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,* 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 who 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.

7. 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.

> *It is best to develop a strategy that utilizes all the physical conditions*
> *and elements that are directly at hand. The best strategy relies upon*
> *an unlimited set of responses.* – Morihei Ueshiba