

## Some Criteria for Evaluating a Tool

- **Is the tool helpful? Does it solve one or more problems in my life?** The first step, of course, is to identify your problems so you can find a tool that helps you get to a solution. If you have no problems, then you have no need for tools. Just enjoy life as it is.
- **Is the tool interesting? Does learning about it and using it provide new ideas or experiences or enhance existing ideas or experiences?** This is rather subjective. But most people would find a course on how to read U.S. tax form preparation instruction manuals rather restricted in application and uninteresting to all except tax accountants, although perhaps helpful in certain ways to people with certain tax problems. The purpose of tools is to increase efficiency, to make life more comfortable, to solve problems, to gain information, and so on. What interests a person usually depends on what he desires to experience or not to experience. Alternatively a person can find interest in whatever happens to be going on in the moment, and for that he does not need any tools or methods.
- **Is the tool easy to master and easy to use? Can most people get practical results within a reasonable time frame with a reasonable mental and/or physical effort?** For example, for most people calculus is pretty challenging to master and has little practical uses in life. But learning to drive a car is a skill most people can manage in a reasonable time with reasonable mental and physical effort. Learning to walk and talk and toilet training take quite a bit of time, effort, and practice to master but these skills are considered so important that they receive a lot of attention in an infant's first two or three years. And most people succeed pretty well at these skills. Literacy is another challenging tool that receives a lot of attention, but the level of mastery achieved by the population shows a much greater range than walking and talking..
- **Is the tool cost effective? Do people enjoy results greater in value than the time, money, and energy they invest in acquiring and learning to use the tool?** For example, a hammer works better for pounding nails than a rock, but rocks are free and a hammer costs a few dollars. In my current situation public transportation is more cost effective than driving my own car, so I have no car. But if I move to a rural area, a car may be a very cost effective investment. The benefits of using a tool may not be measured strictly in financial terms. For example, how much is it worth to relieve yourself of a major accumulation of stress? How much will it cost you financially if that stress leads to loss of your job or a physical health problem that includes a lot of lost time and a stack of

medical bills? How much is happiness worth?

- **Is the tool “transcendental”?** **Does the tool enable people to transcend the mechanism of the tool and enjoy greater freedom?** In other words, are you stuck in the tool once you start to use it, or does the tool take you some place you would like to go and then leave you free to operate beyond the limitations of the tool? For example, we make use of a car to travel to a destination, but then leave the car to do our business or pleasure. Some tools are addictive like opium used as a palliative for discomfort and simply replace one undesirable condition with another that may not turn out to be that much better, and possibly may be even worse. It is like taking a tour and not being able to leave the tour bus to really enjoy the sites. A political or economic system that creates more difficulties for the people using it than it resolves is not a “transcendental” system. A good transcendental tool is like a good ferry boat: it does its job and then retires leaving you in freedom to do what you like at your preferred goal.

The answers to these questions will vary from person to person as they are quite subjective. You may come up with your own evaluation criteria, but I think the time, money, effort, effectiveness, and freedom issues cover the most essential points.

**Caveat Emptor: Anyone who uses a tool must understand that it is just that – a tool. You can whack your thumb with a hammer if you do not use it properly. Therefore it is important to understand that anyone using a tool must follow the instructions and apply the tool properly, assuming full responsibility for his or her own results or lack of results or unintended results.**

**Also, don’t go around blaming other people if you do not get to where you want to be. Any lack of satisfaction with results means one of three things:**

- (1) You have not used the tool long enough to finish the job. Keep at it.**
- (2) You are botching the job by not using the tool correctly. Go back and reread the user instructions or get some assistance from an expert.**
- (3) You are using the wrong tool for the intended result. Go back to your tool box or consult with someone qualified to show you how to get the intended result.**