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# optimising your own productivity

Use a personal SWOT analysis to focus on your best opportunities

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## In Brief

SWOT analysis is the examination of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is generally applied to products, or a business as a whole, and used as a starting point for assessing strategy. It is particularly powerful at the personal level, where it can offer clear guidance to how best apply your strengths, identify opportunities, manage weaknesses and contain threats. It is very simple to do. It is best done with a partner or team.

A walk through the process is as follows.

- First, carefully read the guide on the next page, then use the working template to take a good look at yourself
- Spend as much time on this process as possible. Ask your colleagues - both senior and junior – for support. Look for input from family and those who know you well.
- Do not limit the number of items in each sector- brainstorm as many as possible
- Look for connections between the sectors. Remember, strengths suggest achievable opportunities. Weaknesses can be managed, threats acknowledged.

The outcome will be a list of opportunities to take Action. Don't go overboard. Two or three are enough. Choose things that you can start right away. The best Actions will provide an opportunity for you to use your strengths, manage your weaknesses and contain threats. They will be exciting for you and show a clear way forward.



## Personal SWOT Analysis

### Strengths

Look for the strengths that work for you. They are often indicated by things you are automatically good at, things you actually like doing, be they selling, filling, organising, writing, managing, communicating, supporting or promoting, just to name a few. You often do them better than others. They can include:

Personal: loyalty, diligence, teamwork, ambition, commitment, analytical ability, creativity, honesty, sport, study, teaching

Skills: technical ability, educational qualifications, courses completed, product knowledge, licenses held, maths ability

Creativity: ability to come up with new ideas in your area of responsibility, or the ability to put them into practice

Relationship: with particular clients or sectors, with suppliers, colleagues, management, family

### Weaknesses

These are not your strong points. You often avoid them, or get someone else to handle them. Some of them get in the way of your performance. They can include:

Poor administration skills: disorganisation, laziness, lack of commitment, difficulty with certain types of people

Personal habits: lateness, not looking after your health, untidiness, being short-tempered, lack of personal care

Lack of skills: areas of performance which would improve with more training; are you simply unable to perform certain functions because you are not trained in them;

Essentially, this sector will contain the things you are not good at and should not be doing, or it will highlight the things that you could do better if you had the right tools.

### Opportunities

There are all sorts of opportunities to further your career or your business if you look for them. Many of these emerge from your strengths. If you look at what you are good at, you will come up with ideas and projects which you are capable of developing. There is less effort - and more return for you - in seeking out opportunities that take your strengths from very good to excellent, than there is in lifting your weaknesses from very poor to not bad. Look for ways to respond to changes in market conditions, your client profile, new product development, internal management structures, new technology, or simply design a project that you know will benefit you and the firm. Don't hesitate to propose it to management or your colleagues. Many great ideas are responses to threats, or ways of eliminating or delegating weaknesses.

### Threats

Obstacles to your performance come from both inside and outside your career. They can include changing business conditions, personal issues, the people around you, the level of competition and changing technology, just to name a few. Basically this is a list of what could go wrong. Many threats can be countered by taking advantage of various strengths you have. But there are also those threats which suggest it will be best to structure your position so that you can avoid them or minimise their impact on you. Threats are a reality and need to be acknowledged. They will not simply disappear if you ignore them. Keep this in mind but don't waste time on things you cannot control or change. Focus on the things you can: your strengths and the opportunities they provide.



## Personal SWOT Analysis - working template

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>



**For more information, visit my website [www.alanhargreaves.com](http://www.alanhargreaves.com)**

Hi, I'm Alan Hargreaves. I specialise in simplifying complex business problems. In over 35 years as a business executive, I have never found an issue that cannot be addressed through identifying the essential but simple steps required to make any problem manageable. It might be your career, your firm, your team or your strategy. It doesn't matter. All hurdles can be lowered through dispassionate analysis, and all executives can embrace simple processes to take them forward. Using these techniques, I have helped hundreds of people through the various stages of their business or career development. It may be the challenge of taking on new responsibilities; it could be the task of managing a business you have created yourself; it may be handling a difficult team in the midst of major change. I use a straightforward combination of key principles to get results: collaboration, adaptation, simplification and action. You can contact me anytime at [alan@alanhargreaves.com](mailto:alan@alanhargreaves.com).



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