

# The twelve Maturities

**Peter Fox<sup>1</sup>**

Whilst it is extremely important to get the 12Rs<sup>2</sup> dealt with logically by robust methods of analysis so that eventual implementation does the job efficiently, and so that people can understand what the 12Rs mean to them; we shouldn't forget another bunch of skills, attitudes and approaches to life of an entirely different nature. I will call these the 12 **maturities**.

Ambition  
Artistic appreciation and accomplishment  
Confidence  
Curiosity, enthusiasm for learning and knowledge  
Develop and defend own opinions  
Empathy  
Excellence of Rs  
Fitness and good health  
Imagination and abstract thought  
Sociable personality  
Stand up for principles  
Temptation : Awareness and resistance. Self discipline

It should be immediately apparent that, whilst these may not be matters of survival and employment, no society that calls itself civilised should be allowing adults to grow up without many or all of these characteristics. ... Pause for reality check - How well do we do at present? If we surveyed 21 year-olds what would we find? My guess is that we'd find many with important gaps, most with some inkling but little experience and a few (they tend to be attract the label "privileged" ) with good groundings in most - but still with gaps.

These are the things that make individuals capable of progressive thinking, intelligent interaction and fully satisfied lives. It's what lets them decide what is important, why it is important and do a little bit towards defending it. They are what make us interesting as individuals, useful as partners and members of a tolerant and adaptable society.

My approach to the 12Rs has been to put them under the analytical microscope of a structured development framework. That's ideal where we can specify a reasonably limited set of skills that are required in reasonably predictable circumstances, but the 12Ms are more slippery and we run the risk of desiccating them if we simply apply the same framework as used for the Rs. To pick one at random: Go to a library and you'll find at least 100 books on fitness and good health. It's a huge subject with technical

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Fox is an independent systems analyst living in Essex, England. He can be contacted at [twelvers@PeterFox.ukfsn.org](mailto:twelvers@PeterFox.ukfsn.org)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://vulpeculox.net/ob> for papers on the 12 Rs

details, many approaches to self-help and 'feeling good' - but at the bottom, the foundation upon which everything else rests is an individual's drive or lack of drive to want to be fit and healthy. This essence can't be bottled but it can be discovered and nurtured. One person's fitness may walking to the shop each day whilst another's is cycling 30km each day with a marathon at the weekend. There is no such thing as a universal perfect diet or anything approaching it; although it is possible, should we think it useful to draw up tables of calories and vitamins according to 'the best scientific advice' - whatever that is - providing you don't take the figures too seriously. The problem we face as a society wondering about how to develop these really useful characteristics in the next generation is not how to dictate what's good and bad but how to light the blue touch paper of enthusiasm, crank the starting handle of self-motivation and open the door on the joy of a wider world.

Firstly the 12Ms need some fleshing out so that we all know what we're talking about, and they need discussing so that we understand for ourselves why they're valuable. That's the first step. Then, something that isn't too difficult seeing how most of these subjects have a large and extremely varied bibliography - we should be teasing out the main threads of each subject in practical applications. There's no real hope of arriving at a definite syllabus and we should strongly avoid the temptation to have a try - instead we need to focus on character forming: How are characters formed? What's the relative effect of different types of influence?

Is there an economic benefit to society of having well balanced individuals? If so shouldn't we at least try to measure it? Of course to do so we'd have to assess individual cases with some sort of 'personality test'. If we had such a personality test then we could test people to spot their weaknesses... .. but that would be pointless unless we were in a position to carry out remediation... which is 100 times more difficult than handing out self-help materials. (Whilst we're thinking of all these 'jobs to do' we could ask all sorts of questions which get quite sensitive - such as should we write off 75% of the next generation as far as Ms are concerned and concentrate on a more 'intelligent' and receptive elite?)

At the bottom of each of the following please add "Opportunities?"

### **Ambition**

- Encourages development, pulling up by own bootstraps, looking for alternative futures, exploring possibilities, making the most of opportunities. This is more than 'reaching one's potential': Expanding ones potential.
- Lumpen acceptance results in a society of sheep with little innovation and flexibility.
- Ambitions help broaden horizons, encourage new economically and socially significant activities and provide interesting occupations. The alternative is boredom and few opportunities.
- Lack of ambition leads to low achievement, poor self valuation and the consequences such as depression and dependency.

---

### **Artistic appreciation and accomplishment**

- Having some ability to appreciate art is a sign of individuality of thought, and being able to evaluate and justify what is often a technical veneer over a personal emotional or abstract symbolic core. This advanced thinking skill shows healthy critical faculties and an effort to understand less direct communications.

- Accomplishment is about learning a skill and using it according to your own ideas: Technical content and artistic merit.
  - "Being artistic" is something that seems to be acquired at an early age. Whilst it may be expressed in playing the violin etc. it appears to be a much deeper and broader attitude to the value of 'art'.
  - Performance involves complex social interactions and individual strength which are both valuable qualities.
- 

### **Confidence**

- This is needed if people are going to take opportunities and avoid ruts and bullying.
  - Without self-belief everyday disappointments turn into defeats that makes a vicious circle. The eventual result is "why bother with anything" - The antithesis of ambition.
- 

### **Curiosity, enthusiasm for learning and knowledge**

- To be well educated is to be well prepared for life, to be able to manage one's own affairs and to be able to contribute usefully to society.
  - The value of knowledge:
    - having it immediately to hand if possible
    - understanding it's accuracy and precision
    - putting it in context - and seeing where it leads
    - being able to apply it when required
 is something that (as defined here) appears to be developed through experience...
  - ...however the *enthusiasm* for knowledge, ie. curiosity, seems to be something built-in at an early age - and which can decay if neglected.
  - The modern media-based society can fool us into thinking that
    - knowledge is about pretty pictures and dumbed-down interpretation
    - knowledge is facts that can be looked up on the Internet and so 'I don't need to make the effort to find out about it'.
- 

### **Develop and defend own opinions.**

- We want individuals that can think for themselves...  
...and make reasoned justification for their conclusions...  
...and have the confidence to take the matter seriously...  
...both in making sure of their own position and ...  
...standing up for them with actions.(See below for more on actions.)
  - There is a terrible attitude abroad that looks upon anyone who stands up for their own opinion, or simply puts forward a theory as a oddball.
  - Contrariwise, established bigotry and dogma need to be tackled by those that don't believe such things are acceptable. If this doesn't happen the result is inevitably social injustice and worse.
- 

### **Empathy**

- Whether it's "do as you would be done by" or "I can see your problem and know how you must feel" we need to appreciate other people's feelings and situations if we are to usefully relate to them.
- Being an experienced empathist is useful for selling anything and of course caring.
- But basic empathy is required if everyday situations involving other people are to be

dealt with without a fuss.

- There is a version of empathy which could be described as mass-sympathy where powerful media forces exploit people's natural willingness to be sad or angry together. For example the hysteria resulting from the death of Princess Diana - Ummm.
- 

### **Excellence of Rs**

- Wanting to be...  
...and actually being good at the full portfolio of basic life skills leads the way to...  
...being above average or excellent at many of them with all the benefits that entails.
  - Someone who values the Rs is more likely to make the effort to pass them on to others, especially children, but also in small and significant ways to colleagues.
- 

### **Fitness and good health**

- Being fit tends to improve health and long-term health prospects.
  - Naturally we want as few people as possible on society's sick-list as we have to pay for their care and pay for their poor economic contribution.
  - Fit and healthy individuals have more opportunities...  
...while those with problems, whether self induced or 'accidental' tend not to thrive in education or employment and often end up opting-out of responsible, well-paid work and possibly any employment at all.
  - There are confusing definitions of 'fit' which don't provide much in the way of objective measurement or justification. Furthermore while 'don't smoke' 'right weight' and 'being able to run up stairs' are vaguely graspable as 'good things' there is no such every-day practical definition for mental health and age-related issues.
  - Making the effort of 'looking after yourself' (care without paranoia) and imposing a bit of self discipline is very much a matter of self-prejudice. (Just because 'everyone knows smoking is really bad for you' doesn't mean everyone gives it up.) It will take a very clever person indeed to find out how to switch people's health habits (as opposed to selling them palliatives and snake-oil).
  - Dependency, especially debilitating drugs, is a huge economic and social problem.
  - Facilities for 'keeping fit' are not always as accessible as they should be. Neither are they promoted as much as fast food.
  - The fact that our society doesn't take fitness very seriously shouldn't mean that individuals have to suffer. Opportunities exist for those that want them. The value to individuals and society of that 'want' is enormous and needs thorough attention.
- 

### **Imagination and abstract thought**

- At one level, abstract thought is required as an essential basic skill, for example doing arithmetic without using pebbles, but at the M-level we're going beyond creating a model in our heads that represents a familiar physical world. There are two additional strands:
  - creativity
  - grasping the unfamiliarFor example a thriller writer could describe political intrigues and murder in the first person set in ancient Babylon without ever sticking a knife into anything more bloody than a melon.

- Creativity is a valuable tool - a lot of problem solving and decision making can be improved dramatically by adaptation and investigation of 'other possibilities'.
  - As a society, we crave and need new things, and for healthy challenging of orthodoxy we need more than just negative scepticism - new alternatives for new times.
  - To think beyond the things we can see, to describe the indescribable, to suggest the impossible and analyse the invisible are important, challenging tasks. "Shall I compare thee to a summers day" is a straight description - yet of an abstract thing, a feeling. "Let slip the dogs of war" conjures up a multi-layered picture with linking threads extending to the horizon. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" gets the point across even if we've no idea what a serpent's tooth is really like.
  - There are technical professions, programming is one, air traffic controller is another, where imagination and abstract thought need to be constantly exercised at the highest level with rapidity and accuracy.
- 

### **Sociable personality**

- Relationships, one of the 12Rs, is about how to get on with people. A sociable personality is being nice and likeable; useful and undemanding; calm and reliable under stress.
  - Having a network of friends and helpful colleagues considerably improves life opportunities and cushions the effects of setbacks.
  - Being able to get on quickly with strangers is a very useful life-skill.
  - Asocial people can end up without the confidence that comes through practice thus forming a vicious circle of fewer friends to ask advice from, fewer introductions to new contacts and difficulties with promotion and working with others at work.
  - Anti-social people cost us all a hugely disproportionate amount through relatively small inconsiderations. This damage is economic and emotional and takes a long time to repair.
- 

### **Stand up for principles**

- This is a muscular grown-up cousin of *develop and defend own opinions*. In that M we concentrated on how opinions were arrived at and validated. Here we combine that with determination and confidence to actually do something. It is one thing to say "I think war is wrong" and another to sign-up as a conscientious objector. It is one thing to moan about the disrepair of the roads but another to badger the highways department to do something about it.
  - There comes a point when intellectual exercises have to give way to definite action. The worry is (which would be nice to prevent) is that actions can easily be driven by propaganda and crowd-whipping.
- 

### **Temptation : Awareness and resistance. Self discipline.**

- Here's a tough nut. Somehow instilling self discipline and a strict code of conduct involves an element of brain-washing - That's a bit of a blow if we're hoping to encourage individuals to think for themselves!
- "You mustn't have sex before marriage" or "you mustn't marry outside your religion" or "stealing is alright if you 'do it legally' from suckers" or "I can have 5 pints and still drive as well as most other people", "you've got to die of something so why not

cigarettes". Some of these are 'offences against those who make the rules' whilst others have genuine anti-social implications. In a fragmented society we shouldn't countenance moralistic factions dictating to the rest of us,<sup>3</sup> neither can we hope to specify in some way the complete behaviour guide. That was tried by the Taliban with awful results.

- Is there an answer for the person who wants to bring up well behaved children and then see them turn into well behaved adults? Even if we have a 'rule book' how should it be applied effectively? These are incredibly important questions...
- ...as is how do we deal with drunk doctors, conspiracies of incompetence in public services and lying policemen? (Unless we have methods and reasons we can't hope to tackle these issues.)
- Having tackled the unavoidable issues head-on from a point of "society shouldn't allow...", what about "I think you're making a mistake" and "I wouldn't do that if I were you"? We know this is also a bottomless pit of wasted good intentions. (Are you going to give up smoking just because I say so?)
- What about the first step of recognising our personal weaknesses, even if we're not really sure about the definition of weakness? It's obvious that you can't avoid a potential or deal with an existing problem until it has been recognised as such. Being honest with ones self is possibly something that can be developed by appropriate (in my opinion, at very early years) intervention.

---

## Conclusion

**Divide and rule** : The purpose of establishing these 12 subject areas is to enable educationalists and sociologists to concentrate on specific issues, each one of which is enormous and wiggly.

**A mature society** : There are many implications for families and society that go far beyond the talents and approach to life of an individual. We can begin to clarify how valuable the Ms are and why providing opportunities and support are money well spent.

---

<sup>3</sup> Or to those who find themselves caught up - children sent to specifically religious schools for example.