

The Animal School



A Story About Using Your Strengths

by George Reavis in 1940

Once upon a time, the animals decided that they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world, so they organised a school. They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer, all of the animals took all of the subjects.

The duck was excellent at swimming. In fact, he was better than his instructor. However, he made only passing marks in flying and was very poor at running. Since he was so slow in running, he had to drop his swimming class and do extra running. This caused his webbed feet to become badly worn, meaning that he dropped to an average mark in swimming. Fortunately, "average" was acceptable, therefore nobody worried about it - except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because he had so much makeup work to do in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher insisted that he start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed cramps from overexertion, so he ended up with a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a real problem student and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing class, he beat all of the others to the top, but insisted on using his own way of getting there!

The principle here is that we each have our own strengths and need to be working hard to maximize them, not handicap our potential by becoming good at something that isn't natural for us.

If you're an educator or parent reading this, think about who the ducks, rabbits, squirrels and eagles are in your classroom or family are and how you can best use their unique skills and strengths rather than trying to get the same level of average performance out of all of them.