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**DISCOVERING  
THE SKILLS  
THAT  
ENERGIZE  
YOU**



**The Skill Clusters Exercise**

**EXECUTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT  
FOR  
FOCUS, DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH**

As an executive, your professional growth cycle is accelerated. Time is compressed. What might take a few months to learn at lower levels becomes part of your expertise in half the time, by necessity. Consequently, your evolution as a leader is dynamic and fluid. You recognize certain tried and true anchors to your effectiveness, yet you also are regularly in a state of self-reflection, self-correction, and leaning into your discomfort zone for growth.

You know the value of reflecting broadly and deeply on where you are and the nature of your developmental path. Pressed by the demands of the marketplace, and motivated by your own desire to improve, you're ready for a periodic check-in on a number of levels, in order to take stock and be intentional about how and where you put your focus and devote your energies. One of those assessments has to do with your skills.

Because of a leader's needs for being skilled with people, data, concepts, processes, systems, and execution, a complex mix of expertise requires strategic focus and discipline in order to leverage the best of what you have, while being realistic about your weaknesses. This tool presents you with a unique, structured approach for doing just that.

At the conclusion of this assessment process, you will have a sense of where you've come from, where you are, and where you're going. What this process helps you to do is to:

- ◆ Accurately identify your full range of skills,
- ◆ Recognize where they developed,
- ◆ Understand how those skills effectively work together, &
- ◆ See where you are being drawn to develop further.

Who knows this information? You do. But identifying it is not easy. When you try to do a personal skills survey off the top of your head, or even through more extended reflection, you're likely to miss a few, if not many of your skills. Or, you become confused about which skills you want to highlight. Another pitfall is inaccurately identifying some skills as your best, when they are simply skills that other people say are important to have.

What follows are exercises designed to help you recognize your best skills, their relationships with one

another, and the experiences that gave rise to and developed them. This information will give you a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of yourself in relation to your work. These insights can be used for designing a professional developmental plan.

The exercise will reveal the range of skills you already possess. But more significantly, it will reveal *the skills that rejuvenate your energies* and, therefore, significantly point the way toward developmental options you'd enjoy. Once you discover the skills that energize you, it's a matter of leading with your strengths and developing additional key skills to enrich your leadership resilience and capacity.

Once skill-building experiences have been organized in a meaningful way, you'll be able to map out various paths that correspond naturally to your unique pattern of skills and experiences as a leader. This is information you'll be able to present and discuss more clearly and confidently with others in the marketplace.

As a leader engaged in personal mastery, you will discover that mastery includes awareness of your energy flow when using certain skills. The intention here is to find the skills you enjoy and those that resonate with a deep sense of who you are. Here's how to do it.

#### **PART ONE: STEP ONE**

Attached is a list of 32 skill clusters (see p.5). Do this exercise quickly. As you breeze through each cluster, allow the words to bounce off all of your experiences: paid and volunteer work, community service, academics, extracurricular activities, hobbies, cultural activities—all of your experience is relevant for the exercise. As an executive, you might be wondering why you would look beyond your professional experience and include your outside activities. What this overall process does is to look for balance and a larger sense of flow and rejuvenation than can be achieved by looking solely at what you do as a leader inside organizations. With that in mind, try to think flexibly about the skill cluster headings. If half or more of the words in a cluster “click” with experiences you've had anywhere in your life, circle that cluster heading. If you feel a bit ambivalent, go ahead and circle it. Don't circle or put check marks next to individual words within the clusters at this point. Push yourself to go through the 32 skill clusters in about four minutes or so, trusting your reflex responses to be right.

Circle as many clusters as you'd like based on your life experiences up to this point in time (don't project into the future). And don't be modest. (Many leaders have a tendency to underestimate and understate what they have accomplished.) Do not be surprised if you circle most or even every cluster heading. Take about four minutes now to do this part of the exercise.

#### STEP TWO

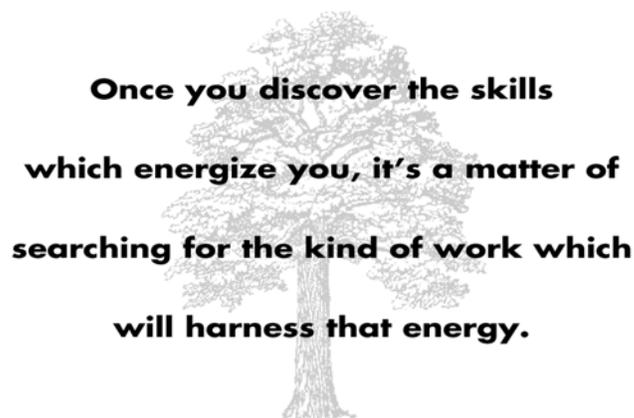
Now go back to the cluster headings you've circled and rank them in *order of enjoyment* – by considering which ones give you more energy, are able to be engaged with less effort, etc. Put a number next to each circled cluster heading until you have them all numbered.

Finished? Think about the significance of what you just did. 1) Recognize the range of skills you have identified. Broader than you thought? Closely related? Surprisingly different? 2) Notice that you've identified skills you're *good at* yet may not necessarily find engaging. In fact, some of them may actually *drain* your energies. 3) Look at the clusters you've ranked numbers 1-6 and see if any are skills you really want to keep separate from your professional life. For example, "Craft/Artisan" may be something you love doing as a hobby, but not something you'd like to integrate into your skill base as a leader. Part of the enjoyment it holds is doing it on your own, away from work. For that or those skills, exclude it (or them) and change your numbers accordingly, moving what was in the number 7 up to number 6, etc.

What remains now is a rank ordering of your skills showing which ones are especially energizing (numbers 1-6), and the remaining ones that you enjoy less (if at all) even though they are competencies. Making this distinction will allow you to focus your attention on the skills you're good at *and* find rejuvenating. (As a further step, you might consider the degree to which each of your skills is animated when applied to: 1) working with people; 2) working with data and information; 3) working with ideas and concepts; and/or 4) working with things (technology, parts of nature, the human body, animals, etc.). Ultimately, much of your mental health as a leader will ride on using and developing the skills that continually make you feel alive, engaged, growing, contributing, and having a meaningful experience. The varied energy levels associated with your different skills are worth thinking about.

#### STEP THREE

At the bottom of the Skill Clusters page, write down your top six cluster heading choices. Now take those same six cluster headings and write them again within the inner rim of the circle. (In the Sample Skills diagram these words are in capital letters.)



#### STEP FOUR

Return to the complete list of skill clusters and start with the one identified as number 1. Quickly go through that cluster again, this time putting check marks next to every word that clicked with some energizing experience you've had. After doing that, jot down those checked words in the pie section of the diagram, just inside the rim. Repeat this process for each of your top six clusters.

#### STEP FIVE

You've checked off words in each of your top six skill cluster heading because they reminded you of experiences that contributed to the development of that skill in your life. What experiences popped into your mind with each of those words you checked? As a leader, you have a great depth and breadth of experience to draw from. Take some time to reflect on these. As they come back to you, jot them above the appropriate skill, beyond the rim section. (In the Sample Skills diagram, these words are in lower case letters outside the outer circle. *Suggestion:* Write all the words on a horizontal plane so you can easily read all of the skill clusters words without having to rotate the page.)

When completed, you should be able to look at the circle diagram and see the heart of your professional life from a marketplace perspective: your six major skills (in the rim), the various elements that make up each of those major skills (in each of the pie slices), and the

experiences that developed those skills (outside the rim).

**STEP SIX**

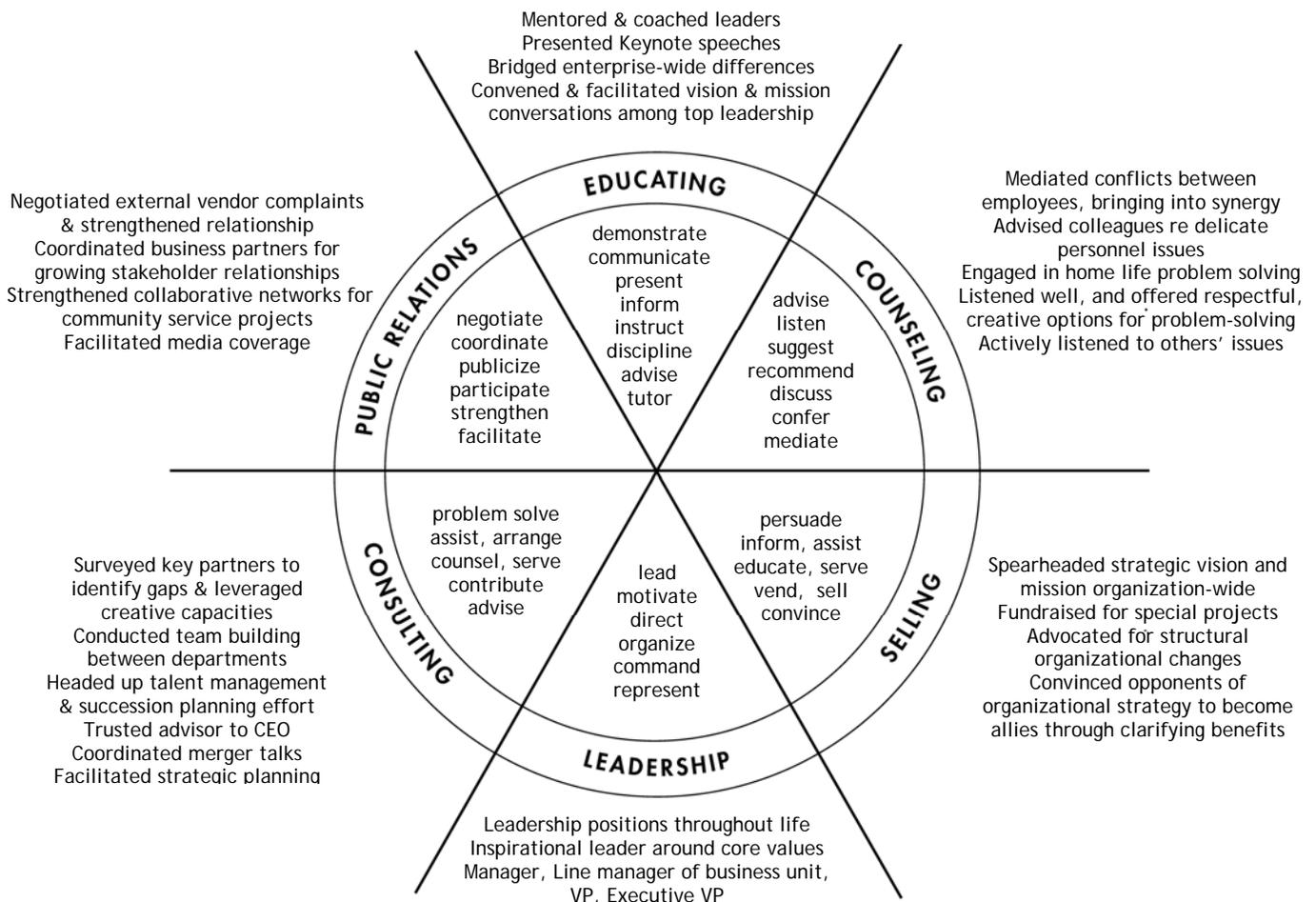
As a final exercise for this part of the process, look at your six major skill clusters in the rim of the circle. Which ones seem to be "close cousins" to one another—related in complementary ways, one helping the other? At the top of the page, write down any and all of these combinations. You may find that they show up in combinations of twos, threes, fours, or even fives.

This is a way for you to see how your skills are related symbiotically, and how they've developed in your life with a deep connectedness. One skill is rarely used by itself; rather you usually employ one in combination with others. Combining skills you enjoy has a synergistic effect and buoys your energy level as well. Discovering these connections helps you see the chemistry of your skills development. To get a sense of this, draw a tree

trunk beneath the circle, and metaphorically imagine yourself as a tree with six major branches of skills. All of the branches are outgrowths of the trunk, and commonly rooted and nourished by your entire life's experiences.

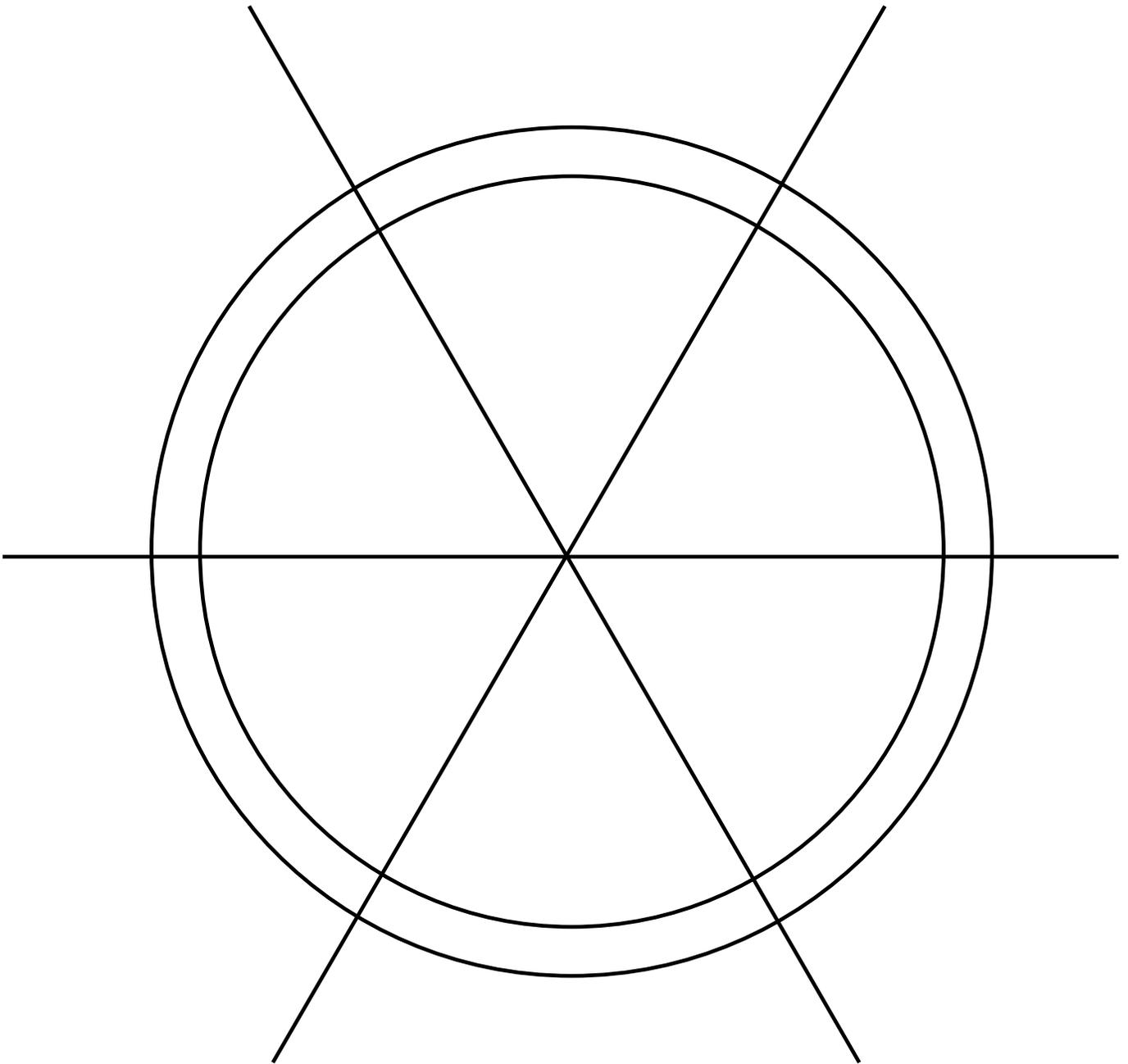
Trust this about yourself: you are deeply integrated in these ways already. Once you see and understand this information, it grounds you in your self-knowledge and allows you to approach further development and growth with an attuned awareness. Learning these connections and the language to express your diverse yet closely woven skills and experiences will provide a coherent and flexible basis for assessing your developmental opportunities in the marketplace. If your leadership development stimulates core parts of your chosen skills, then you are more likely to find that work satisfying, rejuvenating, and meaningful. And through that process comes a unique coherence and depth.

**Sample Skills Diagram**



## SKILL CLUSTERS

<b>Fundraising/ Development</b> research analyze identify contact purpose present strategize develop coordinate raise inquire motivate	<b>Product Development</b> identify evaluate interpret review assess design build develop develop experiment prepare recommend conclude	<b>Program Development</b> analyze design construct develop prepare strategize coordinate formulate recommend persuade implement monitor	<b>Marketing</b> review assess survey analyze quantify identify develop announce promote advertise advance boost improve	<b>Public Relations</b> assess prepare coordinate present negotiate publicize strengthen promote handle participate facilitate troubleshoot	<b>Human Resources</b> assess analyze recruit survey screen interview select train mediate appraise coordinate align	<b>Information</b> appraise analyze inventory structure design categorize document process manage program link coordinate organize	<b>Administration</b> monitor track assess coordinate organize requisition access receive process serve furnish respond oversee
<b>Accounting</b> record assess audit prepare maintain forecast calculate estimate figure appraise examine measure verify	<b>Finance</b> analyze invest budget inventory value appraise construct develop acquire deploy manage project	<b>Management/ Supervision</b> coordinate facilitate plan schedule delegate mediate evaluate strategize develop listen consult monitor	<b>Collaborating/ Facilitating</b> listen network focus coordinate systemize negotiate prioritize arbitrate harmonize integrate liaison complement	<b>Service/ Hospitality</b> serve assist troubleshoot present maintain help coordinate prepare create welcome enhance anticipate	<b>Leadership</b> create empower motivate encourage manage organize listen inspire interpret envision direct advise facilitate strategize	<b>Research/ Analysis</b> assess observe review interpret discern conceptualize discover infer illuminate clarify quantify qualify conclude develop	<b>Design/Develop</b> organize explore formulate sketch draw draft layout create plan style pattern build display pilot
<b>Persuading</b> present articulate clarify challenge negotiate inquire reason influence convince arbitrate mediate reconcile	<b>Writing</b> conceive create construct craft integrate interpret capture abstract express inform summarize conclude	<b>Editing</b> read review analyze check compare comment correct rewrite revise rework amend approve	<b>Technical/ Technology</b> design analyze troubleshoot inspect locate edit link coordinate implement construct modify program	<b>Mechanical</b> design analyze construct craft troubleshoot create engineer repair manipulate align coordinate balance	<b>Craft/ Artisan</b> design create build sculpt entertain perform draw render illustrate compose construct conceive choreograph	<b>Presenting/ Performing</b> create present improvise interpret act sing dance perform model entertain inspire moderate	<b>Consulting</b> troubleshoot problem solve assess assist arrange guide counsel survey serve contribute initiate investigate advise
<b>Selling</b> inform educate persuade provide assist serve trade vend handle present sell convince	<b>Investigating</b> pursue interrogate question analyze intuit seek search probe examine explore evaluate corroborate depose	<b>Innovating</b> create modify change upgrade improve design activate restructure establish stimulate implement transform	<b>Educating</b> present educate tutor stimulate inform challenge facilitate teach explore advise counsel motivate awaken	<b>Organizing/ Logistics</b> classify organize plan assist maintain liaison support arrange systemize schedule coordinate streamline simplify	<b>Counseling/ Healing</b> listen sense intuit assess analyze assist align coordinate understand inform facilitate help	<b>Language</b> translate interpret lecture converse negotiate compare understand comprehend proficiency fluency teach tutor	<b>Cross Cultural Communication</b> listen facilitate interpret empathize help understand inform respect appreciate guide bridge embrace



**PART TWO:****STEP ONE**

Take another look at the full page of 32 skill clusters. You've marked them with circles and numbers so far—determining how they rank with one another in terms of their giving or taking energy. This time, look at them *from a workplace point of view*. Do this: put a **rectangle** around the six cluster headings that reflect the skills most used in your current (or most current) leadership experience. On a daily basis at work as a leader, generally speaking, what six skill clusters defined the bulk of what you did? Complete that selection process now.

**Afterwards:** Survey those six clusters you just put a rectangle around, and look at their numbers (in terms of their energy levels). What information does this provide for you in terms of understanding your energy flow as a leader? Where might you be gaining and losing energy in the way you lead? What does that tell you?

**STEP TWO**

For this last exercise, you have a chance to step back and take a fresh look at all that you've come to learn about your skills so far. One last time, look at the full page of 32 skill clusters. Ignore the markings, rankings, circles, and rectangles. Even consider any skill cluster that may not have any markings whatsoever. Think about this, and take your time. What six skill clusters would you most like to be engaging and developing (deepening or broadening) over the next 3-5 years? In other words, what skills do you find yourself drawn to, intrigued by, or motivated to learn because you know it would be good for developing your overall capacity as a leader and your growth as a person? Simply follow your instincts here—and put a **triangle** around those six skill clusters.

**STEP THREE**

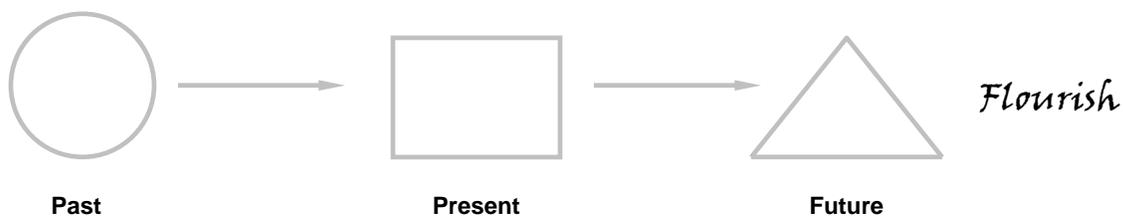
Putting it all together, here's the progression you've gone through:

Skill clusters with **circles** = skills developed from your past and up to the present

Skill clusters with **rectangles** = skills predominantly used in the present

Skill clusters with **triangles** = skills that pull you towards future development & growth

With a sense of where you've been, where you are, and where you want to go—you have a way of looking at your natural progression. Pay attention to it and the skills that bring energy into your life. Play with the possibilities of taking these developments into the marketplace, connected with organizations that are doing the kinds of work you respect and value. Merging your most energizing skills with your values and seeking out organizations (or your own entrepreneurial ventures) for mutual benefit are the intersections to pursue. The more you come home to this fundamental awareness of how you enjoy producing value in the marketplace and world, the easier it will be to cultivate a rejuvenating flow of energy in your work. That's where you will work and play passionately, and flourish.



This tool is offered free to interested users. Pass along to any who may benefit. Thank you.