

HOW TO CONDUCT A PERSONAL S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

Excerpt from Chapter 7 of "Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide to Getting the Job You Want—Every Time" by Lisa Quast.

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A valuable process companies use to assess themselves and their competitors to formulate their strategies is called a "S.W.O.T." analysis. A tried-and-true business technique, I have used the S.W.O.T. analysis for more than two decades for strategic planning. This exercise is also helpful for job seekers and career ladder climbers.

Here is how the process works: After defining your career aspirations and evaluating your skill set against the job's requirements, the next step is to learn more about yourself and your external environment. S.W.O.T. stands for:

S = Strengths (internal)

W = Weaknesses (internal)

O = Opportunities (external)

T = Threats (external)

This analysis process is used to capture information about your internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. To get in the right mindset of completing a S.W.O.T. analysis, start thinking about your career like a business and yourself like a product.

Strengths. To help you understand your strengths, picture yourself as a competitive product. A personal strength is an asset to you as a product and can be used to differentiate yourself from others when interviewing or seeking your next promotion. A few examples of strengths: project management skills, ability to improve or reengineer processes, computer programming skills, experience presenting to large audiences, proven success achieving annual sales quotas.

Weaknesses. A personal weakness is a liability or an area for growth. These are characteristics you could improve to increase future job opportunities. A few examples of weaknesses: disorganized, tendency to procrastinate, poor at time management, uncomfortable speaking in front of groups, have never led a project or team, outdated computer skills.

Opportunities and Threats. When thinking about opportunities and threats, I always find it easier to begin with the "threats." Try comparing yourself to people you'll likely compete against for the job you want. Then, as objectively as possible, judge your threats (the competitive threats) and determine possible ways to overcome them (opportunities/initiatives). Here are some examples to help you understand the process.

Example 1:

Threat: The job description states that the position requires someone with a four-year college degree. Other candidates have college degrees, but I only have a two-year college degree.

Opportunity: I could go to night school and finish my four-year college degree. Or, during job interviews, I could discuss how my four years of work experience is equivalent to the college degree requirement.

Example 2:

Threat: The higher-level job I want requires training large groups of employees, but I'm not good at public speaking.

Opportunity: I could take a speech class in the evenings or join a program, such as Toastmasters. I also could seek out opportunities to improve my presentation skills, such as asking my manager if I could provide a training session during an upcoming department staff meeting.

The purpose of the personal S.W.O.T. analysis is to identify steps you can take to best meet the requirements of the job or promotion you want, or to find ways around them. Comparing your strengths and weaknesses to the job requirements will help you identify gaps and better prepare you for the job interview, as well as the position.

Throughout my career, I've used the S.W.O.T. analysis every time I've applied and interviewed for a job. Going through this exercise has ensured I'm prepared for the interview and gets me ready to answer tough questions from hiring managers, such as, "Describe your biggest weakness" (no one wants to get caught without an answer to this one!). Following this process also allows me to anticipate areas that could be potential issues during the interview, so I can determine ahead of time how to respond. In my own career, when I am in job interviews (as the candidate), I often explain to the hiring manager the process I've gone through to ensure I'm qualified for the position. I will even show him or her my S.W.O.T. analysis.



Hiring managers have always been impressed with the homework I've done and the thought I've put in to make sure the job is a good fit for my knowledge, experience, skills, education, and personality type.

As you go through this process yourself, here are helpful tips for completing the S.W.O.T. analysis exercise:

- Choose a location that is comfortable and quiet.
- Approach this exercise with a fresh mindset. Clear your mind and be relaxed and refreshed before you start. If you've had a bad day, this is not the time to work on this exercise.
- Write down your thoughts as quickly as possible.
- Avoid the tendency to be overly critical of yourself in the "Weaknesses" category.
- View yourself as a competitive product and have some fun creating your list.
- Remember, there are no wrong answers.

After you've gone through the S.W.O.T. exercise, seek out a few people who know you well and ask them to review it and provide feedback. Do they agree with your strengths and weaknesses? In other words, do the perceptions of others equal your opinion of yourself? In life, perception is often reality. It is as true with people as it is with consumer products. As you begin to think about your career as a business and yourself as a product, make sure you take time to understand how others perceive you. Then, you'll be in a much better position to know where and how to focus your time and efforts to make the right changes or enhancements to your product (you).

It's doubtful you'll enjoy every aspect and every minute of your job—people rarely do. Changing jobs isn't the only answer. The key is taking time to understand why you want to change jobs and whether or not changing jobs is in your best interest.

Key Takeaway: Because it encourages self-improvement, using a personal S.W.O.T. analysis to evaluate yourself and your competition will keep you at your best. Use the exercise to sharpen your strengths, improve your weaknesses, identify opportunities for development and neutralize or overcome your threats.

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Lisa Quast is a former Fortune 500 executive turned career coach and author. In her latest book, "Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide to Getting the Job You Want—Every Time," she shares a step-by-step guide on everything you need to do to find and get a job, from writing a cover letter to acing an interview and negotiating a starting salary. For more information, visit:

