflict.

Ask:

- **What do people tend to come to me for?**
- **What role do I naturally play in groups, friendships, or family?**
- **What do people seem to trust me with?**
- **How do I contribute to the relationships that matter to me?**
- **Look at What You've Survived and Navigated**

Some capabilities are developed because life required them.

Think about difficult transitions, losses, failures, disappointments, conflicts, moves, career changes, relationship changes, parenting challenges, financial stress, health challenges, or periods of uncertainty.

Rather than focusing only on what happened, ask: **What did that experience require from me?**

Maybe you learned to adapt.

Maybe you became more independent.

Maybe you learned to ask for help.

Maybe you learned to tolerate uncertainty.

Maybe you developed patience, persistence, boundaries, emotional awareness, or the ability to begin again.

The difficult experience itself is not the capability.

What you developed while navigating it may be.

Look for the Capabilities You Minimize

One reason capabilities can be difficult to identify is that we frequently discount our own.

We say:

- *“That’s easy.”*
- *“Anybody can do that.”*
- *“It’s not a big deal.”*
- *“I’ve always been able to do that.”*
- *“That’s just part of my job.”*
- *“That’s just what parents do.”*

But familiarity does not make something less of a capability.

Pay particular attention to things that feel natural to you.

Ask yourself: **What do I assume everyone can do that perhaps not everyone can?**

Build Your Capability Inventory

Begin creating your own inventory. Don't worry about whether something is impressive enough to belong on the list.

Consider capabilities across different parts of your life:

Thinking & Learning

- How do you learn, analyze, understand, plan, decide, or solve problems?

Relationships & Communication

- How do you connect, listen, communicate, support, influence, collaborate, or repair?

Practical Life

- What can you organize, manage, build, cook, fix, plan, navigate, or take care of?

Professional & Leadership

- What can you lead, teach, coordinate, create, manage, present, negotiate, or improve?

Physical & Recreational

- What can you do with your body? What sports, activities, outdoor skills, hobbies, or physical challenges have you learned?

Creative & Expressive

- How do you create, write, design, imagine, perform, make, decorate, tell stories, or express yourself?

Emotional & Change

- How do you manage difficult emotions, tolerate discomfort, adjust, persist, recover, ask for help, or begin again?

Care & Contribution

- How do you parent, mentor, encourage, support, volunteer, teach, care for, or contribute to other people?
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Go Beyond the Inventory

The purpose of identifying capabilities isn't simply to create a longer list of things you are good at.

The larger goal is to develop a **broader sense of yourself**.

If most of your confidence comes from one area such as your career, relationship, parenting, appearance, academics, athletics, or being needed by others, difficulty in that area can have a disproportionate effect on how you feel about yourself.

A broader range of capabilities gives you additional places to experience yourself as competent, useful, engaged, connected, and effective.

After a difficult day in one area of life, ask: **What else am I capable of today?**

- Maybe work went poorly, but you can cook dinner.
- Maybe your relationship feels difficult, but you can go for a run.
- Maybe parenting was exhausting, but you can build something, call a friend, play music, work in the yard, read, create, exercise, or learn something new.

This isn't about avoiding the difficult experience.

It is about remembering: **One difficult moment, role, or area of life does not get to define the whole of you.**

Continue Building

Capabilities are not fixed.

Some you already possess. Some you haven't used in years. Some are waiting to be discovered. And others haven't been developed yet.

Consider: **What would I like to become capable of?**

- What would make your life more interesting?
- What would make you more independent?
- What would increase your confidence?
- What would help you connect with other people?
- What would give you another place to experience accomplishment or enjoyment?
- What would help you navigate life more effectively?

Choose something small enough to begin.

Take a class. Try something new. Return to an old hobby. Ask someone to teach you. Practice a skill. Volunteer. Make something. Fix something. Join something. Learn something.

You don't have to already be good at it.

Developing capability requires spending some time **not being capable yet**.

That is part of the process.

Reflection Exercise

What are five capabilities you know you already possess?

What is one capability you tend to minimize or take for granted?

What is one part of your life where too much of your confidence or identity may currently be concentrated?

When you have a difficult day in that area, what other capabilities can you intentionally reconnect with?

What is one new capability you would like to develop?

What is one small step you could take toward becoming more capable in that area?

Remember

Your capabilities are not limited to what you are best at.

They are the collection of things you have learned, practiced, figured out, survived, developed, and discovered throughout your life.

And perhaps one of the most important capabilities is knowing:

I can become capable of things I cannot do yet.