

# **UNDERSTANDING LEARNING STYLES: IMPROVED COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY**

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Who we are-- begins with our family.

I am the mother of 2 children, both teenagers, both gifted—in very different ways. The 19 year old possesses abundant and enviable learning abilities, and the 14 year old, who is adopted, struggles with learning disabilities so severe that she cannot stay in a classroom. That's my first credential. I'm the daughter of Dr. Mary Meeker, a pioneer psychologist in the field of intelligence development and gifted education. My second credential. I am a wife of 22 years, my third credential.

Incidentally, I'm a psychologist, and Stanford graduate, with a doctorate from USC. Over 30 years, I've been down many paths, and I've learned to appreciate what one man said so well: "In the end all heroes are ordinary people who have simply made the courageous decision to give up slow death and enter the Fundamental State of Leadership." (Bob Quinn)

We are all ordinary, on some level. And, we all have the potential for heroic leadership... particularly in our families.

I want to tell you a story—a story about how learning styles can be changed by the experiences we have. Later I will tell you how, by understanding your own unique profile of intellectual abilities, you can explore your learning styles.

Both my parents were simple heroes. My mother developed the Structure of Intellect (SOI)—which is a theory of intelligence. She applied to education her understanding that “**all** people have intelligence. We don’t ask ‘how much,’ but rather ‘what kind.’” Five decades of SOI assessment, brain training, and coaching has helped many families and individuals learn and communicate better, in both public and private settings.

My step-father, Robert Meeker, now carries on the work of the SOI. After my mother died, 4 years ago, he could have chosen slow death. Upon her death, however, he honored her legacy by throwing himself into the work of continuing to develop ways to truly educate children—learning how to relate to people, was not his natural learning style. He, by nature and by his training, was a timid computer “geek,” actually a computer genius, and mathematician. The world of computers and numbers was his primary comfort zone.

Through his relationship to my mother— which entailed talking, being with people— and through his love and respect for her work, he has expanded his learning style. She had an uncanny ability to read people, which she did almost as a great psychic would.

Maybe she tutored him for 45 years. Maybe she simply decanted him. But the fact is, he is no longer shy around people, and he is now my personal hero...(You've heard about nature vs. nurture, well my mother was changing "nature through nurture.") We have become, as adults, very close. My step-father has become my father: Family of Affinity!

By knowing your learning style you gain better control over your destiny as a leader. You can get closer to your family by understanding each other's unique profile of intelligence. This can consolidate your legacy in a whole new way.

A leader's greatest contribution is to create tools to help others in society. When Bucky Fuller encouraged people to "make tools that make tools" he was describing what my mother did for educating children. In creating SOI, she fashioned a tool for training minds so the well-known tools of education can be that much more productive.

When you know your particular constellation of intelligence, you gain a new tool to explore your enlarged frontier. You really have to entirely understand your self in order to be fully confident in the world. And, what we have found through 50 years of SOI research, is that individuals and families tend to underestimate not only their degree of intelligence, but also the multiple ways your intelligence manifests in the world.

How can anyone know their mission in life unless you are informed about your profile of intellectual abilities?

As J.K. Rowling professes in her latest Harry Potter book: **The real quest in life is that of personal transformation, and not even the Chosen One can go it alone.**

My work with families internationally has shown us that you will flourish when you develop this intellectual capital within yourself and in your family. Intellectual capital can appear illusive when power and wealth is not equally distributed in a family. Worse, intellectual prowess can be hidden in subsequent generations of families—especially if you're a non-traditional learner. **Many Generation-1 elders—who knew in their hearts and guts, what needed to be done to get to a goal-- were non-traditional thinkers and learners.** They were risk-takers but they had a calculation, a vision, a predictable calculus to get to that goal.

One elder said to me: “I don't care how many stop signs there are between here and there...I'm getting there!” Now, most of his offspring—some of whom inherited a different learning style—found it difficult to recapture in their own lives, the glory of the family's rich origin....especially in this new world in which children more and more are expected to stay inside an educational box, not taking risks. They are subsequently disempowered. And, not surprisingly, labeled as having some kind of learning problem, such as ADD.

We have found that some very gifted young adult children in these families, feel inadequate and have little sense of their intellectual abilities, their inherent gifts. So, when Jay Hughes theorizes that Generation-

3 might tend to squander wealth, it is not just that they are some kind of “spoiled child” with a bad case of affluenza. I have found, working with families, that

1. Non-traditional learning styles are generally not respected,

2. Few in the family (and often neither the school nor even their counselors) really understand how they think, how they learn, and more fundamentally, how they need to be taught!

Thousands of dollars of IQ testing did not particularly shed light on the problem or offer a solution. A parent may have been suspicious (“I always knew he was bright!” or “He took the vacuum cleaner apart and put it back together when he was 20 months old!”). But, the learning style remained a mystery.

Look, **testing should offer not just information, but a direction!** Who doesn’t know someone who has struggled with learning? The SOI is diagnostic, descriptive and prescriptive. As my mother said: “SOI doesn’t tell us what to teach, but **where** to teach.” This is a bit of a novel concept in education. To get it you have to shed rigidities of the past, This, indeed, is how to lay down effective and powerful legacies. There may be forces in your own family—certain belief systems—that do not pass on a “wealth-creating culture.”

This past spring, a week after the completion of the SOI assessment process in one family, an elder male said to me: “My grandson for the first time doesn’t

feel inferior—this has been a watershed for our entire family!” Indeed, this amazing young man of 20 years, had felt useless, stupid and lost since he entered kindergarten; in his mind, prior to SOI, he believed that his brother and cousins and everyone else in the family had a purpose, an interest and a future—just not him. I don’t think I’m overstating it to say, that every consultant and every intervention prior to the SOI assessment, had been unable to pull this beautiful young man out of his angst and depression...and you can imagine what else. The grandfather called me “an angel” but I clarified: “I’m not an angel; it’s just the power of this assessment!”

At this point, I want to give you some history of the development of the SOI learning style profile. Then I’ll describe what it actually is and how it is useful—how it can empower your family. It strikes at the heart of what Jay Hughes calls the development of “human and intellectual capital”...and how you must “diversify intellectual capital to encompass every niche of the world’s learning.”

Jack Valenti, one of the most powerful figures in the history of Hollywood, was eulogized by his daughter, Alexandra, like this:

“When we saw him at his funeral laid out in a a suit with a rosary in his hand, my family kept thinking that something didn’t look right...that SOB only went to church once a year. He should have been wearing white tennis shorts, had baby oil on his chest, and been holding a bag of Orville Redenbacher popcorn in his hand.” She described his loss as feeling like an

“astronaut cut loose from a space ship. I mean, it’s like your dad is Jimi Hendrix and you have to go up there and give a guitar solo! I was an angry kid because he wasn’t around much, but he did the best he could and I’ve finally come to understand and accept that. Things have come full circle, which is the most beautiful part of all this. So, that’s why I spoke today. Not for all of you, but for both of us.”

Take a moment. I want you to think about what your true legacy might be. What do you leave behind for your family and the planet?

## HISTORY

Dr. Guilford, a statistician and psychologist at USC (Go Trojans!) and my mother, Dr. Mary Meeker, mapped the brain long before neuroscience produced its brain scans of today. This is a continuing legacy.

It’s important historically to know how SOI was developed: During W.W. II, the Army Air Corps was training pilots, navigators, and bombardiers. The need for trained personnel was critical, and the Air Corps was losing one out of every three men who entered the program. The Air Corps used three measures for personnel selection: Good health, especially good vision; the ability to operate under stress; and high intelligence. All of the flight school cadets met these qualifications, but many of them were not successfully completing the program. The Air Corps contacted Dr. J.P. Guilford to ascertain why the failure rate was so high given the criteria used for selection. Guilford

began by composing a set of job descriptions for pilots, navigators, and bombardiers. From the job descriptions, he derived a compilation of the intellectual functions required for each job and developed tests that identified and measured the necessary abilities. Guilford administered the test to two groups of men: those who had successfully completed the training and those who had not. He analyzed the results, and created a brand new test, which resulted in the failure rate decreasing from 35% to 5%.

The impressive results led our Defense Dept. to fund Guilford's work for decades. My mother studied under Dr. Guilford and in 1965 began to apply the SOI model to education, to train intelligence. Her model of intelligence identifies and trains 120 different learning abilities—many that you don't even know you have! And, you may be gifted in these... She was far ahead of her time. In my mother's firm belief in our ability to train intelligence, she innately, knew that **“neurons that fire together, wire together.”** She knew deep in her soul (what geneticists now tell us) that genetics are not fixed, SHE KNEW THIS that we can positively change the course of our lives—IF we have the proper knowledge of our true intellectual gifts. Really, the moment of brain training is just catching hold right now! We have 50 years of documentation that SOI works to train intelligence!

Now, what does training pilots have to do with learning styles and your family's better communication? Families and society tend to presuppose that your learning abilities are in tact and that learning style,

(that is to say-- how you communicate and how you are being heard or seen) is already known and appreciated. This just is not the case! **Bill Gates said it well: “We all learn best in our own ways.”** The SOI scientifically defines 4 distinct learning styles:

1. Spatial/Mechanical
2. Symbolic/Scientific/math/finance
3. Semantic/Verbal/words/ideas/working with people, writing
4. Kinesthetic/touch

**#1: Spatial/Mechanical:** When the baby comes into the world, he or she sees the face of the mother and father. He sees a figure. This is the beginning. SOI calls it figural or spatial intelligence. People who are naturally blessed with this learning style love to tinker, fix things, engineer things, design, do art projects, work with shapes and patterns, and guess what? They are typically those who “learn differently.” They often have trouble in school, yet they can be the most successful in the real world of careers and they find fulfillment in doing something meaningfully original. They are hands-on. They are right brain. Since languages like Japanese or Chinese are figurally-based, those cultures experience much fewer reading disabilities.

You know it best as mechanical ability. Look at your “family learning styles grid.” You see the art palette, the buildings, the tools, the blueprints...Which of you helped design your own house, your office building? (After Stanford...post-‘60’s...I tried to develop this ability by becoming a car mechanic—I was what my

family called: “downwardly-mobile”—it mortified my parents—but they grew to appreciate how I learned some things about engines, transmissions, and BMW’s). I later went back to graduate school in psychology.

**#2. Symbolic:** You are high in symbolic ability when you are naturally good with numbers, finance, computers, business, math, and science. They like reading manuals for new gadgets. Hopefully, your financial advisors are 99%ile—we could test them. Musicians are high in their ability to manipulate symbols. It’s no coincidence that many Silicon Valley computer analysts go home and play jazz! On your Learning Styles grid you see the scientist looking into the microscope. The scientific mind bridges us to the future.

This weekend, while walking my dog, one of my neighbors, an honest-to-god rocket scientist with AD/HD, said: “Doc, I’ve got a problem that is so damn interesting.” Of course, I thought he was going to ask me if my son could mow his lawn. He says to me: “Do you think, if you could hang a string from geosynchronous orbit, would it spin or go straight?” I then got a 20 minute dissertation on how the center of mass has to be geosynchronous, and how the string must be a carbon fiber and has to taper down 23,000 miles, and how he would have to “grab an asteroid” to anchor it as a counterweight...and then how something went from “infinity to very do-able.” He’s a symbolic thinker, alright!

**#3. Verbal:** People who are high in verbal ability are the writers, the speakers, the teachers and professors of the world. They read and are known to be book-smart. They stay up all night talking when they find a match...another verbal person. You can see from the graph that they like talking on the phone. They may be uncomfortable, setting up their new cell phone, however. Schools are designed around verbal learners who are basically left-brained, even when there are so many other ways of thinking and learning.

My father redesigned Motorola's written training manuals. They were too wordy. Next to the words, he included symbols and figures and the immediate success rate on the job for all Motorola workers went up 50%. The retention rates over 3 months went up over 80%...that's how effective we can be when we recognize learning styles. That program, by the way, is called "Multi Modal Communication."

**#4: Body-in-space or kinesthetic learners:** We assess and train this learning style. Children with body-in-space problems are often learning disabled, don't know their right from left, are clumsy, get lost and intrude on another's personal space. Conversely, children who are great kinesthetic learners are often also diagnosed with learning problems, when in reality, they just learn differently. They often become our world champions.

**How do we arrive at knowing our learning styles?**  
Assessment! We can do it together as a family or individually. Results, computerized, can be discussed

as a family or individually. I allow the family to decide whether they want their names associated with their profile, or we do it anonymously. Either way, the family sees that they have distinct ways of thinking—this gives the family greater cohesion as a functional unit. It can be almost a schemata, like a family brain scan that inspires new ways of thinking about how you think. From our family discussions after assessment, perception becomes more reality-based. Often ancient defenses about someone's perceived weakness is lowered simply because we focus on what you can do (your strengths) not what you can't do!

SOI then customizes brain-training according to your individual learning profile. You get your own individual workbook and CD for training abilities, like creativity, decision-making, or memory—you can enhance, in your own “mental weight room” the ones that are already strong and remediate weaker ones. Each family member, therefore, has the opportunity to become a more efficient and complete learner.

For example: An artistically-oriented person might learn, from accurate learning style assessment, that they also have an ability to work with numbers and data—this might inspire someone to feel more comfortable with financial planning (a family need). One family member I tested discovered, to their complete surprise, that they had spatial ability and creativity that they had never explored. This family member took up photography, which both made him feel happier and more complete; he effectively became the family documentarian—which the family enjoyed.

Learning Styles assessment opens up new opportunities for families. Here are some of the positive results:

- Family unity is enhanced through greater understanding of how each member's unique learning style brings added dimension and strength to the family.
- Family unity is enhanced through better awareness of how each person learns and is intelligent.
- Understanding how each family member is a "life-time learner" is actually a key tool to keep the family in a dynamic and forward-moving process of evolution, not just of consolidation.
- Suggestions for team-building are discussed. Solutions are offered in a family discussion of how each can contribute from their own different and unique intelligence.
- Each assessed intellectual ability serves as an asset to family preservation.
- Improvements in self esteem and self confidence are seen immediately upon viewing "Gifted" and "Superior" intellectual areas of functioning.
- Questions are answered about future directions:
  - Academic issues: Better school (ore return-to-school) planning can occur. School, class, educational major can be better selected. Often, a learner rejected a field of study early on because they were not taught in a way that they best learn. All fields of study are reopened once the family member

understands their intellectual profile of strengths and their learning style.

- Career: Career changes sometimes result from the identification of untapped strengths. These areas may be ones the family member had not entertained previously as possible or plausible for him/her. Career improvements often grow out of accurate assessment that focuses on the positive. This, in turn, fosters a general movement of a family member toward a greater sense of self-efficacy and self esteem. People perform better when they feel good and confident in their chosen field.
- Avocations: For family members of wealth, hobbies, interests, and new avocations are most important. These endeavors are both more rewarding and consistently pursued when they derive from a clear measurement of ability. For example, even if it were “too late” to pursue medical school to “become a doctor,” if the test indicated high ability in medical sciences, it is never too late to study health or neurobiology!

Last week, at an SOI associate meeting at our headquarters in Oregon, I heard SOI year-end results from the Superintendent of a district in Texas in which almost 50% of the students are below poverty level. This district is using a brand new program called Certified Learning, and when we say “certified” we mean just that: it’s guaranteed. Certified Learning is a virtually failure-free program that satisfies the No

Child Left Behind Act. My father created this SOI program for mastery, based on the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM). Certified Learning's version of TQM is computerized and the voice that talks to these kindergarteners all year is my father's voice. There's a waiting list to get into next year's program, and they are extending it into the first grade.

At last week's meeting, the superintendent of schools told the story of when my father arrived to supervise the SOI kindergarten training. She recounted how a 5 year old girl, heard my father's voice in the hallway, ran up to him, throwing her arms around him: "Dr. Bob, I've been waiting my whole life to meet you!" To which he replied: "I would travel the world to hear you say that."

Now, that's connection and that's communication--  
The beginning of her family legacy. So, we have to ask ourselves:

- Is there any effective change made in the world without effective communication?
- Is there any effective communication without confidence in our own learning style and abilities, and in those of others?

SOI makes it happen...a powerful tool for empowering students and families. One family member wrote to me after understanding the value and role of learning therapy: "I truly believe that the work we do now will bring us closer to our vision of 'a family united forever.'

We are on a mission of discovering and sharing this information to all families. I invite you to come join our family.

I am the president of a non-profit organization, The Foundation for Learning Development (FLD), that seeks to map all these new brain training techniques and technologies—no one yet really knows how many there are, or which one works for which kind of learner. We have brain research that proves how mindfulness (meditation) training builds the cortex, how training the auditory system through sound therapy helps dyslexics read, and how training in the broader concepts of math is graduating special ed. high schoolers out of algebra at higher rates than many regular ed. students. In our Learning Gym in Manhattan Beach, California, we use all of these training programs...from the miraculous use of colored/filtered lenses that aid in reading, to the amazing brain research with high quality Omega-3 fish oils.

Because of our success internationally with learning therapies, our need for financing is expanding. We really are capable now of empowering all people in the world by enhancing their learning abilities, and that's educating the global family. And, a commanding legacy.