

PEAK LIFE'S WORK

FIND YOUR GIFT AND GIVE IT AWAY

PEAK PRODUCTIVITY
BOOK 5

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For Lin Lin Aung

Who remains unbreakable no matter what life throws at her.

*Just like a bamboo that thrives in the harshest conditions, yet its roots
burrow deep into the earth.*

Life is too short to waste dreaming of someone else's
passion. Create yours.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1. THE GIFT	1
The Four Pillars	2
Hone Your Gift	3
Barriers to Maximizing Your Gifts	4
The Pitfalls of Assessment Tools	7
2. CHARACTER STRENGTHS	11
The Six Virtues	11
Intensity of the Strengths	17
Strength Development	18
External Influence	22
3. SKILL	25
The 10,000-Hour Rule	26
Brick by Brick	30
Rapid Skills Acquisition	31
When IQ Scores Are an Obstacle	34
Creativity	35
Lifetime Skill Development	40
4. INTEREST	43
Indications of Our Interest	44
Transforming Interest into One's Life's Work	46
Interest Killers	48
5. TALENT	52
The Freedom of Expression	53
Latent Talent	54
Discover Your Talents	57
Mistaken Talents	59
A Double-Edged Sword	60

6. SYNERGIZE THE GIFT	63
The Merger	64
Get Inspired	65
Manufacturing Aha Moments	68
When Meditation Kills Creativity	76
7. THE LIFE'S WORK	79
The Work You Were Born to Do	81
Lonely Intellectuals	83
Inevitable Rejection	85
Bet More	86
Give Your Work Away	91
When Your Job Inhibits Contributions	93
The Turning Point	94
<i>Conclusion</i>	99
<i>Keep in Touch</i>	101
<i>Also by Said Hasyim</i>	103
<i>About the Author</i>	105
<i>Notes</i>	107

PREFACE

After wandering from one thinking nook to another for six years, I finally completed the manuscript of this book.

As I wrote the last section of this book in the solitude of early hours in a park, I pondered what it was going to take for me to not publish this book.

While the sun warmed my right cheek, and five ducklings sauntered the green, lush grass, I realized how fortunate I have been to be afforded the chance and time to finish this book. Who am I not to share this piece of knowledge with the world?

If I can change a person's life for the better, I'll take the chance on doing so. It is my honor to present you with this book.

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, you had a dream to start your own business, act on stage, or even become a rap star. That fantasy lingered in your mind for a long time, until one day your friend told you it was impossible, your sibling said, “Keep dreaming,” or your coach remarked, “I don’t mean to hurt you, but that is farfetched.”

Your desire to fulfill your dream was shattered that day. What everyone said sounded true, and you needed to return to reality. You were not that talented anyway. Life goes on. You remained mired in the same slough.

You continued to work hard your entire life, aiming at only one goal: to earn a lot of money to retire comfortably. When you finally had enough money to retire, you realized that the sudden extra free time left you bored. When you do not know how to spend your time, you will resort to killing your time. That’s a sad reality that many cannot admit.

If you can’t wait to retire, you have not been living your life fully. You have not been taking pleasure in what you do. That’s

why when you are granted that enormous amount of free time, you don't know how to use it productively.

If we never pursue our potential in life, we will leave nothing in this world that can be of service to our children or to humanity as a whole; no inventions or great ideas. We will do nothing other than consume what others offer.

Discovering your gift gives meaning to life. Without knowing your gift, you are swayed by your environment. Your talent remains latent and is never used to fill up your void. You live in the hollowness of the world, like society expects you to do.

Honing your gifts to create your life's work and then later giving it away by making it accessible for the betterment of humanity gives you a purpose. Everyone is born with a set of unique abilities meant to contribute to the world's furtherance. The world needs our temporary existence to furnish it with creations assembled through the gifts bestowed to all of us.

This book chronicles the findings and lessons that I have spent more than a decade working on, satiating my incessant desire to find my gift and use it to create a fulfilled life. I finally discovered my gift with certainty at thirty-one and never looked back. My life has been a genuine pleasure every day. Improving my innate strengths has been my source of enjoyment. Since then, all the life decisions I have made have been based on whether I can advance my gifts. After saving enough to carry out my life's task, I surrendered my day job.

I have been living an uncertain and yet rewarding life. Every day is a new discovery. I can't wait to get off my bed every morning to do the work I *want* to do while at the same time,

honing my skills. Six years into my life's task, the dividends have paid off in life satisfaction many times over.

Your gift can be a dominant source of galvanic motivation, inspiration, and creativity. If you haven't explored your gift yet, it's time to start. What is confined in you that can serve humanity? Through this book, we will unearth your heart's desire, maximize your strengths, and prepare you to create a life's work that only you can do.

THE GIFT

“ A wonderful gift may not be wrapped as you expect.

— JONATHAN LOCKWOOD HUIE

THE *GIFT* IS A TERM THAT REFERS TO AN INVISIBLE, INTANGIBLE quality or attribute of a person. I refer to it as a person's innate talents, interests, character strengths, and relevant skills.

Everyone is born with some innate gifts. If you draw better than most people, you have a better chance of becoming a successful artist. Unfortunately, not everyone knows what gift they own. Maybe you've been told you should be a writer or an artist but weren't sure if it was just a passing fancy.

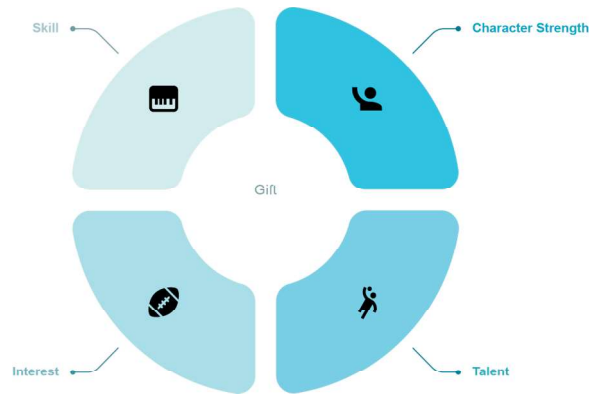
If you already know exactly what your talent is, you will be lucky enough to get to know your true self. For many of us, finding our innate talent is a long, hard, and sometimes painful

process. A few have been told consistently that they possess certain desirable abilities, whereas most people's latent talents remain undiscovered. If you are an adult reading this book now, you must have developed something within you that is just waiting to be found—if you haven't found it already.

The Four Pillars

There are four components that constitute a gift:

- **Character strengths** are the traits that are generally regarded as desirable by many cultures, such as love of learning, honesty, and discipline. These are what make your personality shine.
- **Talent** is ears for music, eyes for details, or a nose for business. Talent is foremost in your genes. It is fixed for you.
- **Interest** is what draws you back to something again and again; for example, interest in empathizing with animals, playing table tennis, or drawing people.
- **Skill** is what you gain while navigating the challenges of life such as making a fire, riding a bicycle, or knitting clothes.



The Gift Components

It is important to differentiate between each of these four components in your quest to discover your true gift. The overly simplified advice, “Follow your passion,” can quickly set you up for a lifetime of disappointment. You may be interested in swimming, but it might not be your talent. Without much deliberation, you may live your life thinking that you have a talent for swimming, only to end up disappointed that you haven’t achieved much of a swimming career. You may think you have a talent for playing chess when your actual talent is strategic thinking. Or maybe you have no talent for playing chess at all but you have developed an interest in that game and have the skills to play it well.

You use the confluence of these four pillars to pursue your life’s work. Knowing what you possess makes it easier for you to define what you want to do.

Hone Your Gift

Being born with a gift is not a guarantee that you will be successful in your life. You can’t achieve your goal without growing into the person who can. Once you discover your true

abilities, you can then hone them for life. Make a plan to upgrade them. Figure out what you can do with these skills. Don't let them wither because you rarely tap them in your current job or activities. These abilities can alter your life for the better. Use them to synergize with what you are already doing to produce novel perspectives.

Nurture your gifts to the maximum of their capacities, even if it means going through years or decades of apprenticeships. You will reap the reward of high satisfaction. The world needs us—people with diverse innate abilities who are willing to make a concerted effort to bloom and produce something that benefits the masses and creates posterity.

When you develop your gift every day, you trigger positive changes in your brain. The more you use your gift, the better your brain gets at using it. The brain's ability to adapt and change in response to your experiences is known as neuroplasticity. You can read more about neuroplasticity in the third book of this series, *Peak Brain Plasticity*. As much as possible, venture into using your gift at every opportunity. Remember that you are already in a more favorable position to use these gifts than most people. Your gift is your unique, unfair advantage.

The convergence of your innate abilities and the opportunities that present themselves to you results in something unique for you to do and do well. People often take the path of least resistance because they are unsure of what else to try. However, with some effort, it is possible to uncover your gift and find the path that will lead you to fulfillment.

Barriers to Maximizing Your Gifts

Had Jimmy Fallon succeeded in major films auditions, he may not have climbed to the top of the late-night show ladder in such a short time. If Soichiro Honda had been successful in his job as an engineer, he may never have undertaken the tasks that ultimately inspired him to make his own scooters and develop Honda Motor Company.

A wrong choice—that may seem good at the onset—could set you back years in reaching your goals. But with the right one—even if it does not seem profitable—and some luck, you can be quickly propelled toward your goal.

Life is full of randomness. If you are going by all your apparently excellent options, it might seem incredibly difficult to successfully forecast which choice will lead to success the quickest.

The common factors that can keep you from developing your gifts are:

i. Your job

YOUR VOCATION, if chosen correctly, can propel you toward your end goal. Most often, when we enter the workforce, we don't give enough thought to anything other than whether the job matches the degree we graduated with. Fair enough—we are all young and naïve at that point.

At our job, let's say we were all quite successful, and the pay was rather decent, even though the work felt like a drag. Every day, we looked forward to the weekend. As we climbed the corporate ladder, we secured a position that had little to no relevance to our gift. Since the pay was good, we became very

comfortable with the job. We stopped improving but still went to work just so we could draw the salary.

At the time, we knew for sure that we didn't like our job, but when it grew too comfortable for us, our inner talent was buried deeper. We may think that our calling was to do that job, but it is just that your colleagues became too reliant on you. Watch out for jobs that drain your soul, no matter how adept you are at them.

2. Monetary rewards

WE MAY SELECT a college degree that potentially grants us access to a high-paying job. We may choose a vocation that will pay the most regardless of our natural inclinations. Because society largely considers money the metric of success, you may feel drawn to what will earn you the most attractive wages.

As long as you earn reasonably well, you may be hesitant to move around. Starting your own uncertain venture might be the farthest thing from your mind. You might still focus on that venture but just as a hobby. A hobby remains a hobby if you can't blossom it into a full-scale realization that can be subjected to public criticism and that generates genuine feedback to grow you. A hobby limits the time you can spend practicing and improving. As a result, you drift farther away from your dream.

Creative work is always uncertain. If you must have assurance that your venture will guarantee a lot of money, you will likely never start your life's work. You will never hone your true abilities.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart would have stuck to composing European music if he had wanted financial security. Instead, he

went on to compose opera-style music, which was risky and not well-received in his time. That controversial music genre later became one of the most world-renowned in the world.

3. People's expectations

OUR PARENTS MAY INCESSANTLY EXPECT us to learn and succeed in their business or enroll in the most prestigious university for a better chance of joining the highest pecking order in society. Because we spend most of our time with our parents, they hold a tremendous influence over us.¹ We depend on them during our youth. They can repress our dream by insisting we take piano lessons instead of drawing or study literature instead of exploring various species outdoors.

As we grow older, we notice that our parents' expectations align with the majority of society's: Graduate top in the class, get a good job, buy a big house, get married, and raise children. We've confused those expectations with our desires. This situation further re-enacts our parents' tenet and inhibits what we yearn for the most from our life.

OVERCOMING a problem requires having an awareness of what engenders it. Watch out for traps as you navigate through the ebb and flow of life's circumstances—which can masquerade as blessings.

The Pitfalls of Assessment Tools

Having a gift that stands out makes it easy to take notice of yourself, if not be noticed by others as well. If you are highly

skillful at photography, for example, others can't help but take note of and appreciate what you can do.

But not everyone has gifts that are easily spotted. For good reason, many tools were invented to help people discover and gain clarity about their gifts. Many people use assessment tools such as the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, StrengthsFinder 2.0, or the Enneagram test to realize their gift. Each of these tests measures different aspects of a person's personality. This information can then be used to help people find their interest.

While these can be helpful in giving you some insight into your strengths to some extent, they have some limitations that could mislead you:

1. Potentially inaccurate results

QUESTION-BASED assessment tools often ask you to rate your interest in different topics or activities. However, rating your interest can be misleading because it does not reflect how passionate you are about it. Your interest is measured rather than your abilities. Someone who reports being an intuitive thinker may actually be better at problem-solving through deduction than through intuition because their interest lies in problem-solving rather than in intuition per se.

Additionally, some assessments require you to input your answers within a certain time period, which opens up more room for error because the correctness of your answers would then depend on:

- Your mood at that time
- The accuracy of your interpretation of the questions
- The pressure of picking the answer fast

2. Limited assessed strengths

THE TOOL WAS CREATED to find a person's strength in a simple, quick, and easy way. However, it is important to note that human uniqueness is incredibly diverse. Each tool only assesses a number of different personal strengths. This limitation could lead to a limited understanding of your overall strengths and potential areas for growth.

There is just no way to get to the heart of the matter by answering the provided ninety-six questions. At best, it can only offer you a glimpse into the obvious strengths a person has from their list of common human personality traits—a list that isn't fully comprehensive. Sending you the incorrect result would spell disaster in your path toward finding your true gifts.

3. False belief

WHILE SOME PEOPLE may have great success using these assessment tools, these tools are just assessment programs written with some level of pre-defined logic to determine a list of configured traits based on your answers. The accuracy hinges on the underlying codes being error-free and on the right context from your answers, failing which would generate invalid results.

Furthermore, if you allow yourself to believe the invalid result, you will limit your ability to explore what you truly enjoy and could be good at. The true value of a discovery process comes when you allow yourself to be open to new opportunities and possibilities. Believing invalid results produced by such assessment tools might keep you stuck in

your current path and prevent you from reaching your full potential.

THERE IS no one definitive way (including even the responses produced by such tools) to uncover your gift. The best way to discover it is through experimentation and personal exploration. Only *you* can find out what you have inside of you.

WE WILL COVER each gift component in the following chapters of this book and how to find them. By the end of each chapter, you will have a better understanding of what your gift components are and how to use them. We will start with character strengths.