



When Our Strengths Fail Us

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Understanding our strengths is important. Our strengths give us a sense of competence and mastery, we leverage can leverage these skills into broader areas, and we can mentor others who need to develop in those areas. In fact, when people utilize their strengths every day, they are more likely to be engaged in their jobs and more likely to have excellent quality of life¹.

However, strengths become problematic in two situations: (1) when we overuse them or (2) when we assume that a strength in one area translates into others.

Overused Strengths

As an individual, we may find ourselves catering to our strengths. For instance, we only work on projects or tasks that we already know we can do well. And while feeling competent will allow us to relieve stress, it won't help us develop into more well-rounded individuals or help us become adaptable to new situations or people.

Let's go through an example. The forceful leadership approach you used with your unionized shop created a platoon-style mentality that created team cohesion and purpose. However, since you got promoted to a regional manager you are now leading a team of leaders and your previously successful style now seems like a micromanaging dictatorship. That is, your approach is no longer going to make you successful and you need to adapt.

Strengths Mistranslation

The second way our strengths fail us is when we assume that strength in a particular skill is an indicator that we will have strengths in other areas. This happens both within ourselves and how we view others. This is known as the Halo Effect. The Halo Effect is a bias, or error, in our judgement, which means we have to be cautious and cognizant of it.

For example, we assume the 'good guy' will be a decent leader or at least will try. Or we think that the best salesperson is going to be a good sales manager. However, in the latter scenario, a manager role takes a completely different skillset. A 'once maverick' salesperson who quickly adapts to the customer and the situation to make the sale, may not understand how to build that skill in others. Or they may become disengaged by the lack of 'action' from sitting in a room looking at numbers rather than talking to people. Therefore, you need to look to your own and others' strengths needed for the future rather than the present.

Solutions

Utilize your strengths when they are appropriate. It's important to not completely 'throw yourself in the deep end' but find lower-risk scenarios where you can test out new styles or approaches to develop yourself.

You can also leverage your strengths to help you develop areas of weakness. For example, if you have a strength in analyzing information quickly and efficiently, this has likely helped you move projects along and drive results. However, it may have come at a cost of neglecting to get buy-in from others or listening to their perspectives. You can then utilize your analysis strengths and apply



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them to people. Schedule time for more active listening and begin to understand people's unique needs, motivations, and agendas. This can then get funneled into your analysis of what to consider to generate not only better collaborative solutions but also help you develop better partnerships.

Developing your adaptability skills also will help you get noticed more by your organization. That is, most organizations use agility/adaptability as a key criterion for identifying high potentials². So by pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, you also increase your likelihood of getting access to promotions, specialized development programs, and pay increases.

References & Further Readings

¹ Flade, P., Asplund, J., & Elliot, G. (2015). Employees who use their strengths outperform those who don't <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236561/employees-strengths-outperform-don.aspx>

² CEB, 2005; 2009; Harvard Business Review, 2010

Goldsmith, M. (2007). What got you here won't get you there: How successful people become even more

How Can Triple Threat Consulting Help?

- Individual coaching
- Team assessment
- Team effectiveness coaching
- People strategy roadmaps
- Change management
- Project management
- Leader/employee guides
- Train-the-trainer sessions
- Leader/employee seminars
- Data analysis
- Business case development

About

Triple Threat Consulting was created by Lauren Florko, Ph.D. After a decade of experience in public, private, for-profit, non-for-profit, local and global organizations, she realized that all workplaces strive for the same thing - growth. Whether that is increasing their bottom line, cleaning up the planet, or bettering the community, all organizations strive for progress. Organizations cannot meet their goals without dedicated people working toward the same vision. Triple Threat Consulting was created to help organizations understand and engage their current and prospective employees and to create an environment where employees, organizations, and communities thrive.



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