

DISCOVERING YOUR TALENTS

Realizing the importance of focusing on
your strengths and talents to succeed

BY BRIAN TRACY



“ Only by discovering your innate strengths and developing and exploiting them to their highest degree can you utilize yourself to get the greatest amount of satisfaction and enjoyment from everything you do. ”

-Brian Tracy

Benjamin Franklin wrote, “Do you value life? Then waste not time, for that is the stuff of which life is made.” The value of anything that you obtain or accomplish can be determined by how much of your time, or your life, that you spent to acquire it. The amount of yourself that you use up in achieving the goals that are important to you is a critical factor to consider, even before you begin. Only by discovering your innate strengths and developing and exploiting them to their highest degree can you utilize yourself to get the greatest amount of satisfaction and enjoyment from everything you do.

Deciding what you want to do, what you can do well, and what can give you the highest rewards for your efforts is the starting point in getting the best out of yourself.

Strategic Planning

When we do strategic planning for corporations, we begin with the premise that the whole purpose of the exercise is to reorganize and reallocate people and resources to increase the rate of return on equity, or capital invested in the business. Invariably, this is done by emphasizing some areas and de-emphasizing others, by allocating more resources to areas with higher potential return and by taking resources away from those areas that represent lower potential returns. By developing or promoting newer and better products and services and by discontinuing those products and services that are less profitable, the company and all the people in it can channel their resources to maximize their returns.

In doing personal strategic planning, the first thing you want to think about is increasing your personal “return on energy,” rather than return on equity. You need to realize that the most essential and valuable thing that you have to bring to your life and to your work is your ability to think, to act, and to get results. You’re earning ability—which is a function of your education, knowledge, experience and talents—is your human capital, or your equity. And the way you use it will largely determine the quality and quantity of your rewards, both material and psychological, both tangible and intangible.

For example, a young man in one of my seminars came up to me and told me that he was working as a plumber for a large plumbing-contracting firm. He made good wages, but he was very envious of the salespeople in his company who made more money, drove nicer cars, wore nicer clothes and had much better life-styles. He had completed all his training and had his journeyman's certificate, and he was at the top of his wage scale. The only way he could earn more money was by working longer hours. He realized, however, that that was not the answer. Instead, he wanted to get into sales, where his income could be higher and would not be fixed on an hourly basis.

I remember advising him that if he wanted to get into sales, it was up to him to learn how to sell and then to do everything possible to get his management to give him a chance at selling plumbing services. His future was up to him, but he first had to learn how to do the new and higher-paying job.

A little more than a year later, he attended another seminar that I was giving in that same city, and he told me his story. He had told his management that he wanted to get into sales. The managers had discouraged him, telling him that plumbers had very little aptitude for the hard, interpersonal work involved in selling a complex service. He then asked them what he would have to do to prove to them that he could sell well. To make a long story short, they helped him to learn how to sell their company's services by having him study manuals and take extra courses on his own time. He bought books and listened to tapes and began spending time talking to the salespeople in the organization.

Now a year had passed. He had been a full-fledged salesman for about five months. He was already earning more than twice as much as the most he had ever earned as a plumber. But most of all, he was happier. He was more excited and more enthusiastic about himself and his work than he had ever been. He loved the field of selling, and he considered his career change to be one of the best decisions he had ever made.

This story is typical of countless stories that have been related to me over the years. In each case, the individual had discovered and developed his or her strengths and, subsequently, improved the quality of his or her life. And you can do the same. In fact, this may be one of the most important things you ever do.

Define Your Values

This first part of personal strategic planning is called “values clarification.” You ask yourself, “What values and virtues do I most admire and wish to practice in my life?” If you wanted to discover your strengths in the work world, first you would define your values as they apply to employment. The values that companies settle upon would be similar to the values that you organize your work life around. Often, both companies and individuals will choose values such as integrity, quality, respect for others, service, profitability, innovation, entrepreneurship, market leadership, and so on. For example, General Electric, as one of its values, is determined to be either first or second in quality and market share with any product that it offers. If it cannot achieve a first- or second-place position, it will make every effort to grow into it, or it will leave the market entirely.

In a similar vein, you could use those values to define your position with regard to your work. You could decide to plan your work life around the values of quality, excellence, service, profitability, and innovation. There are dozens of values that you can pick from, but whichever you choose, and the order of priority you place on your choices, will determine your approach to your work.

Your next step is to create your personal mission statement. This is a clear, written description of the person you intend to be in your work life. I have often found that this is even more important than setting specific financial or business or sales goals. Once you have decided how much you want to earn, you need to write out a mission statement that describes the kind of person you intend to become in order to earn that amount of money.

For example, you might say, "I'm an outstanding salesperson, well-organized, hardworking, thoroughly prepared, positive, enthusiastic, and intensely focused on serving my customers better than anyone else can." With this as your mission statement, you have a series of organizing principles that you can use to guide your career choices, your personal- and professional-development activities, and your work schedule for each day. This mission statement also tells you the kind of person that you're going to be in your interactions with the people whose satisfaction will determine your career success. A clear mission statement also is a definition of the areas in which you intend to become stronger in order to achieve your goals.

Define Your Goals

Remember: Your goal is to identify your strengths so that you can deploy yourself in such a way as to increase your personal return on energy. One of the best mental techniques that you can use to accomplish this is to see yourself as a "bundle of resources" that can be applied in a variety of directions to achieve a variety of objectives. As a bundle of resources, the amount of time and energy that you have is limited; therefore, your time and energy must be put to their highest and best use. Stand back and imagine that you're looking at yourself objectively, as if through the eyes of another person, and you're thinking about how you could apply yourself to bring about the best results. See yourself as your own employer or boss. What could you do to maximize the output of which you're capable, and where could you do it?

Once you have defined your values and written out your mission statement, the next step is to do what is called a "situational analysis." Sometimes we call it a "performance audit." This is the process of analyzing yourself thoroughly before you begin setting specific goals and planning certain activities. You begin your performance audit by asking yourself some key questions.

One of those questions should be, "What are my marketable skills?" Think about it. What can you do for which someone else will pay you? What can you do par-

ticularly well? What can you do better than others? What have you done particularly well in the past?

A wage or a salary is merely an amount of money that is paid to purchase a certain quality and quantity of labor or output. The results that you're able to get by applying your strengths and your energies largely determine your rewards in life. If you wish to increase the quality and quantity of your rewards, you have to increase your ability to achieve more and better results. It's very simple.

Earl Nightingale said that the amount you're paid will be determined by three things: (1) the work you do, (2) how well you do that work, and (3) the difficulty of replacing you.

The laws of supply and demand also affect the labor market, of which you are a part. Employers or customers will always seek the very most for the very least. That means that you'll always be paid the very least that is necessary to prevent you from moving to another organization.

Abraham Lincoln said that the only security a person can have is the ability to do a job uncommonly well.

The height of your income will be determined largely by how well you do your job and the difficulty of replacing you. In areas where workers can be replaced easily, the workers are paid only the minimum amount necessary to keep them. In increasing your return on energy, one of your objectives is to become so good in your chosen field that the cost of replacing you is extremely high. This is the way to assure that you will always be paid well because no one can get the kind of results that you can get for the amount that you charge, or the amount that you're paid (which are the same).

Take Control

In reality, you're the president of your own personal-services corporation. You're completely in charge of production, quality control, training and development,

marketing, finance, and promotion. Thinking of yourself passively, as being employed and, therefore, subject to the dictates of someone else, can be fatal to your long-term success. On the other hand, seeing yourself as self-employed forces you to see that you also are self-responsible and self-determining, that everything that happens to you happens because of your conduct and your behavior. You're in the driver's seat. You're behind the steering wheel of your life. It's up to you to decide how to utilize your talents and abilities in such a way as to bring you the very highest return on investment of your time and energy. No one else is going to do it for you. You're the boss. Others can help you, guide you, direct you, channel you, point you in the right direction and even give you opportunities, but in the final analysis, no one can make the critical decisions that will determine your future and your fortune.

Define Your Strengths

Here are four questions that you need to ask yourself on a regular basis:

- (1) "What do I most enjoy doing?"
- (2) "How would I describe my ideal job?"
- (3) "If I could have any job at all, anywhere, what would it be?"
- (4) "If I won a million dollars in the lottery and I had to pick a job to work at indefinitely, what would I choose to do with my time?"

In uncovering your strengths, ask yourself, "What are my unique talents and abilities?" What have you been good at in the past? What things do you do easily that seem to be difficult for other people? In what areas of work do you seem to get the best results, and do you derive the most pleasure from? The answers to those questions all are indications of how you might deploy yourself to increase your return on energy invested.

As a result of your genetic structure, your education, your experiences, your background, your interests and proclivities, you're a unique and rare combination

of talents and abilities. You can be extremely good at something. You're responsible for finding out what that something is and then throwing your whole heart into it, without reservation or holdback. Only when you discover what you really enjoy doing and then commit yourself to it wholeheartedly do you begin to feel really alive and fully engaged in life.

Find Clarity

Look at your current job and current abilities, and ask yourself, "Where do I want to be in three to five years?" What kind of work do you want to be doing? What kind of people do you want to be working with? What level of responsibility do you desire? What kind of money do you want to be earning? What part of the country do you want to be living in?

Let your imagination flow freely for a while. Imagine that there are no limitations on what you can do or be, or where you can do it or be it. Imagine that all options are open to you.

Look at your work and at your life in general today, and ask yourself, "What kind of people do I admire the most and want to be like?" Who do you know, or know about, who is doing the kind of work that you want to do and living the kind of life that you want to live? What changes would you have to make in your life to be like that person? Remember: Whatever anyone has done, someone else can do as well. You'll never be exactly the same as another person, but you don't need to be. You can use the successes and achievements of other people as examples and guidelines to help you decide where you want to arrive at the end of your particular journey, but you can be unique and different and successful in your own way.

Harold Geneen, the former CEO of ITT and one of the most powerful business executives in American history, always used to say, "Start with the goal and work back." So decide where you want to end up somewhere down the road, and then plan back to the present day to determine what you're going to have to do to

get there. If you can make an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, your threats and vulnerabilities, your areas of potential opportunity and the areas that might be holding you back, you're in a perfect position to begin looking forward to the future, to decide where you want to go and what you want to achieve.

Be a Leader

Finally, in personal strategic planning, the aim is always to achieve leadership in your chosen market niche. Business leaders have the authority to determine the area of excellence in their business. Analogously, on a personal level, you can choose the thing at which you're going to become absolutely excellent and achieve extraordinary results. So in what areas are you going to work to achieve results that are far beyond what the average person could be expected to accomplish?

What can you—and only you—do that, if done well, will make an extraordinary difference in your life? What can you do now, or can you learn to do in the future, that will give you the biggest payoff for the amount of time that you invest in it?

Remember: You were put on this earth with a special combination of talents and abilities that make you different from anyone who has ever lived. Whatever you're doing today, it's nowhere near what you're really capable of doing. The key to a happy and prosperous life is for you to regularly evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, to become very good in the areas you most enjoy, and then to throw your whole heart into what you're doing.

ASSESSMENT

Personal success is a result of two factors:

- 1) You must know exactly what you want;
- 2) You must determine the price you will have to pay to achieve it.

Absolute clarity regarding your goals is essential to high performance.

- 1.** Begin with your values; what are the three most important values, qualities, factors in your life today?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

- 2.** What would you do, how would you change your life, if you received \$1,000,000 cash today?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

- 3.** What would you do, how would you change your life if you learned today that you only had six months to live?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4. What sort of work or activity gives you your greatest feeling of importance and personal satisfaction?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

5. What have you always wanted to do but been afraid to attempt?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

6. If you could make any significant changes in your life today, what would they be?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

7. What one great thing would you dare to dream if you knew you could not fail?

To achieve greatly in life, you need to be clear about your goals in the seven main areas of life:

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1) Personal | 4) Financial | 7) Social |
| 2) Family | 5) Education | |
| 3) Business & Career | 6) Health | |

When you set your goals, imagine you have no limitations.

1. List your three most intensely desired personal goals:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

2. What are your three most important family and relationship goals?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

3. List your three most important business and career goals:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

4. What are your three most important financial goals?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

5. What are your three most important educational goals, your goals for personal and professional development?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

6. What are your three most important health goals — physical fitness, sports, weight?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

7. What are your three most important social goals? What contributions do you want to make to your community?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

8. Without referring to your answers in the previous goal-setting questions, make a list of 10 goals you would like to accomplish in the next 12 months:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____

9. Imagine you could be absolutely guaranteed of success in any of your goals, which one goal would you choose?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations.

Brian's goal is to help you achieve your personal and business goals faster and easier than you ever imagined.

Brian Tracy has consulted for more than 1,000 companies and addressed more than 5,000,000 people in 5,000 talks and seminars throughout the US, Canada and 80 other countries worldwide. As a Keynote speaker and seminar leader, he addresses more than 250,000 people each year.

He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology. He is the top selling author of over 50 books that have been translated into dozens of languages.

He has written and produced more than 500 audio and video learning programs, including the worldwide, best-selling Psychology of Achievement, which has been translated into more than 20 languages.

He speaks to corporate and public audiences on the subjects of Personal and Professional Development, including the executives and staff of many of America's largest corporations. His exciting talks and seminars on Leadership, Selling, Self-Esteem, Goals, Strategy, Creativity and Success Psychology bring about immediate changes and long-term results.

Prior to founding his company, Brian Tracy International, Brian was the Chief Operating Officer of a \$265 million dollar development company. He has had successful careers in sales and marketing, investments, real estate development and syndication, importation, distribution and management con-

sulting. He has conducted high level consulting assignments with several billion-dollar plus corporations in strategic planning and organizational development.

He has traveled and worked in over 90 countries on six continents, and speaks four languages. Brian is happily married and has four children. He is active in community and national affairs, and is the President of three companies headquartered in Solana Beach, California.

Brian is the president of Brian Tracy International, a company that helps individuals and businesses of all sizes achieve personal and professional goals.

To learn more about Brian Tracy, please visit www.briantracy.com.

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