How to Conduct a Personal SWOT Analysis

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An effective process companies use to assess themselves and their competitors and formulate their strategies is an analysis called “SWOT.” But this exercise isn’t just for businesses. It can be helpful for job seekers and those who are looking to climb the career ladder, too. Here’s how the process works…

After you’ve defined your career aspirations and goals (see my [previous blog](http://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2013/04/08/dont-rely-on-luck-at-work-define-your-career-aspirations-and-goals/) on how to do this), the next step is to understand more about yourself and your external environment. This is where the SWOT analysis is helpful. It stands for:

* **S** = Strengths (internal)
* **W** = Weaknesses (internal)
* **O** = Opportunities (external)
* **T** = Threats (external)

This process captures information about your internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. Key to completing your SWOT analysis is to treat your career as a business and yourself as a competitive product.

**Strengths**

To help you understand your strengths, picture yourself as a competitive product in the marketplace. A personal strength is an asset to you as a product and can be used as a way to differentiate yourself from others when interviewing or trying to obtain your next promotion. Examples of strengths: Strong project management skills, ability to improve or reengineer processes, experience and training in presenting to large audiences, proven successful sales abilities.

**Weaknesses**

A personal weakness is a liability or an area of opportunity for growth. These are characteristics you could improve upon to increase future job opportunities. Examples: Disorganized, uncomfortable speaking in front of groups, tendency to procrastinate, poor listener.

**Opportunities & Threats**

When thinking about your opportunities and threats, I always find it easier to begin with the “threats.” Try comparing yourself to people you’ll likely compete against for that next job or promotion. Then, as objectively as possible, judge your threats and determine possible ways to overcome them. Here are some examples:

* **Threat:** Other candidates have college degrees
* **Opportunity:** Go to night school and finish my bachelor’s degree
* **Threat:** Colleague X is much better at presenting in front of groups
* **Opportunity:** Take a speech class or join a program (such as Toastmasters); seek out opportunities to present in front of audiences

The purpose of the personal SWOT analysis is to identify actions you can take to best meet the requirements of the job or promotion you are seeking. Comparing your strengths and weaknesses to the job requirements will identify gaps and help you prepare to be the best candidate for the position to which you aspire.

Throughout my career, I’ve used this SWOT analysis every time I’m applying and interviewing for a new job. Going through this exercise helps me ensure I’m prepared for the interview and gets me ready to answer tough questions from interviewers (such as, “Describe your biggest weakness”). Following this process also allows me to anticipate areas that could be potential issues during the interview.

So if you need a little boost in your job search or to obtain that coveted promotion, try using the personal SWOT analysis exercise to sharpen your strengths, improve your weaknesses, identify opportunities for development and neutralize or overcome your threats.