



DAWN ANFUSO

Be thankful for the strengths you can build on

Here's one more thing to give thanks for today: what you do well. A landmark 30-year Gallup survey of more than 2 million workers found that employees who defined and refined their talents gained more opportunities than individuals who turned weaknesses into strengths.

"Employees believe they'll be immune to layoffs if they can demonstrate proficiency in a wide range of skills, but that's the wrong strategy," says business strategist Vaughan Evans. "You can differentiate yourself from co-workers by being near perfect in just one or two areas — areas that also happen to be critical to the success of your organization."

Evans, who is also author of "Backing U! A Business-Oriented Guide to Backing Your Passion and Achieving Career Success," calls this a "Stand Out Strategy." Here are his suggested steps:

Step 1: Identify your top strengths. These are the qualities and skills for which you've become known. They are the key capabilities for which you receive compliments from co-workers and praise from managers in your performance review. They are the areas in which you feel masterful.

Step 2: Rank your strengths. Now, put these key strengths in order of strongest to weakest by rating them on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is top of your game, and 5 is strong, but still developing.

Step 3: Rank the strengths crucial to your job. What are the five or six strengths that are most valued and play the largest role in the success of your business? You can draw from internal management docu-

ments or even ask co-workers or managers for their views. As an example, in a public relations job, communication and writing skills might trump IT expertise, even though both are important. Rank these required strengths in order of greatest importance to the company.

Step 4: Compare the two lists. Which top-ranked strengths on your personal list intersect with top-ranked strengths in the company's required list? Use your judgment to pull out the two most promising.

Step 5: Invest in these top two strengths. For now, forget your weaknesses. Instead, invest all of your energy in becoming a superstar in your top two strengths — ones that are also critical to the success of your business. Take classes, read books, go to conferences, do Web research, join associations, ask for testimonials, get a mentor — do whatever is necessary to become an unparalleled leader at your organization in these two skills.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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