

Turning Points

THE HIGHLANDS COMPANY STUDENT NEWSLETTER #5

Going to college? Start with yourself!

In *Alice in Wonderland*, the Cheshire Cat said, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.” The opposite can be even truer: If you know where you are going, you can overcome almost any obstacle to get there.

Sound easy? Not really. Many students find it very difficult to envision their future – to know where they’re going. They don’t have enough experience about their options; or, conversely, they have preconceived opinions about the “only” career they want. Often this is based on what a parent or friend is doing. In reality, each student has to make decisions based on one very real issue: *who am I?* You are a unique individual, hardwired in ways that make you distinct. You may have some of the strengths and talents – and maybe even some of the interests – of your parents, but you will also have some that are unique to you as well. So how do you decide what “road” to take to school, majors, and career?

The Highlands Company has developed programs that help you make these decisions by helping you consider critical factors about yourself. We help you measure and consider your natural abilities, your interests, your values, your personal style, and your acquired skills. Understanding how these affect your choices can give you practical guidance for considering options without limiting your choices.

1. Learn what **your** natural strengths are. What are you good at? What comes to you easily? What activities are more difficult? How do you learn best? How do you solve real strategic problems most effectively?

Karen was planning to study philosophy at a small liberal arts college when she took The Highlands Ability Battery. In this process she learned that she had strong structural abilities. In thinking about these abilities, she realized that she had always had an interest in the architecture and design of buildings around her. Karen decided to try a larger university where she could study philosophy but also explore courses in architecture and industrial design as well. Today, Karen is a successful practicing architect.

2. Determine how **you** study and work most easily and effectively with others. Do you prefer to work alone or on projects which involve cooperation with others? How do you learn best: in group discussion, lectures, laboratory work, or individual study time? Do you get intense about one element of a subject you’re interested in, or do you prefer getting involved in numerous aspects of the same subject?

Bill started out in a technical program concentrating on computer programming. His classes were small and design-oriented with individual hands-on projects. He soon found that he was tired and bored at the end of a day. His grades began to suffer. Bill’s parents suggested he learn what his true abilities were before he went any further in his studies. By



completing the Highlands Ability Battery, Bill learned that his personal style and learning channels were directed to more discussion-oriented classes involving lectures and group projects. He found a group of classmates with whom he could study and he began taking more general business courses. Bill became enthusiastic about his classes, his grades improved, and he went on to graduate and get a management training position at a mid-sized computer software firm.

3. Think beyond grades and test scores. What you have learned and accomplished, and how well you do on standardized tests,

are certainly important. But what may be more important is who **you** are, what you do well and what you enjoy.

Diane scored well on all the standardized tests. She made very good grades at a well-know prep school and went on to an Ivy League school where she also excelled. She then went to law school and got a job at a good law firm. Diane did well, but she was unhappy with her career. When she took the ability battery, she realized that her strongest abilities were those that lawyers rarely utilize and her relatively weaker abilities were those that lawyers make almost constant use of. Diane was intelligent and motivated enough to do any job well, but her satisfaction was greatly reduced by the effort it cost her to work against her natural abilities and interests.

4. Seek out practical as well as educational learning experiences that focus on **your** choices. College is a time of learning and experiencing. Do you see a connection between your school work and future work activities? Once you have discovered your natural abilities, give yourself the chance to experience life in areas that combine your abilities and interests. Consider several options and concentrate on courses, summer jobs and internships that draw upon these abilities and interests.

Peter went to college with three possible career targets: be a journalist, be a lawyer, or go into politics. These may be related, but each is a broad and challenging field distinct from the others. They were all related to Peter’s strongest natural abilities. In college, he systematically took courses and got internships in all three fields. By the end of college, he had eliminated politics and law, but decided to go into journalism. He now has a job in that field with a major newspaper. Of his group of 6 or 7 friends from high school, Peter is the only one who graduated in 4 years.

Whether you think you have a definite sense of what you want to study, or whether you are overwhelmed by the pressure of making educational choices, several steps are clear:

- Know your natural abilities
- Consider your interests
- Formulate 2 or 3 reasonable choices
- Begin to focus on those options
- Start getting hands-on experience in the areas you’ve chosen.



Ethan's Story:

Ethan graduated from high school and went to college as a management major, intending to follow in his father's footsteps. He was finding his classes a little frustrating, but didn't know why. As his first year ended and summer approached, Ethan decided to take The Highlands Ability Battery and look for a summer job. Ethan got a big surprise. He had a very strong sales profile.

Deciding to test the new information about himself, Ethan took a job selling pest control contracts. Every few days, he went over his profile to review his strengths and weaknesses so that he could learn better ways to make sales. By the end of the summer, Ethan was #6 in an organization of over 300 salespeople. He sold over \$100,000 of the product and made \$30,000—enough to pay for a good part of his college education. Ethan wrote to say, "The information about my abilities helped me pinpoint my strengths and weaknesses so that I could work to improve my skills. Thanks to the help of Highlands, I was elected most inspirational sales representative in the top office of the country and sold more contracts than 97% of the company. All in one summer!"

Ethan also found that learning about his strengths helped him make better decisions about college courses. Management courses, for him, were frustrating so he looked at a curriculum that was more in tune with his interests and his strong abilities. Learning about his unique strengths helped Ethan gain the confidence he needed to succeed. Most of all, he could make practical plans for the future based on his new knowledge of himself.

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

Beth and her mother, Sharon, both knew that Beth needed to go to college to get ahead in this world, but they had different ideas about the kind of school and major Beth should pursue. Beth took The Highlands Ability Battery and found out that she was a "specialist-introvert" with a talent for art. Working on the school yearbook her senior year helped Beth decide to look at a potential career in art. Based on Beth's ability profile, she and Sharon decided that a small school where Beth could specialize quickly would be better than a large university. In addition, Beth was able to use the knowledge she gained from the ability battery to articulate her needs and talents in order to gain entry into the school of her choice. Sharon wrote us to say, "Without The Highlands Program, I never would have supported Beth's decision. THP gave me the objective, concrete information I needed to advise and guide my daughter. Now I feel confident that she will graduate in 4 years with a degree that will ensure her a job she can combine with her interests...I found that the ability battery is for the parents as much as for the child. As the one who is paying huge amounts of money for the child's college, the parent needs this information. It helped me gain tremendous insight into my daughter."

Students frequently have only vague ideas for the future. They often are led more by what others consider important for them than what is really important. Parents and counselors can help students think through the process of discriminating between good ideas and unsound ideas.

Here are some tips that will help you talk to your teenager about his or her dreams:

- **Don't rush to judgment.** It's not important that a teenager find the ideal career right now. It is more important that he or she actively try out several different ideas about careers. Students frequently change their goals as they gain more experience and insight.
- **Be suspicious of pat answers.** When an answer about college or career comes too quickly, try to understand where it comes from. Has the desire to become a doctor come from real experience (working with sick people, a love of biology, family experience) or is it prompted by the notion that it's a good way to make money?
- **Welcome complicated, half-thought-out answers.** It's easy to become frustrated when you get cloudy ideas. But be glad that you are getting something, however unclear, and try to find the source of the ideas. When did the student get interested in that? Why?
- **Encourage hands-on experience.** What students experience for themselves will have 10-20 times greater impact on them than what you tell them. Encourage paid or volunteer work in areas of interest. It will help solidify good ideas and help them understand why other fields may be wrong for them.
- **Help your student pay attention to what he or she is really interested in.** Interests are a clear source of passion and creativity. Help your student pursue subjects and ideas he or she finds compelling and interesting. When it comes time to choose a college or a career direction, students who have actively pursued their interests have a clear advantage.

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