I’m starting out this month with a question; actually, a set of questions. Make sure you’re well rested, well hydrated, and have a good blood sugar level before you start. If this is just a little too heavy for you, flip the page and come back later. My intention isn’t to make you feel bad or make you wish you were someone else. My intention is to get you to think; to question who you are and how you’re doing.

Ready? Here you go.

Are you using all of your talents and abilities? Do you know what they are? If you’re working, does your supervisor know what your talents and abilities are? Is your supervisor enabling you to use some or all of those talents and abilities?

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Look around you. No two people are alike. Even twins who look identical generally pursue entirely different interests. One common thing you’ll find among all people is that we have our own set of talents and abilities that are uniquely our own. They go with our unique appearance.

Years ago, I spoke at a Career Day held at a middle school in Melbourne. Being in the water and wastewater field like most of you, I chose to bring some samples of water as props. They were in tightly sealed, clear mason jars, thoroughly cleaned on the outside. The three labeled jars contained samples of drinking water, reclaimed water, and raw sewage. I had volunteers hold the jars up for everyone to get a good look at the contents.

Before I spoke about what was in the jars and the treatment methods used to make drinking water and turn raw sewage into reclaimed water, I made a statement to the audience. I told these eighth graders that each of them was created with certain talents and abilities and the interests that they have will mirror them. I said they should find out what they are and pursue them in earnest. Study them. Ask questions about them. Seek out others with the same interests. Enjoy the subject matter with their peers.

We’ve all heard the quote, “Find something you love to do, and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.” That particular quote is attributed to Confucius. There are many other variations of it spoken over the years. I think it’s great advice.

I’m going to offer another variation, but with an added wrinkle: “Whatever you are doing in life, learn to love it!” If you have a steady job that you’re well equipped to do, why not love what you do? Enjoy the work. Enjoy your co-workers. Enjoy producing the goods or services that your employer provides. Enjoy knowing that your customers are well served, more so because you’re a part of the team that serves them. Look for opportunities to do your job even better. Encourage or assist your co-workers to help them do their jobs better.

Are words of encouragement and praise given to you periodically? Everyone loves to hear such words. Turning that around a bit, do you speak words of encouragement and praise to others in your workforce? Your co-workers, and even your supervisor, would likely benefit greatly from some positive words coming from you. (Caution: If this isn’t your normal modus operandi, make sure certain subjects are in a secure sitting position before commencing delivery!)

Back to our eighth graders. I told them where the water first comes from, what treatment is done to it, and how it travels to their homes. After customers are finished using it, additional treatment is required before disposal or use for the second time as reclaimed water. The young lady holding the raw sewage jar was just a bit squeamish holding a clear container of “disgusting” water. However, at the conclusion of the presentation, all of the students were very impressed that, with proper treatment, it could look as good as the drinking water.

A great deal of talent is needed to first make drinking water and then to treat sewage to near drinking water standards. Those of us in the water and wastewater industry have and use those talents, making sure those services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But we shouldn’t “rest on our laurels.” Strive to learn something new each day or teach a co-worker something new each day. Like any subject, the more you know, the more you know you don’t know. Read. Actively participate in training classes. Volunteer to teach a training class. Join a professional association. Tour other treatment facilities. Lead tours of your facility. Apply for awards. Lead a brainstorming session to tackle an ongoing problem at work. Champion your ideas. Become a member of an association committee (and chair the committee). Achieve higher licensing. Plan a career path for yourself with your supervisor. Establish goals. Present a paper at a conference. Write an article for this magazine!

I would venture to guess that you don’t fully know how wonderfully made you really are and the potential you have for doing some pretty neat things. . . yet. If you’re still breathing, you aren’t at the finish line, so take the next step. Start today. Set out on a course to use all of your talents and abilities in ways you haven’t started dreaming of— until now!