

**LEARNING STYLES INVENTORY IN FAITH COMMUNITIES:
A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**

Imaginative

Logical

Practical

Enthusiastic

THE FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

This facilitator's guide is designed to accompany *The Learning Styles Inventory* by Janet Hagberg and Terry Donovan. It provides specially designed group exercises, small group discussion questions, and applications to the life of faith communities and their ministries. It is essential that facilitators first thoroughly review *The Learning Styles Inventory*, a sixteen-page booklet which provides the following:

- An introduction to learning styles and the four major abilities involved in learning, namely thinking, feeling, observing, and doing.
- The inventory itself with instructions and scoring.
- Quadrant descriptions of the four styles.
- A two-page description of each of the four styles including how learners with each style approach a new job, turn in reports, manage others, handle job and career change, and learn a new skill. Information is provided on how to manage and supervise people with each of these styles and how to encourage the development of their styles.
- A humorous look at our styles and the association of an animal name with each style.
- An exploration of the assets and liabilities of each of the four styles along with ways to increase one's style flexibility.

**USING THE
LEARNING
STYLES
INVENTORY
IN FAITH
COMMUNITIES**

There are many excellent opportunities to employ the learning styles inventory within churches, synagogues, and other communities of faith. Among these are the following:

For staff-development and team-building: *The Learning Styles Inventory* can help your staff members to appreciate each other's style contributions to ministry, understand some of the tension in work relationships that may develop, make valuable adjustments in ministry assignments based on style strengths, develop more balanced approaches to staff meetings and in-services, and appreciate the need for developing more situational approaches to training and supervision based on the learning styles of those one is teaching or supervising.

For lay leadership teams and leadership retreats: The inventory can aid lay leadership teams in much the same way as it does staff teams. Information about the contributions and characteristics of people with each of the four learning styles helps us to be more appreciative of others and to see their learning styles as important gifts to our work groups and communities. It will allow you to develop more balanced approaches to ministry team orientation, agenda development, group in-services, and assignments of ministry tasks, and leadership and supervision of other ministry volunteers.

For teachers in faith-formation and religious education: An understanding of the differing learning styles is essential for those who lead learning events for both children and adults in faith communities. It helps them to appreciate the differing styles of those in their classes, adds greater balance to their teaching styles and gives more breadth to learning activities.

For facilitators and leaders of gifts-discovery seminars: This inventory is among the most popular and useful of all the gift-discovering tools the author has used in leading gifts seminars and retreats. Since learning is essential for all of our life activities, our learning style is an important, foundational gift. Knowing our preferred learning style and its strengths and limitations can aid us in our personal and professional lives as we make decisions and solve problems. And understanding our learning style will help us know the best ways of going about discovering our own gifts and call to ministry.

For new-member assimilation: New members of faith communities learn about its life and ministry in differing ways and will benefit from a variety of approaches to orientation and assimilation.

For leaders of worship: *The Learning Styles Inventory* has interesting implications for those who lead worship and preaching as well as those who participate in worship. One can improve one's preaching significantly, for example, by understanding that listeners do not all internalize information in the same ways.

For one's personal spirituality and prayer life: The insights of *The Learning Styles Inventory* makes it possible to choose environments that will be energizing and rewarding for developing our faith and spirituality. Awareness of our learning styles may give us insights into our spirituality and ways of being in relationship with the sacred in our lives.

**OPENING
STORY ABOUT
THE STAGES
OF LEARNING**

A session on learning styles often begins with a story from the facilitator's own experience in making a decision or solving a problem using each of the four stages (or abilities) involved in learning. Here is a story the author often tells about her experience in buying cars in several different ways.

The first time I bought a car alone I used only the feeling stage of learning. The entire process was based on my emotions and relationships. I went to a car dealership where close friends had purchased their vehicle. Once there I looked for a similar model. The salesman was good looking and friendly (not pushy). I quickly chose a navy blue car of the same model as my friends. I had just had "my colors done", discovered I was a "winter" and navy blue was my color! I did no negotiating but simply paid the sticker price.

Later my family and friends informed me there were better ways to buy cars! My mother, for example, read *Consumer Reports* thoroughly before purchasing her car and she went to dealerships armed with data and negotiation skills. Others told me about the importance of comparison shopping among dealerships. In this new stage of observation and reflection, I learned from others.

Soon I used my thinking ability to form some new concepts and generalizations of my own. The first was that prices differ from dealership to dealership and from customer to customer even on identical model cars with the same accessories. The second was that she who negotiates does well and she who doesn't gets taken to the cleaners!

Two years later I traded my car in and prepared to buy another. This time I decided to test my recent learnings in a new situation. I would learn from doing. I began shopping only after carefully researching my bottom line and determining just what I could afford. I went to several dealerships and test drove two or three different models. I walked out of one dealership dissatisfied with the deal they offered. I was on my way out the door at a second dealership when the salesman caught up to me and said he'd attempt to talk to his manager one more time. I finally bought my car there at a much cheaper price than the sticker price. Granted, the car was still the same model as the one I bought two years earlier, and I chose a silver car — still one of my colors, but this time, however, I had tried to use all the abilities and stages involved in learning and good decision making. I experienced more stress as I tried to act in new and unfamiliar ways, but it paid off in considerable savings. I was proud of myself.

**INDIVIDUAL AND
SMALL GROUP
PROCESSING**

After participants have read the instructions, completed *The Learning Styles Inventory* and scored it (pages 4-6 of *The Learning Styles Inventory*), invite them to show their “box(es) profile” (represented on page 6 of *The Learning Styles Inventory*) to several other people in the group. The visual representations of our profiles can serve as vivid reminders of the rich diversity of our gifts.

Following this sharing, encourage participants to read the summary descriptions of each style (see page 7 of *The Learning Styles Inventory*), beginning with their own quadrant(s) and then reading each of the others. The facilitator might suggest that group members place check marks by parts of the descriptions that sound especially like them. Alternatively, project an overhead slide, summarize each style, and take questions from the group.

Before participants read more about their styles in the remainder of *The Learning Styles Inventory* booklet on pages 8-16, invite them to gather in random groups and discuss the following questions listed on an overhead slide or flip chart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR RANDOM SMALL GROUPS:

- Do you find your style a surprise or is it a confirmation of what you had previously sensed to be true?
- When did you first realize that you learned differently from some of your friends or classmates — or from other members of your family?
- What did that realization feel like?
- What styles of learning do you think were most rewarded in your family? in elementary school? in high school? in college? at your workplace? at church? Which of the learning styles was discouraged or even punished?

When the discussion groups have completed their work, elicit a few summary insights from the various groups. Then encourage participants to take some quiet time to read the two-page description of their “home” style in *The Learning Styles Inventory*. Ask the group to suggest a common task not discussed in that booklet, for example, how people with each style might best go about discovering their own gifts, or what approaches to prayer people of each style might prefer. As participants suggest ideas for each style, list the suggestions on a flip chart or overhead transparency. (You can also refer to the sample handout on pages 8-11 of this Facilitator's Guide.)

LEARNING STYLES AND TEAMWORK

After participants have read the more detailed interpretation of each style, invite them to gather in groups with others who share their style. This will be easier if you pass out stickers representing the animal names for each style and ask participants to put the appropriate sticker on their nametag. (You can usually purchase children's stickers depicting monkeys, beavers, giraffes, and hawks or create your own with a computer graphics program.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STYLE GROUPS:

- How do you *feel* and *behave* when a situation requires:
 - a style different from your own?
 - working with others whose style is different from yours?
- How do you think your style impacts your family and work life?
Your life as a lay minister?

After a break, participants should re-gather in style groups, and the facilitator can assign a specific problem to be solved or a project to be completed. They might be asked to develop a comprehensive gifts-discovery program or strategy for your church; decide three major priorities for your congregation's ministry for the coming year; solve the problem of church parking; make recommendations for addressing the issues of homelessness in the community. Give each group anywhere from thirty minutes to a couple hours, depending upon the length of the event and the type of problem or project assigned. Ask the groups to report back to the assembly at a given time. (This exercise works especially well on leadership retreats or other lengthier events and is best done in a site where groups can meet in separate rooms.)

When the groups report back, note the results of their deliberations, the processes each used, and their respective forms of reporting. Expect some lively results and differences! In one large conference of Christian educators, for example, the beavers reported back with several flip chart drawings and a skit; the monkeys had quickly finished their task and adjourned to play volleyball; the giraffes reported with extensive charts in Roman numeral outline form; and the hawks came back with no report because they were still circling and considering all the options. They hadn't had time to finish!

If you have time, assign participants to mixed-style groups and provide another problem-solving situation or project and go through the same process as before. Alternatively, on a leadership retreat, invite participants to meet with others from their own ministry committee or team and address a real problem or challenge currently before their own committee. At the conclusion, participants will likely report higher stress levels and more disagreement in their groups, although you will find that the outcomes may be more balanced.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Ask participants to identify a major decision they have made or problem they have solved in the past couple of years. Then have people write down chronologically each of the steps they took to make that decision, and compare those behaviors with the learning style characteristics of each style. (This exercise helps people to identify in what ways their style preferences may have led them to skip over some important steps in the process of problem solving.) Gather participants into groups of four with one representative of each of the four learning styles or, alternatively, try to group people by the common types of decisions made — for example, put together people who made career decisions, decisions to purchase a house or car, decisions to marry, and so forth. Ask each group to discuss their discoveries from this exercise and its implications for their own problem solving and decision making. Emphasize attention to one's blind spots resulting from strong style preferences.
- To add some fun to your event, make foods available that represent each of the four styles (for example, meat for the hawks, bananas for the monkeys, leaf-like lettuce for the giraffes and bread sticks for the beavers to resemble small tree branches). The visual environment might include mobiles or large posters made of pictures of each of the animals or a collection of representative stuffed animals.
- Ask members of a ministry team or other committee to read the participant's page, "Implications of Learning Styles Gifts for Ministry Teams" on page 8 of this guide. As part of a brief in-service, have members of the team explore the implications of the suggestions in this handout for their work together. Such a discussion can lead to mutual respect for each other's gifts, encourage compromise in the design of group processes, and support better distribution of assignments.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Hagberg, Janet. *Wrestling With Your Angels*
Personal Power Products. *Learning Styles Inventory*
Hagberg, Janet, and Richard Leider. *The Inventurers*, 3rd ed.
Hawkins, Thomas R. *The Learning Congregation*
Peter M. Senge, et al. *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*
Smith, Donna M., and David A. Kolb. *User's Guide for the Learning Styles Inventory*.

DESCRIPTIONS

Hawks prefer to see the big picture, then visualize the outcome in their imaginations and work toward that ideal. They want to maintain a low conflict level and attain a consensus-based outcome. They hope that others will be in accord with the outcomes reached.

Monkeys generally do not have a specific outcome in mind. They don't worry much about fact-finding; rather, they just jump in with both feet. As long as others are willing to jump at the same time, the outcomes will work themselves out.

Beavers want to know the goal and how they can get there quickly and in an organized manner. They like very practical research that leads to outcomes and testing to see if the outcome really works. They will "process" with others until this gets in the way of time constraints. Efficiency is their forte.

Giraffes are determined to be thorough, no matter what the outcome. They bring logic, facts, and procedures to the task. They explore the potential implications of various options, and often generate pros and cons. They believe that all decisions must be based on solid data.

IMPLICATIONS OF LEARNING STYLE GIFTS FOR WORK AND MINISTRY TEAMS

Much of what frustrates us about the way that other people behave and do business in groups is not rooted in their being obstinate, stupid, or wrong. Their styles are just different.

Identify and accept these style differences; then draw upon them as strengths rather than obstacles to good team work.

Learning styles impact the types of agenda items group members prefer and those they are most enthusiastic about.

Learning styles affect the outcomes people want and expect.

Learning styles impact the pace with which people make decisions. Giraffes and hawks will take longer than monkeys and beavers.

Logic, concepts, and theory are usually boring to monkeys and hawks, who prefer dealing with people issues and the everyday work of the team.

To satisfy and motivate each group member remember to:

- Provide variety in agenda items and methods for handling each item.
- Compromise on the time allowed for decision making.
- Divide up assignments based on style preferences, drawing on the strengths of each style for various pieces of the group's work. Each style has a contribution to make for a good team product.
- Show that you value each style's unique contribution to effective decision making.
- Become aware of both the strengths and the limitations of your own style. Don't assume that your way is the only way nor that it leads, by itself, to the most effective problem solving and decision making. The input of differing styles is important.

When you feel yourself become irritated at a meeting or when conflict begins to occur, one of your first questions ought to be: Is this frustration and conflict about our differing styles?

**REFLECTION
EXERCISES**

- Think about how you feel and behave when you work on a team whose members have learning styles different from your own. How do you feel and behave when a working situation requires your own learning style? When it calls for a learning style other than your own?
- Together with members of your ministry team, reflect on how your respective learning style gifts are affecting your group processes and ministry outcomes.
- Recall a recent committee or group meeting during which you felt especially frustrated or irritated. How might the diversity of learning styles represented in the group have touched off your own emotional reaction? Knowing now what you do about learning styles, how might you and the group have handled the situation differently?
- Given your learning style gifts, what tasks and assignments will be especially suited for you in each of the major teams in which you participate — your family, friendships, workplace, neighborhood, and church?

**LEARNING
STYLES:
IMPLICATIONS
FOR GROUPS**

- 1) When you feel irritated with someone in a meeting, remember it may be about differing styles - not that the other person is wrong, stupid, or obstinate!
- 2) Provide variety in agenda items and methods used to handle these items.
- 3) Compromise on time allowed for decision-making.
- 4) Divide up assignments based on style preferences - draw on each other's strengths.
- 5) Value the unique contributions of people with each style.
- 6) Be aware of the limitations as well as the gifts your own style contributes.

**LEARNING
STYLES:
ORIENTING
NEW MEMBERS**

ENTHUSIASTIC: (Monkey) Feel It and Do It

- Wants to get to know other members
- Needs to know how to find key gathering spaces in the church
- Unlikely to read lengthy orientation material
- Ready to engage in a ministry task with others

IMAGINATIVE: (Hawk) Feel It and See It

- Enjoys stories and videos depicting the life and ministry of the faith community
- Wants to ask questions
- Enjoys a tour of the church building
- Benefits from a relationship with a sponsor or mentor

LOGICAL: (Giraffe) Think and Plan

- Reads about the mission and ministries of the faith community
- Likes to see the organizational chart
- Wants to understand how individual ministries fit in with the overall mission and long-range plan of the community
- Needs time and information to thoughtfully consider involvement in a specific ministry opportunity

PRACTICAL: (Beaver) Think and Act

- Wants short, practical orientation to faith community
- Seeks early chance for trying out a ministry involvement
- Wants to know who does what in the faith community
- Sees navigating through assimilation process in a new congregation as an interesting challenge

**LEARNING
STYLES: PRAYER
AND WORSHIP**

ENTHUSIASTIC: (Monkey) Feel It and Do It

- Likes new approaches to prayer and worship
- Open to spontaneous prayer
- Prefers active involvement in worship
- Engages in prayer and worship with others in a group
- Participates easily in new worship and prayer rituals

IMAGINATIVE: (Hawk) Feel It and See It

- Enjoys participating in a small, intimate prayer group
- Likes story-telling in sermons
- Enjoys singing as a form of prayer
- Employs guided imagery in prayer
- Benefits from the use of symbols in worship and prayer

LOGICAL: (Giraffe) Think and Plan

- Enjoys theological and spiritual reading
- Wants logical, challenging, 3-point sermons
- Engages in private prayer and spiritual journaling
- Enjoys opportunities for in-depth reflection on one's faith and life
- Develops a plan for spiritual growth

PRACTICAL: (Beaver) Think and Act

- After learning about new prayer forms, experiments with them
- Wants sermons with practical applications to daily life
- Keeps an intercessory prayer list and uses it daily
- Sees life activities as a form of prayer

**LEARNING
STYLES
FOR GIFTS
DISCOVERY**

ENTHUSIASTIC: (Monkey) Feel It and Do It

- Talks with friends about her gifts
- Volunteers with new group at church and discovers she is talented in that area of ministry
- Talks with the facilitator of shared ministry about how she can use her gifts, especially within groups

IMAGINATIVE: (Hawk) Feel It and See It

- Participates in a close-knit small group for gifts discovery; they watch a video together
- Listens to others' personal stories about gifts
- Enjoys singing music about gifts and call
- Imagines new directions in which God may be calling him to use his gifts; seeks one-to-one mentoring

LOGICAL: (Giraffe) Think and Plan

- Reads books about gifts
- Completes gift reflections at home and journals about her findings
- Develops a five-year plan for employing her gifts

PRACTICAL: (Beaver) Think and Act

- Participates in a gift class that is very focused
- Brings a tentative plan for using his gifts to the interview with facilitator of shared ministry
- Experiments with three newly discovered gifts at home, at church, and in his work place

**LEARNING
STYLES: STYLES
IN GROUPS**

ENTHUSIASTIC (Monkey): Feel It and Do It

- Jump in with both feet
- Doesn't worry a lot about fact-finding
- Ready to make decisions quickly
- Good at considering impacts on people

IMAGINATIVE (Hawk): Feel It and See It

- Likes to picture outcomes in his mind
- Wants the "big picture"
- Dislikes conflict; works for harmony
- Likes using consensus decision-making
- Good at brainstorming possibilities

LOGICAL (Giraffe): Think and Plan

- Wants to understand the structure/organization
- Good at doing research and fact-finding
- Good at generating the pros and cons of options
- Slower to make decisions - gets the facts first
- Explores whether options are consistent with purpose
- Helps put a plan to paper

PRACTICAL (Beaver): Think and Act

- Efficiency is her forte
- Goal-oriented; good at carrying out a work plan
- Brings organizational skills
- Insists on practical outcomes