

Assess for Success

Assessing Personal Strengths and Weaknesses

A

So? What

Have you ever interviewed for a job and faced these questions:

- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your greatest weakness?

Perhaps you don't have a lot of interview experience yet, but be assured that you *will* have to answer these questions in the future. Interviewers use them to determine whether or not you are a good fit for a certain position. You want a job that uses your strengths and minimizes your weaknesses—and employers want this as well. An employee in the wrong job is a waste of time and effort for everyone involved. This is why developing the ability to identify your personal strengths and weaknesses is so important. Read on to learn more about how you can master this vital skill!

Objectives

- A Explain the importance of recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses.
- B Identify personal strengths and weaknesses.

Getting Personal

Philip is an excellent writer who's at his best when he can collaborate and share ideas with team members. What will happen if Philip takes a job that is math-oriented and requires working alone all day? Most likely, Philip will be unhappy and unsuccessful.

His managers and coworkers will also be frustrated with his performance. Philip needs to be in a position that capitalizes on his **strengths** and minimizes his **weaknesses**. But, for this to happen, he needs to know what those strengths and weaknesses are!



▲ How can you find a career that's the best fit for you? First, you have to assess your own strengths and weaknesses.

If you stop to think about it, we often **assess**, or evaluate, the strengths and weaknesses of everyday things. A coach, for example, might have the team assess the strengths and weaknesses of its performance in yesterday's game. You might ask your supervisor to look over your proposal to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Both cases should reveal things that were done well and things that need improvement. The same principle is true for people. We all have our own individual strengths and weaknesses.

“Know thyself”

Socrates, an ancient Greek philosopher, said, “Know thyself.” His quote encourages you to evaluate yourself as a person. By doing this, you can make the best use of your strengths and can identify areas for improvement. In short, you can work to become a better employee and a better you. Other benefits of knowing yourself include:

The ability to apply your talents where they are best used.

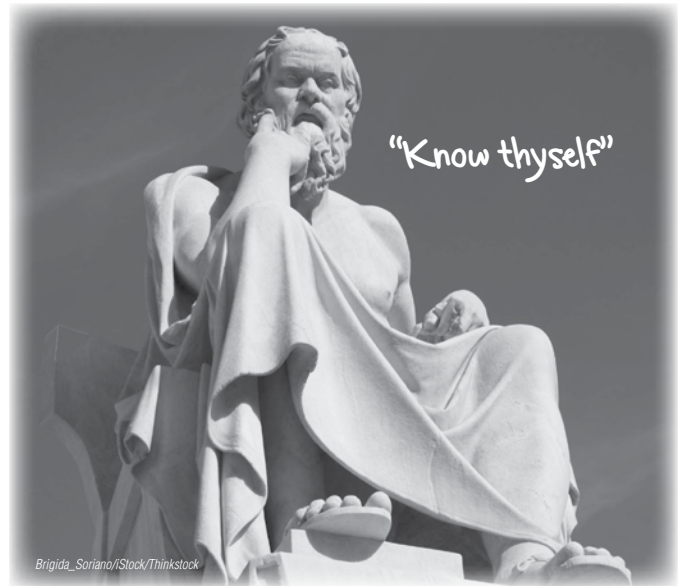
Once you understand what you do best, you can look for opportunities to apply those talents. You may have great interpersonal skills and be very persuasive. These strengths would translate well into a sales career. Or, you might be a very talented artist. This skill could take you many places—a career in graphic design, art education, or even fashion. Knowing your strengths can also help you maximize your performance in your current job. Let’s say you’ll be babysitting all summer. If you have athletic talent, you can take the kids swimming or to the park to learn how to play soccer. This will likely bring you more success and satisfaction than staying indoors playing video games.

If one of your strengths is being outgoing, what sort of career should you have? What about if you’re caring, determined, or a great leader? “What Are Your Strengths” from the University of Kent lists some possible career options for a variety of strengths. The link also includes a strengths test: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/Choosing/strengths.htm>.

*Increased opportunities for **professional development***

and career success. When you know your strengths and weaknesses, you have a greater chance for career success. You give yourself the opportunity to maximize your strengths and improve your weaknesses. Perhaps you’ll pursue a career in architecture, but there will be a certain software program you struggle with. When you recognize this weakness, you can take steps to fix it—spending extra time on it after work or taking a class or seminar, for instance. You can also utilize your strengths, possibly by mentoring coworkers in certain subjects or taking the lead on an account you’ve had experience with.

Better interviewing skills. Asking a potential employee about his/her greatest strengths and weaknesses is a classic interview tactic, one that you will undoubtedly face many times over the course of your career. As with all interview questions, it’s best to have an answer reviewed and ready to go. When you have taken the time to evaluate yourself and identify your strengths and weaknesses, you will be better prepared to handle these questions. As a result, you will be a more impressive interviewee with a better shot at landing that job.



▲ When you understand your weaknesses, you can take steps to improve them by taking classes or seminars.



It can be tough to talk to an interviewer about your weaknesses! This article by Alison Green, “How to Talk About Your Weaknesses in a Job Interview,” explains how you can use your knowledge of your personal weaknesses to craft a great answer for this tricky question: <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2013/09/23/how-to-talk-about-your-weaknesses-in-a-job-interview>.

Better decision-making skills. Whether or not you realize it, you make choices based on your personal strengths and weaknesses. Let's say one of your weaknesses is time management. Time management involves many small decisions each day. If you are not a good manager of time, then many of those small decisions you make are probably the wrong ones—going to bed too late or spending too much time on a minor project, for example. When you recognize this weakness, you can look at your individual decisions in a new light and begin making improvements.

Better teamwork skills. Groups need people with certain strengths to function effectively. No one person can possess all these strengths. Therefore, a mix of different group members with different strengths is important. When group members know their strengths and weaknesses, they have a clear understanding of what they bring to the table to help the group succeed.

These are just a few of the benefits that identifying strengths and weaknesses can bring to your career. Can you think of even more?

Summary

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. In our careers, it's important to capitalize on our strengths and to minimize and improve our weaknesses. Benefits of identifying personal strengths and weaknesses include the ability to apply your talents where they are best used, increased opportunities for professional development and career success, better interviewing skills, better decision-making skills, and better teamwork skills.

TOTAL RECALL

1. How does self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses help you to apply your talents appropriately?
2. How does self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses provide increased opportunities for professional development and career success?
3. How does self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses help to build better interviewing skills?
4. How does self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses help to build better decision-making skills?
5. How does self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses help to build better teamwork skills?

THE GRAY ZONE

It's often helpful to get input from others when assessing personal strengths and weaknesses. At one time or another, *you* may be the person someone comes to for input on his/her self-assessment. Let's say a friend from the office asks for your feedback on his strengths and weaknesses on the job. You've thought of a few weaknesses as well as strengths, but you're unsure about sharing your thoughts. You value your friendship with him and don't want to cause problems or hurt his feelings. On the other hand, knowing his weaknesses can help him improve and become a better employee. What should you do?

Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses

You understand the benefits of identifying your personal strengths and weaknesses and how doing so can help you build a more successful career. But, how do you go about it? Identifying your strengths and weaknesses is not easy—in fact, it can be downright scary. Self-examination may reveal characteristics we don't really like about ourselves. Plus, some people have low **self-esteem**, so they are much more aware of their weaknesses than their strengths. It takes courage to evaluate yourself, acknowledge your strengths, and examine your flaws.

Take some tips

Your self-assessment will be more productive and balanced if you follow these tips:

Be realistic. It's great to dream big, but you must also be honest with yourself about your limitations. If you have a below-average aptitude for and interest in math, you may not become a NASA engineer. You will need to pursue a career that's better suited for your strengths.

Don't compare yourself to others. You might wish that you had your best friend's math skills or your coworker's public speaking ability, but remember—assessing your own strengths and weaknesses is not a competition. It involves only you, so there is no need to compare. Everyone has abilities. You may not be a math whiz like your best friend, but maybe your strength is in learning foreign languages. And while you might not be a great public speaker like your coworker, maybe you're good at organizing team projects. All of these strengths have their own advantages!

Be specific. Don't just say, "I am a good leader," or "I am not a good leader." Think about what makes these statements true. Are you a good leader because you know how to communicate clearly, and you don't shy away from responsibility? Are you a poor leader because you lack self-confidence? Break down general statements to get to the heart of your strengths and weaknesses.

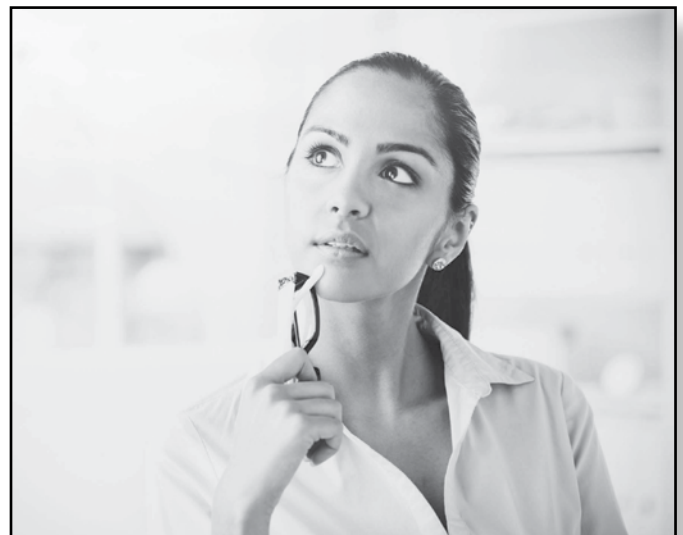
Be honest. Of course, it's difficult sometimes to admit a weakness. No one likes to look at him/herself and see flaws. Keep in mind that *no one* is perfect, and everyone has areas that need improvement. If you're not honest about your weaknesses, you won't have the opportunity to improve them. On the flip side, it's sometimes difficult to be honest about strengths as well. We don't want to seem as if we're bragging or stuck up. Be assured that recognizing our talents, abilities, and the things we do well is a healthy and acceptable thing to do!

Don't be too hard on yourself. Recognizing our weaknesses is important, but it's equally important that we don't obsess over them. Remember, beating yourself up over your weaknesses won't help you improve! Try to identify one strength for every weakness you find in yourself.



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▲ There are so many possible careers. Self-assessment can help you pursue the one that's right for you!



benardtswein/Stock/Thinkstock

▲ It can be hard to examine your flaws, but it's necessary to reflect on your weaknesses as well as your strengths.

Don't make *false generalizations*. Never base your idea of a personal strength or weakness on one isolated incident. Missing one deadline does not make you a poor time manager. Acing one test does not make you a genius, either! Look for patterns in your behaviors, things that occur regularly over time, before you decide what's a strength and what's a weakness.

Assess yourself on a regular basis. Have you kept a portfolio of important documents and projects from throughout your educational and professional career? Once in a while, you may look over these items. Some things are still valuable to you, while others are not. If you compare a paper you wrote five years ago to one you wrote yesterday, it is obvious that your abilities have improved. Assessing your strengths and weaknesses is similar to this process. You should start your assessment early in your career, but you need to review your strong and weak points regularly. Keep the strengths that are valuable, improve your weaknesses, and notice how your assessments change as you mature. Tracking your changes and progress increases your self-awareness and prepares you for lifelong success.

Ready, set, go

Now, you're ready to begin the important task of identifying your strengths and weaknesses. Keeping the tips you've already learned in mind, follow these steps for success:

Step One—Ask yourself important questions such as:

- What do I do well?
- What can I improve?
- What have I learned from my mistakes?
- What are my career goals?
- What might others see as my strengths and weaknesses?
- What skills and talents do I *most* enjoy using?
- What skills and talents do I *least* enjoy using?

Answer these questions honestly and thoughtfully, and record your responses. Doing so puts your thought process into motion and helps bring your strengths and weaknesses into clearer focus. Remember that these are just a few examples of questions you might ask yourself to help determine strengths and weaknesses. Can you think of some more?



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▲ What do you do well? What can you improve? The first step of self-assessment involves answering important questions like these.

Step Two—Review your education and experience. Think about your life so far and what you have accomplished, both educationally and professionally. Consider choices you have made, things you enjoy doing or don't enjoy doing, situations you handled well or wish you could redo. Look for patterns. What skills or talents do you use on a regular basis? What situations do you try to avoid at all costs? Although some situations may seem unrelated, do you notice any similar reactions or behaviors? For example, you may serve on the ethics committee for your company, and you may also contribute frequently at weekly team meetings within your work group. While these two situations appear to be different, they both show that you work well with others in a team setting.

Step Three—Get input from others. While self-assessment implies working alone, it often helps to get another opinion. Before you ask for help, think of people you trust and respect. Choose people from different aspects of your life—supervisors, coworkers, even family and friends. The people you choose should be honest, yet tactful—not those who will hurt your feelings. Remember, the purpose of this exercise is to make you more aware of your positive and negative qualities, so prepare to hear both. Plan a time to meet, and make sure you will not be rushed or interrupted. Really listen to what the person has to say about you. Ask for examples to support the qualities identified, particularly those you had not previously considered.



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▲ Getting feedback from important people in your life—like teachers, supervisors, or coworkers—is an important part of self-assessment.

When it comes to receiving **feedback** about your weaknesses, it may be a little tough to handle. Keep in mind that growth and development aren't always easy but are necessary for success. Then, use the feedback to your advantage as you continue to assess your strengths and weaknesses.

Getting input from others is beneficial, but that doesn't mean it's always fun! "How to Deal With Negative Feedback" by Lisa B. Marshall explains how to learn and grow from criticism: <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/business-career/public-speaking/how-to-deal-with-negative-feedback>.

Step Four—Observe others whom you admire. Self-assessment often comes indirectly from observing others. Who is a **role model** for you? Have you met a manager or a coworker who inspired you? What about a famous person whose career you'd like to emulate? Anyone from your personal life? Analyze why you look up to or like being around this person. What qualities do you most admire? Be as specific as you can in your observation so you can create a list of admirable strengths. Evaluating your role model can help you identify strengths you wish to possess.

*Step Five—Complete **personal skills inventories**.* Having trouble coming up with ideas on your own? There are great assessment tools designed to help you figure out your strengths and weaknesses. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and The Clifton Strengths-Finder Profile are two examples of commonly used surveys. If you were to take one of these surveys, you would answer multiple-choice questions related to your behavior, interests, and feelings. The survey would then be scored, and you would be given the results. The survey results often reveal new information about you that could be useful in the assessment process. The Internet is an excellent resource for finding these and other assessment tools, many of which you can take advantage of at no cost. The human resources department at your work place or the guidance counselor at your school may also have access to similar assessment tools.

Determining your strengths and weaknesses is not a onetime activity. It is an ongoing process that occurs over a period of time, so it may be helpful to keep a written record of your thoughts. Writing down the information gives you a starting point each time you begin the assessment process. Additionally, written records allow you to organize and add to your "work in progress."



If you want to assess your personality ASAP, try out this test based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>. Do you agree with your results?

Where to start?

Once you have assessed your strengths and weaknesses, you may want to focus on a weakness that you wish to improve. Here are some ideas to help you:

- *Alphabetize.*
Put your list of weaknesses in alphabetical order, start with the first thing on your list, and work your way down. An alphabetical list allows you to focus on one issue at a time, make improvement, and move on. Crossing items off your list will give you a real sense of accomplishment as you turn weaknesses into strengths!
- *Note repeat problems.*
Review your list of weaknesses. Are there any that have caused you problems on several occasions? If this is the case, you may want to concentrate on these immediately for a more rapid, noticeable payoff.
- *React*
An unexpected situation may arise that tests one of your weaknesses. View this as an excellent opportunity to make improvements. Take advantage of any situation that allows you to turn a weakness into a strength.

Gear up to take action

After following the five steps above, you should have identified several personal strengths and weaknesses. Now you know which qualities you should emphasize and which ones you should minimize or work to improve. There are many different ways to go about doing so, but the important thing now is that you're in the know! Use this knowledge to help you along the path to professional development and career growth.

Summary

Self-assessment will be more productive if you are realistic, are specific, are honest, avoid comparing yourself to others, avoid being too hard on yourself, avoid making false generalizations, and assess yourself on a regular basis. The five steps you can use to identify your personal strengths and weaknesses are: asking yourself important questions, reviewing your education and experience, getting input from others, observing others whom you admire, and completing personal skills inventories.



▲ Your self-assessment can point you in the right direction!

TOTAL RECALL

1. List some tips for successful self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses.
2. Describe the five steps of the process of assessing personal strengths and weaknesses.