

Your Strengths Are the Path to Excellence

By Carole Nicolaides

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What is the one strength that - if you worked on it - would make the difference in your profession? Is it your ability to draw pictures? Translate feelings into beautiful visual images? Take words and put them into persuasive sentences? Are you especially clever with numbers? Can you sing acappella? Can you inspire people at work? The answers to all these questions will be clues to your natural talents, and most likely to your true purpose in life. Acknowledging and dedicating yourself to your natural talents is the path to excellence, success, and effortless abundance.

One of my gifts has always been my ability of asking questions. It seems others appreciate that I ask questions in a non-threatening way that allows others to see their own issues and usually the solutions to their problems. I took this gift for granted for many years. As someone who was in medical training, I thought this was a normal thing to do. Inquiring, and trying to get to the root of peoples' illnesses was all part of becoming a doctor.

I realized that this was not such an easy task for every medical student. Later on, when I abandoned the medical profession and started working in the business realm, the same gift helped me again. My ability to ask the right questions at the right moments helped technical projects to move ahead, made people feel good about themselves, and brought business satisfaction within very challenging operations. Once again, I was focusing all my energy in developing other special competencies of mine, but not acknowledging my natural gift. Why?

Only after 30 something years did I realized that my gift - my brilliance - lies in my ability to ask questions. Once I internalized this wisdom, acknowledged my gift, and stopped denying it, I was able to find my true path in life and start doing work in a way that is deeply fulfilling. The beauty of it is - once you stop fighting it - you get answers to all the things that you once had questions about. You are still working hard, but excellence comes much more easily.

So many people, when asked what they are gifted at, reply either "I don't know" or "nothing." How sad! I am pretty confident that you have at least one thing that you do well. If you do not know about it, then ask your family or friends and they will point something out. Everyone has something unique to offer in this world. Some have strengths that are abundantly obvious. Others, like me, have gifts that may take some investigation to uncover.

Knowing your strengths will allow you to tap into your inner desires, from which you can plot your

path of life. Everything is interrelated. Your strengths will reveal your true blueprint in life.

Whether you've discovered your strengths or not, the sad truth is that most people do not take the time to develop their gifts. A prime example is the person who works hard, struggling to rise to the top, while ignoring the very things that come naturally to them. Unfortunately, it happens every day.

One of the reasons this happens is that our gifts - the things that come very easily to us – are often ignored, or smothered by other duties. Let me explain.

One client of mine, a marketing strategist, built his business using his natural strength (gift) of building relationships. He loved connecting with clients, meeting new people, and personally interacting with others. However, as other business responsibilities set in, he found himself laying his primary strength aside and devoting more time to mundane duties. The result? He began to degrade in his level of excellence. Without focusing his contribution to the business on his strength – he, personally and professionally, started to suffer.

Once he acknowledged this - he readjusted his schedule, dropped all administrative tasks that did not require his personal attention, and devoted two-hours of his time to re-cultivating old relationships and building new ones. Within a few months, his business boomed, he felt great and he had more time.

Are you like me? Are you unsure of what your natural gifts are? It took me a long time to realize mine. The tips below will help you pinpoint the strengths you have that can lead you down the path to excellence.

1. Make a list of the specific things (no more than three) that come easily for you. You may not see them as "special" (like my ability to ask the right questions) but if you are naturally adept at them, write them on your list.
2. Decide how committed are you to dedicating money and time to developing your gifts.
3. If you are willing to do what is needed to develop these strengths, set some deadlines. Research classes, activities or counselors who can help you expand on your gifts.
4. Find a "mentor" or someone else who will support you in your efforts to excel.
5. Put a measurable return on your investment. Create a list of reasonable accomplishments that you hope to make after developing your gifts.
6. Think big! Who is your role model, who is expert in your field? Study them and then see if you like any of their development strategies.

The key here is to remain persistent with the development of your strengths. Many people have paid great sums of money for the help of experts. If you do not feel you are able to grow solely with the help of a mentor, by all means – hire a coach or consultant. The end result of having peace and confidence in your personal and professional life will be well worth the cost!

Carole is President and Leadership Coach of Progressive Leadership, a management consulting firm that specializes in improving organizational effectiveness, leadership performance and profitability through developing employees' soft skills and building upon their strengths.

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