How to Identify Your Strengths
By Barbara Sher – November Issue of O, The Oprah Magazine

Discovering your true talents isn't always easy. The trick: Let someone else do it for you.

How often have you gotten a compliment on your creativity or your patience or your resilience, only to wave it off, assuming that these strengths must come easily to everyone? In my 30 years as a lifestyle/career coach and author, the mistake I see people make time and again is failing to recognize their talents. An honest inventory may be difficult—even impossible—for you to do yourself. So sit with a friend and try this exercise. It's a new twist on something I call the Self-Correcting Life Scenario, and it's one of my favorites.

1. Ask your friend to name three of your strengths (The words in the image above may provide some inspiration.)

2. Tell your friend your top passion. Then have your friend tell an imaginary story of your life, based on this passion and your strengths. For instance, "You're organized, creative, and friendly, and your passion is baking. So, you run a bakery where customers can buy cupcakes with little icing portraits of themselves."

3. Take a minute to imagine this fantasy as your real life. Tell your friend what appeals to you ("Making cupcakes with artistic frosting would be awesome!") and what makes you cringe ("I'd never start my own business—the thought of bookkeeping gives me hives").

4. Now your friend revises the story based on your feedback. ("Okay, you organize monthly bake sales at the local Boys & Girls Club. Kids buy the cupcakes and paint their own portraits.")

5. Keep going back and forth until the story feels right. This may take three or 13 rounds—there's no need to rush. Your friend will likely suggest unexpected scenarios. Don't let knee-jerk objections ("That would cost too much!" "When would I have time?") shape your feedback. This is about crafting a scenario tailored to your strengths.

6. Stop when the story feels completely satisfying. You've just shaped your passion into a goal and defined what you do and don't want from your calling.