

Personal Strengths and Weaknesses

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Developing Our Strengths while Managing Our Weaknesses

Many are painfully aware of weaknesses that hold them back. Yet, surprisingly, they are unaware of their many strengths. Focusing on our weaknesses while ignoring our strengths can be a source of discouragement and failure. And glorifying our strengths while ignoring our weaknesses can be equally unproductive. It is only when we give equal weight to our strong points and faults that we can realize our potential. Also note that we must choose our friends carefully because each relationship nurtures our strengths and weaknesses. That is, we will grow better or worse, depending on whom we spend our time with.

Considering how they affect our lives and that we seldom see the big picture, I will try to share some helpful ideas about our strengths and weaknesses.

PART ONE: OUR WEAKNESSES

A) THE BIG PICTURE

We all want to be powerful. By powerful, I don't mean ruling over others, but ruling over ourselves. How can we reach our dreams unless we first master ourselves? This is why understanding and managing our weaknesses is so important. The first lesson, then, is to remember that weakness means the absence of power. The question we have to ask is not "Do I want to overcome this weakness?" but "Do I want to be powerful or powerless?"

Weakness is nothing to be ashamed of; it is part of human nature. We are not dealing with a moral issue, but a practical one. That is, we want to know what works. What will help us reach our goals? It is not weakness but strength that will take us where we want to go. So, we need to identify our weaknesses and overcome or manage them.

Yet, we also have to realize that we will never overcome ALL our weaknesses, nor should we want to. For weaknesses are important. They help each of us to become a unique individual. You see, it is not only the strengths of others that make them appealing, but their weaknesses as well. We

relate to their flaws and root for them because we, too, are imperfect. And as we open up and expose our weaknesses to friends, we develop intimacy, strengthening our relationship. In fact, weaknesses contribute to our greatest relationship, our love life, as well. For as Francois Mauriac (1885~1970) wrote, "Human love is often but the encounter of two weaknesses."

Although we are painfully aware of some of our weakness, we fail to acknowledge others. Yet, the first step in overcoming any weakness is to become aware of it. So, how do we detect character flaws that are hiding in the background? A good way to start is by monitoring our negative emotions. Are we angry, vengeful, resentful, jealous, envious...? They all point to weaknesses that we can work on.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO AFTER FINDING OUR FAULTS?

1. Change those you can. The important thing is not overcoming them, but the strength we gain in doing so.
2. Accept those you cannot change.
3. Regularly come back to the ones you can't change, for what you can't do today, you may be able to do tomorrow.
4. Embrace those you cannot change because it is what makes you unique. If everyone were perfect, everyone would be the same, and we would live in a dull world.
5. Use your weaknesses to develop compassion. Since others have to tolerate your faults, it is only fair that you tolerate theirs. Also use your flaws to learn new coping skills and strategies. In other words, use your weaknesses to find new strength.

B) EXAMPLE WEAKNESSES

1. Envy. If you envy (or admire) someone, that is useful information. It points to the person you would like to become. So make that your goal. You can even ask the person you admire how you can become more like them. They may not only be happy to help, but may develop into an important friend.
2. Anger and resentment. Here is useful advice from August Wilson (1945~2005), "Confront the dark parts of yourself, and work to banish them with illumination and forgiveness. Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing. Use the pain as fuel, as a reminder of your strength."

3. Ingratitude. Failure to be grateful for what we have prevents us from being happy, weakens relationships, and blocks more good from entering our lives. Live with a grateful heart and you will live a long, happy life.

4. Arrogant. People who think they know it all weaken themselves because they stop learning. They are also easily hurt by the criticism of others. The paradox is they become weak because of their fear of appearing weak.

5. Gullibility. To accept as true whatever one reads or hears without questioning the facts may leave one misinformed, ignorant, or open to manipulation by others.

6. Insecurity. To be uncomfortable with insecurity is to be uncomfortable with life, for insecurity is the nature of life. If you need to satisfy your hunger for security, rest with the assurance that although you cannot count on others or the world, you can always count on yourself. So, use your feelings of insecurity as a catalyst to develop self-reliance.

7. Failure. Failure is not possible unless one stops trying. Its cures are perseverance, patience, commitment, flexibility, creativity, and solution-oriented thinking. As Kin Hubbard (1868~1930) wrote, "There is no failure except in no longer trying. There is no defeat except from within, no really insurmountable barrier save our own inherent weakness of purpose."

8. Boredom. Boredom is a lack of interest in doing anything. It's equivalent to feeling life isn't interesting. Whenever you are troubled with boredom, rather than asking yourself why you don't feel like doing anything, ask what you SHOULD be doing. Why? Because what you SHOULD be doing is what you really WANT to do. The reason why you're not doing it is not because it isn't interesting, but because your subconscious has created a wall of resistance that is blocking you. To learn more about this problem and how to easily overcome it, see the "GAINING CONTROL OVER OUR LIVES" section of this article: <http://www.personal-development.com/chuck/acceptance-questions.htm>

PART TWO: OUR STRENGTHS

A) THE BIG PICTURE

We all have strengths. But we cannot just smugly sit self-satisfied like a Cheshire cat. Rather we need to further develop our strong points because it's a matter of using them or losing them.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890~1969) explains, "Our real problem, then, is not our strength today; it is rather the vital necessity of action today to ensure our strength tomorrow." As a military

commander he knew we must never run from, but squarely face adversity, for we gain the strength of that which we have overcome.

How strong is an ant? Scientists in Krakow, Poland were astonished to see an ant holding a dead bird in the air weighing 500 times more than the ant. That would be equivalent to a 200- pound man holding 50 tons in the air (National Geographic, December, 1996)! You, too, have enormous power at your disposal, but it is often overlooked and neglected. I'm referring to the power of commitment. With it you can make the 'impossible' possible. People do not lack strength; they lack commitment. And if you cultivate it, you will be laying a firm foundation for success.

It is a sign of strength to be weak, to know it, and to manage it, but a sign of weakness to be unaware of our faults and mistakenly believe we are strong. Oddly enough, many people are unaware of their many strengths. It is important to recognize our inner resources, for until we do, we will fail to use them. The sad fact is a strong person unaware of his strength is no more useful than a weak person.

How can we make sure we are not overlooking our strengths? A good way to identify personal strengths you have overlooked is to ask yourself a series of questions, such as the following.

Do I hunger for success? Do I set goals and am I eager to take action to realize them? Am I excited by life? Am I curious? Do I love adventure? Do I live courageously? Do I like to support others, lead others, or both? Am I patient? Am I a risk taker? Do I get along with others? Do I look at the pros and cons before acting? Can I depend on myself? Do I encourage others and offer praise where it is due? Do I respect and learn from others? Do I see the potential in others and in myself?

Do I control my emotions or do I allow them to control me? Do I balance work and recreation? Do I look after my general well- being or do I neglect myself? Am I organized? Am I a visionary and see what others miss? Do I have a positive outlook? Am I a peacemaker? Do I empathize with others? Am I interested in what works and what doesn't? Do I embrace change or do I prefer the status quo? Do I love to learn and apply new things? Am I a thinker, planner, and doer? Do I always strive to do my best? Am I gentle and kind? Am I generous? Am I understanding and accepting?

B) THE DANGER OF OUR STRENGTHS CHANGING TO WEAKNESSES

Once we become aware of our strengths, we need to regularly monitor them, for unless we are careful, they could turn into weaknesses and halt our progress. Here are some examples of what I

mean.

1. Self-confidence is good, but when we are too confident, we stop learning.
2. When we are overly concerned about personal problems, we become blind to the problems of others.
3. It is good to be prudent, but unless we are willing to take risks, we cannot go very far in life.
4. Decisiveness is a strength, but guard against stubbornness.
5. Striking while the iron is hot is a positive trait, but acting rashly can lead to a downfall.
6. Self-discipline can lead you to expect too much of others.
7. Thoroughness is good, but it can turn into perfectionism.
8. It's good to be supportive, but not when you conform to every wish of others.
9. If you are too patient, things may never get done.
10. Diplomacy helps, but not when you allow others to take advantage of you.
11. Self-starters sometimes have problems working harmoniously with others.
12. Decisiveness is a strength, but not when you fail to consider other viewpoints.
13. Determination is a strong point, unless one is headstrong, one-sided, and aggressive.
14. Being a good speaker is an asset, unless one talks too much.
15. Enthusiasm is contagious, but enthusiastic people can come on too strong.
16. Creativity and an active imagination make some visionaries and others unrealistic dreamers.

C) EXAMPLE STRENGTHS

1. Faith, trust, and confidence. Unshakeable faith in ourselves and the world create a launching pad for success, for as William James (1842~1910) taught, "Pessimism leads to weakness,

optimism to power"

2. Excited by life. Or, as Vincent van Gogh (1853~1890) said, "Love many things, for therein lies the true strength, and whosoever loves much performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love is done well."

3. Living Courageously. After all, this is the bedrock of a happy life. Rabindranath Tagore (1861~1941) prays, "Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them. Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain, but for the heart to conquer it. Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield but to my own strength. Let me not cave in." Arnold Schwarzenegger continues, "Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strength. When you go through hardship and decide not to surrender, that is strength."

4. Getting along with others. The Dalai Lama fills in the details, "In my own limited experience I have found that the more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being. Cultivating a close, warmhearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. It helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the principal source of success in life. Since we are not solely material creatures, it is a mistake to place all our hopes for happiness on external development alone. The key is to develop inner peace."

5. Self-discipline (self-leadership). Self-discipline is an essential ingredient of success, and, therefore, a major strength. Judith Viorst aptly explains the true meaning of strength, "Strength is the capacity to break a chocolate bar into four pieces with your bare hands -- and then eat just one of the pieces."

6. Follow-through. The greatest idea and the finest intention are utterly worthless unless we follow through. If you need some help in this area, I recommend, "**FOLLOWING THROUGH, A Revolutionary New Model for Finishing Whatever You Start**," by Steve Levinson, Ph.D. and Pete Greider, M.Ed., Unlimited Publishing, 2007.

7. Compassion. Compassion is love in action. The more of it we give away, the more of it comes back to us. Here's something to keep in mind; if we are not compassionate toward others, how can we be compassionate toward ourselves?

8. RESPONSIBILITY. We all have challenges, but when Tom prayed for a helping hand to solve his problems, God said, "I already gave you a helping hand. It is attached to your arm." When we accept responsibility, we realize that God helps those who help themselves. Sure, there are always excuses available if you are weak enough to use them, but wouldn't you rather be strong?

A wise man admits his weaknesses. So, I would admit mine if I had any. Ha! Ha! That is supposed to be funny. Now that that is over, let's get serious again. I'm going to end with three relevant quotations, followed by two more books for recommended reading.

"Those who gave thee a body, furnished it with weakness; but He who gave thee Soul, armed thee with resolution. Employ it, and thou art wise; be wise and thou art happy." --Akhenaton (King of Egypt, 14th century BC)

"A true friend knows your weaknesses but shows you your strengths; feels your fears but fortifies your faith; sees your anxieties but frees your spirit; recognizes your disabilities but emphasizes your possibilities." --William Arthur Ward (1921~1994)

"When I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid" --Audre Lorde (1934~1992)

BOOKS

THE STRENGTH WITHIN: Find Your Life Anchors and Cultivate Habits of Wholeness, Hope, and Joy by Barbara Hansen, Ph.D., HiddenSpring, 2000.

THE WINNER'S BIBLE: Rewire Your Brain for Permanent Change by Dr. Kerry Spackman, Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2009

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