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SWOT Analysis for Your Career

by Don Goodman

A basic tool used in strategic planning is **SWOT analysis**. This is where you take a hard look at your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and plan accordingly. I am a firm believer you should perform this analysis on your career at least once a year.

STRENGTHS. Make a list of all your strengths. In particular, consider what skills, knowledge and experience you have that makes you indispensable to your employer. Also consider what the demand for these skills is in the marketplace. I knew a fellow who was what I would call a professional Sniffer – he was able to smell fragrances and detail their makeup, components and quality. Although he was pretty secure in his job, there are not a lot of jobs out there for this kind of skill. So he had to decide whether he wanted to take the risk of counting strictly on those skills to secure his future (he took courses in project management and moved on by the way).

Think about your technical as well as your soft skills. Do you know how to program in .Net? Understand SEC reporting requirements? Additionally, are you great at motivating teams to peak performance? Are you the one that the executives call upon to use your diplomacy skills to facilitate tricky work sessions and drive consensus among various stakeholders? These are the strengths that make up your value proposition.

You also need to consider company politics in your assessment, so now review the strength of your relationships with people who can influence your career. How is your relationship with your boss? How about the people who influence your boss? Do the same analysis for your peers and staff. This is extremely important as we all know competent people who didn't succeed because they were not aligned with the right people.

WEAKNESSES. Now take a hard look at yourself and list the areas where you can improve. Look at the positions you would like to have and identify the skills, experience





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or knowledge that you are lacking. Consider too the relationships that influence your career and detail where important relationships either don't exist or need bolstering. It is generally a good idea to brainstorm with your buddies to get an outsider's view.

OPPORTUNITIES. Let your mind wander to the possibilities that surround you. Is your boss or another manager going to retire? Are there new projects or initiatives coming up? In particular, look to see if there are other areas of the business that you can contribute to and gain a better position. Look both within and outside your company. Did you gain strong SEO skills that make you a valuable catch to other employers? Many people discover there are real opportunities available they had never considered before.

THREATS. What can go wrong? Consider such things as a shift in management, budget cuts, downsizing, outsourcing, mergers, acquisitions, your health and even someone getting promoted to a position you wanted. This is where you can let your internal Gremlin run wild (the little voice in your head that tells you the sky is falling) and list everything that comes to mind.

Now that you have this list, make a plan. I like to start with the opportunities because many times people have uncovered positions that they would really like and hadn't considered before. So identify where you would like to be, then review the strengths and relationships you can leverage to get there and the weaknesses you have to consider or overcome that could hold you back. Prioritize your biggest threats and make a plan to neutralize them. If you have never done this, try it as it is a proven method to build actionable plans that will lead you to success.

Don Goodman is a triple-certified, nationally recognized expert resume writer, career management coach and job search strategist.

