

Creating a Personal SWOT Analysis

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Keep the reins of your career firmly in your hands says
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Many of us are familiar with the concept of a SWOT analysis for our companies. This part of the strategic planning process reviews and critiques the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the company. However, many of us have never applied this process to our own personal and professional development. This is an extremely useful exercise. Let's take a look at how to conduct a personal SWOT Analysis.

A SWOT analysis looks at both internal and external factors. To do a general personal SWOT analysis, you would start with identifying your strengths and weaknesses. These are things like your skills, experience, knowledge, training and advantages. Where you are strong? What areas can you target for improvement? What areas are lacking?

Examples of Strengths

Think about the things that make you unique and that help you to stand out in a crowded field of co-workers or potential job candidates. Examples could include:

- I am well organized.
- I speak more than one language.
- I have a college degree in Business.
- I have an outgoing personality.
- I have a strong knowledge of Microsoft Office.
- I know first aid.
- I can type 90 words per minute.
- I am comfortable speaking in public.
- I have worked in the medical field.
- I know how to create databases.

Examples of Weaknesses

Weaknesses are things that hold you back or that might prevent you from getting a job. Examples could include:

- I am egotistical.
- I tend to procrastinate.
- I don't know how to use Crystal Reports.
- I am weak on macros in Microsoft Office.
- I have no marketing skills.



- I lack accounting experience.
- I am uncomfortable with change.
- I am too shy in social situations.

No one has to read these lists unless you want them to. It's important to be honest about where you stand. It might also be illuminating to poll friends and coworkers for their opinions.

Note that this analysis can be done for a more specific purpose like preparing for your next promotion or starting a new business. Then you can look at your strengths and weaknesses specifically as they pertain to the goal you are working towards.

Recognize that most strengths and weaknesses are points on a spectrum, often matching like bookends. The strength of cockiness can easily become the weakness of cockiness under different circumstances. It's up to you to decide if a certain quality is a strength or weakness and to recognize that the decision may change depending on the unique situation. It's also important to consider that other people may have differing opinions on whether certain qualities are positive or negative.

Next, you will look at opportunities and threats. These are items external to us – perhaps, beyond our control. Only by identifying them

ahead of time can we take steps to be prepared for potential opportunities and to mitigate the damage of threats.

This is another area where your answers may appear in both lists, as threats often open up new opportunities. For example, on the corporate level, robotics and technology could be a threat to worker's jobs, but they are also an opportunity for new types of jobs. Someone needs to design, build, install, provide training on, and maintain those machines. Always step back to look at the bigger picture and detect the silver lining of any threat clouds. By being open to those possibilities and actively looking for the opportunities threats may bring, you will greatly expand your options and improve your attitude toward change.

Examples of Opportunities

Opportunities and threats include things like changes in laws, the economy, political changes, company management changes, geography, environment, other people, industry trends and overall life changes.

- People at work are nearing retirement age.
- The internet has opened up the possibility of finding customers worldwide.
- My company is opening a new division.
- There are new companies opening up in my area.
- Technology could let me work from home.
- Changes in certain laws provide opportunities for me to start a new business to help companies address those changes.
- Training and leadership development would make me eligible for a promotion.
- There is a need for a particular skill that I have.
- The population is aging.

Overall as you are putting together these lists, you should be identifying factors from your financial circumstances, physical resources (like computer equipment you already own), natural resources, current processes you are following, market trends, economic trends, demographics, relationships, politics, and more.

Examples of Threats

Threats are external issues that could derail our efforts. However, threats can also result from

our weaknesses. If you are chronically late, the loss of your job might be something that should be included under threats.

- Economy could be unstable.
- Company could close.
- Could lose my job.
- Spouse could lose job.
- Laws could change.
- My industry is in decline.
- Something I rely on for income is going away or changing.
- There could be a natural disaster.
- There is competition in this field.
- I could get medical issues.
- My income is all from one source.

Analyzing the SWOT Analysis

Once you have identified your SWOT quadrants, you can use them to develop a plan for your career. You might identify areas of training that you need to prepare for a promotion or launch a new business. You might research the opportunities to see if there is merit to starting a business.

Comparing and combining the various quadrants may highlight a unique niche for you. For example, someone who wants to start their own business, speaks two languages and previously worked in a legal office might create a virtual assistant business focused on translating legal documents. If you have several years of experience as an admin or are a registered parliamentarian and your local community has a good business base with plenty of hotels and a convention center, you might create a business focused on providing administrative support for business travelers at local hotels or providing parliamentary services to meetings at the local convention center.

Several years ago, my company was still on Office 2003, although Office 2007 had been out for more than a year. After doing my personal SWOT analysis, one of the areas I listed as an opportunity and a threat was that my company would need to upgrade to Office 2007 at some point. It was an opportunity for me to showcase my leadership and technical skills at work and it was a threat in that I was falling behind in the marketplace with

the latest version of the software. Office 2007 was an enormously different version that had a substantial learning curve. I decided to offer a free study group to learn Office 2007 to the local chapter of my professional association, since that would motivate me to learn it well enough to get certified on it.

What I found interesting was the difference in attitude in some of my fellow chapter members. Many jumped at the chance to learn that version of Office. Others however, said they were still on 2003 and would wait until their offices upgraded before they learned the new software. Remember, this was a FREE study group they were turning down.

Fast forward a few short months. My company decided to roll out an upgrade of Office 2007 with two weeks' notice to all employees. Because I had prepared ahead for the software with the study group, I was able to calmly go to my boss and offer to lead some overview sessions of the differences to help minimize the downtime of employees and reduce their frustration in learning the latest version.

By not waiting until the circumstances actually changed to start preparing, but instead, recognizing that it was only a matter of time and that I could take steps to ease the transition, I laid the groundwork to make myself look like a shining star to my boss. This emphasized to him that I was proactive in planning ahead and demonstrating leadership skills.

THAT is the power of conducting a personal SWOT analysis on an annual basis. It helps keep control of your career firmly in your hands, right where it belongs.

Don't wait for opportunities to present themselves. Make them appear!

about the author



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