

“The Truth About You”

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From a very early age you knew you had something special to offer. Work can be a great place. A place where you are challenged in just the way you like to be challenged. A place where you get to make the kind of difference only you can make. Fewer than *two* out of *ten* of us get to play to our strengths at work most of the time. Don't be pressured into living some second-rate version of your own life. Don't wake up one day and find yourself in a job that doesn't engage you, that doesn't call on the best of you, a job where you're just marking time, putting in the hours until the weekend comes around again, a job that doesn't give you a kick but instead bores you and burns you out. It can be a job, where, today, at this moment, you feel trapped. Ask yourself, how can I become one of the *two* out of *ten* people who plays to my strengths and passions most of the time?

1. As you grow, you become more and more of who you already are.

During your life, your dreams may change, your values may change, and your skills will certainly change. But the core of your personality—how patient you are, how competitive, how organized, how charming—will remain remarkably stable throughout the course of your life.

2. You grow most in your areas of greatest strength.

It sounds odd, but you will improve most, learn the most, be the most creative, be the most inquisitive, and bounce back the fastest in those areas where you have already shown some natural advantage.

3. A great team player volunteers his strengths to the team most of the time and deliberately partners with people who have different strengths.

The core of teamwork is partnering with people whose strengths are different from yours

4. Performance is always the point

Your organization will never truly know you. It's going to fall to you to know yourself well enough to stay on your strengths path. It's going to fall to you to figure out how to use your strengths to drive the performance your organization wants. Always remember that you are the greatest teacher about your and your strengths. Experience will (over time) teach you just how well you know your own strengths. Your interests are a very good clue to your strengths. Wisdom, it is said, can be found in what you choose to overlook. In this sense, your interests are wise. They cause you to overlook a bunch of other stuff and zero in on something specific.

You want to know what your interests are? Take a moment to look back over your life and ask yourself some questions. Start with what you have done.

- Have you ever held a job?
- Was it just for the money, or did it spark something in you?
- Was there any part of the job that really intrigued you?
- Was there any part of the job you can honestly say you loved?

Okay, now let's move on to your hobbies.

- Do you have any hobbies or special interests?
- Have you ever joined a club or group and found yourself actually looking forward to going every week?
- What was it?

Okay, now on to reading.

- What were the last two books you read?
- When you walk past a newsstand, which two magazines do you always buy?
- When you read these magazines, do you find yourself drawn to certain kinds of articles or certain subjects? Which ones?
- When surfing the Web, which sites are you drawn to?
- Which articles do you tend to read online?

Finally, look at the people in your life. Take a moment to think about your friends and close colleagues.

- What kinds of people do you find yourself drawn to?
- What words would you use to describe these people?

Okay, now look at what you've written down. Scan your answers and try to pick out a couple of interests. Choose three things or subjects, or types of people that you know in your heart are deeply seated interests of yours. And then write them down.

Your interests are the 1st and most obvious sign that you are not the same as everyone else. And so, to live a strong, successful life, your interests are the first things you must take seriously.

5. Your strengths aren't what you're good at and your weaknesses aren't what you're bad at

When you ask people in job interviews. "What are your strengths," their answers tend to be broad, things like, "I like working with people" or, "I like to be challenged." A strength as broad as this isn't much help to anyone. What exactly are you doing with the people? Are you selling to them, serving them, inspiring them, charming them or teaching them? To push your life and job toward your strengths, you have to be specific about exactly which activities are your strengths. A strength—your strengths—are any activities that *make you feel strong*. To discover your strengths, you must look beyond "what you are good at" and pay really close attention to what you're feeling before, during and after an activity. Your feelings will tell you what your strengths are.

It may be your strength when:

1. Before you do something you actually find yourself looking forward to doing it
2. While you're doing it you feel focused, in the zone, with time whipping by really quickly
3. After you're done you feel fulfilled

Here's a "SIGN" to remember what to look for when trying to spot your strengths.

SUCCESS - You experience success at the activity

INSTINCT - Before you do it, you find yourself instinctively looking forward to doing it

GROWTH - While doing it, you find yourself easily able to concentrate (your brain synapses firing)

NEEDS - After you've done it, it feels like it fulfills a *need* of yours.

To find out what your real strengths are do the following:

1. Anytime you feel yourself looking forward to doing something, write down the activity you're looking forward to
2. Anytime you find yourself in the zone stop and write down what you are doing
3. Anytime you find yourself at the end jazzed and energized, write down what you just did

No matter what you were doing, if you felt strong before, during or after doing it, then write it down.

After a period of time you may have written down 15 to 20 activities. These are the best of your week. These activities are you...uniquely you...uniquely the best of you and hold the key to your strengths.

A strength statement begins with the phrase “I feel strong when...” and then continues with you describing an activity. This activity has to be specific enough to give you an emotional punch when you read it, but it has to be general enough for you to use in a lot of different situations.

Your goal should be to write three clear Strength Statements. These will help you find the right job and to succeed in this job once you are in it. Be careful not to judge what you write and try to make it “sound “ better. What matters is how the activity made you “*feel*” not how *good* it sounds.

6. When it comes to your job, the “what” always trumps the “why” and the “who.”

People join because of the “why” stay because of the “who” and in the end quit because of the “what.”

You need to ask what exactly you will be paid to do. Write this down. No matter how much you like the job description, or the job title, or the money, you will thrive or fall at this job based on the actual activities of the job. Compare the activities of the job to your three strength statements and the ask yourself:

1. Can I see myself doing these actual activities?
2. How can I use my strengths to get this job done?

Then make the decision if this is the right job for you

7. You’ll never find the perfect job

Every week, for the rest of your life, write your strong week plan. You will grow the most in your areas of greatest strength. You will improve the most, learn the most, be most creative, most inquisitive, and bounce back fastest in those areas where you have already shown some natural advantage—your strengths. Each week, pick out two things you are going to do to put your strengths into play. That’s all your Strong Week is; two things you are going to commit to this week that will put your strengths into play. Each week you are going to say to yourself, “I am not going to let the week go by without doing these two things.”

Gradually (week by week) two things will happen:

1. Your job will change—your job description will look like it was written for you

2. You'll gain a reputation—the right kind of reputation the “he’s got initiative” kind the “he keeps searching for better ways” kind, the “he’s a top performer” kind

8. You'll never turn your weaknesses into strengths

This means that what weakens you now (and what strengthens you) will probably weaken you just as much 20 years from now. Remember that your weaknesses aren't just things you're bad at (sometimes you might actually be quite good at them) but are those activities that weaken you. Here are five tactics to neutralize your weaknesses.

1. Stop doing it and see if anyone cares
2. Partner up with someone else. Seek out someone who is strengthened by the very thing that weakens you
3. Keep sharpening your strengths and make them so powerful that they render your weakness irrelevant
4. Try looking at your weakness from the perspective of one of your strengths. When you fall back on one of your strengths, it has the side effect of helping you with your weakness
5. If all of the above don't work, suck it up and do it. Realize that what weakens you should be only a small part of your job, and then devote the rest of your time to getting better and better at your strengths