

# How to Focus on Strengths in Careers

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Focusing on your strengths, rather than your weaknesses or limitations, can keep you optimistic and lead to career-building opportunities. Your strengths can illuminate a fulfilling new career path or guide you on your current path. Finely tuned strengths are valuable assets when applied with precision on the job and toward your goals.

## Set Your Goals

Imagine and write down what you want to accomplish in your career within five years. Connect the steps it would take to achieve your goals with personal strengths and skills you'd need in order to make progress. For example, achieving a customer service management position in your organization could require solid communication and problem solving strengths. Similarly, landing a new job in a competitive and emerging field could require strengths and skills in quick learning and adaptability to high-pressure work environments.

## Assess Your Strengths

Use your last performance assessment or evaluation to determine your strengths in your current position. Alternatively, performing a personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis, also known as a SWOT analysis, can help you assess yourself in relation to your career goals, suggests Lisa Quast in an April 2013 *Forbes* article. Including weaknesses, opportunities and threats in a self-analysis helps you see your strengths in a larger context and apply them more strategically. For example, recognizing that you're weaker at certain sales methods, a sales management position is opening up and another salesperson is gunning for the position could help you narrow your focus to activating specific strengths needed to compete and achieve that position. Additionally, doing a personal analysis before a job interview can prepare you for tough questions, according to Quast.

## Seek Opportunities

When you determine your strengths, look for ways to use those that you aren't yet using in your career. When you know that you can do something well, and those skills are underutilized, you might feel demoralized. Seeking opportunities within your organization to apply more of your education, training, skills and interpersonal strengths can keep you motivated and elevate your value to your employer. Ask for additional projects or responsibilities and pursue new positions in the organization as they open up. These opportunities can expand and develop your strengths and value to ever-greater degrees.

## Stay Balanced

Be judicious when exercising your strengths in the workplace. Applying too much or too little of any strength can hurt your effectiveness and reputation on the job. As a manager or executive, overdoing a strength negatively impacts employee engagement and teamwork as much as not doing enough, writes Robert B. Kaiser and Robert E. Kaplan in their April 2013 *Harvard Business Review* blog article titled "Don't Let Your Strengths Become Your Weaknesses." For example, too much drive for achievement can turn into an overbearing leadership style or put too many resources being put at risk. Dialing down an overused strength may take practice. Pay attention to situations and then decide how to best use your strengths and skills.

