

Advancing Your Career Success - Creating Your Personal SWOT Action Plan

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Every individual has strengths. Many we are aware of, and yet, often we have strengths we have not yet recognized or unleashed. Every individual also has liabilities. What we often do not recognize is that our strengths, when overplayed, can become our liabilities. Our liabilities are often our blind spots – they are sometimes career limiting behaviors that others recognize in us that we don't recognize in ourselves. Our perception of ourselves, compared to our peer's perception of us, often differs greatly. Perception IS reality for our peers. (Perception is reality even if perception is not Truth, but that is a topic for another article).

Do You Know and Understand Your Strengths and Liabilities?

If you were to take 10 minutes and write down your top strengths and areas of contribution, how many would you come up with? 5? 10? 25? In my leadership development coaching, I have been surprised to find that most people given this exercise will list 3 to 5 strengths. This means there are possibly dozens they have not yet recognized or developed.

- List the strengths you believe you have.
- List the inherent liabilities you think that come with those strengths.
- Do you know how to mitigate the liabilities?
- Do you think your supervisors, peers and subordinates see you from the perspective of your strengths or from the perspective of your liabilities?

We'll look at how to get more objective feedback and data in a moment, but first, we need to look at the issue of accepting feedback.

Do You Welcome Feedback?

A career limiting behavior is avoidance of feedback or an inability to accept feedback constructively. Fear of feedback, or taking feedback "through the heart" instead of taking it "to heart" are behaviors that limit our professional growth and leadership maturity. There *is* a balanced way to receive feedback.

Learn to view feedback as information that deserves an *objective* evaluation to find the value. Most feedback has some nugget that we can benefit from if we perceive it as wise council that could help us refine our talents. Consciously choose to turn it into a positive learning that you can do something with. Then do it, and give yourself a pat on the back for being able to constructively process and utilize the feedback. With practice, you can actually learn to welcome feedback and see it as a gift that helps you develop your talents. It's a real confidence builder to know that you can handle feedback without becoming defensive.

Thank those who provide you with feedback, even though it may have been difficult for you to hear. There is, or course, an exception. This assumes that feedback was delivered in an appropriate manner. Abusive and inappropriate treatment does not deserve gratitude. There are times when feedback is less than helpful, when it's



clearly about someone else's issue or agenda and is not in our best interest. An appropriate response is to smile and think to yourself - "thanks for sharing" - and then let it go. There is no need to allow it to drain your energy in the form of anger or hurt. Choose to let it go. You'll gain strength and confidence knowing the choice is yours.

Objective Assessments: A Powerful Source of Feedback.

Perception is reality. How are you perceived by others? Do you know your behavioral style? Do you know your motivators? Do you understand others' styles and motivation? Understanding style and value differences and the impact of differences on relationships is vital to improving work and personal relationships.

Self-rated assessments are designed to help provide you with objective feedback about yourself to more fully understand both your strengths and liabilities.

From Gap Analysis to Professional Development SWOT Action Plan

Feedback from peers and valid assessment tools are valuable tools to help you assess and view yourself more effectively. Now that you have a better understanding of your strengths and possible career limiting behaviors, now what? What do you want to do with what you have learned? Ask yourself (write this down, it's a helpful exercise):

- What career results do you want?
- What career results are you getting?
- How large is the gap between these two?
- Are you serious about closing the gap?
- What is it worth to you to close this gap?
- What will it cost you if you don't close this gap?
- Do you believe in investing energy in yourself?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 the highest, where is your commitment level to the necessary actions to close this gap?
- Now you can create your Professional Development SWOT Analysis and Action Plan? Use the worksheet idea described on page 4.

1. **Strengths.** What have you learned from assessments and interviews are your behavioral, motivational, and talent skills and strengths? List these.
2. **Weaknesses.** All strengths come with inherent liabilities. What are yours and how do they impact your relationships and work? Here's the good news. WE ARE NOT REQUIRED TO BE GOOD AT EVERYTHING. Sometimes an area we may be lacking bears no relevance to our job. Great. Let it go. That's why we have teams, so we can have and blend different strengths. However, there are weaknesses that we may identify as being relevant to our work that we wish to transform. This is an opportunity for us to identify those more clearly.
3. **Opportunities.** What opportunities exist that take your strengths into consideration? Which of those opportunities draws you in? In other words, where do you have high energy around application of your strengths? Where do you have talents you would like to more fully develop? This is a time for exploration and brainstorming around possibilities and options you may not have considered

before. Most importantly, identify clearly where your energy is. Energy and motivation are vital to succeed at any development work you choose to do.

4. **Threats.** These come from the weaknesses that are attributes, skills, or behaviors that are relevant to our life and work roles that, if left unmitigated, are threats that can become career limiting behaviors. Get clear about what they are. Include steps in your action plan to mitigate these threats.

It is hard for us to see our blind spots. Get help with this one. Get a development partner or professional development-coach who can objectively help you create a clear action plan, who can see your progress and who can help you hone your results.

Worksheet Ideas:

- Take out 4 pieces of 8 ½ by 11 inch paper. Label the pages Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Brainstorm onto these four pieces of paper your thoughts, ideas and conclusions from your assessments and peer feedback. Spend time (multiple sessions) with this brainstorming exercise and get additional input from a coach or mentor. Align the 4 pages like a matrix so that the Strengths help you think of corresponding Opportunities, and the Weaknesses help you to identify the accompanying Threats. From this worksheet, create your own SWOT Action Plan and incorporate the action steps into your prioritized daily planning system.

Strengths	Opportunities
Weaknesses	Threats

Summary

This technique can provide a continuous professional improvement process that can be practiced regularly throughout your career. If you go through the above exercise, answer the questions and get both subjective and objective feedback (360 degree and self-rated assessments) you will have the foundation for enhancing strengths and mitigating liabilities.

- Answer the questions about your current career results, the results you want and the size of the gap between the two.
- Analyze the information for clarity on strengths and possible liabilities.
- Decide what actions you are committed to taking to more fully develop your strengths and mitigate your liabilities.
- Listen to the appropriate RxCd's for learning and recommended exercises.
- Put this information into your own Professional Development SWOT Action Plan.
- Coordinate specific tasks and actions into your daily planning system.
- Get a partner to help you in periodic results check.
- Revise the plan if necessary based on results.

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