

## GAME PLAN FOR GREATNESS

### Best way to advance in workplace is to accentuate positives

By Dawn Klingensmith  
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Concerned about surviving the next round of layoffs? Then you should not worry so much about improving your weaknesses.

It sounds counterintuitive, but working on your shortcomings will not save your job or help you get ahead. Instead, focus on what you do well and then do it better, said London-based business strategist Vaughan Evans.

"It's about making what you offer distinctive and different," he said. "If you focus on becoming near-perfect in just one or two of your strong areas, you will stand out from your co-workers." Just make certain those strengths are critical to the success of your organization.

Gallup research supports Evans's observation that employees who refine their talents gain more opportunities than those who try to turn weaknesses into strengths.

However, the research also uncovered widespread reluctance to devote attention to strengths. Instead, people choose to spend their time and energy examining their weaknesses, said Tom Rath, Gallup's global practice leader for workplace-related research.

To get past this tendency, employees should think of themselves as a business and the boss as an investor.

"Once you treat yourself as a business, you start to think more clearly about where demand for your services lies, who your competitors are, what your bosses require of you and what you need to do to become the ideal service provider," said Evans, who discusses this concept in his book, "Backing U! A Business-

Oriented Guide to Backing Your Passion and Achieving Career Success."

Analyze the "business"—you—from your boss's perspective as an "investor." What are the business's defining strengths? The areas worthy of "financial backing" are the ones you should focus on developing.

*Continued on page 4*

Follow a few simple steps to determine which areas to target. First, identify your primary strengths—the half-dozen or so qualities and skills that managers and co-workers praise. Then, rank them from strongest to weakest.

Next, identify and rank the five or six strengths that are most valued and play the largest role in your employer's success.

Now compare the two lists. The top two strengths on your personal list that intersect with the top-ranked requirements of the company are the ones you should invest in.

"Become a superstar in your top two strengths," Evans said. "Take classes, read books, get a mentor—whatever is necessary to become an unparalleled leader at your company in these two skills."

Aside from your talents, it also pays to constantly hone at least one other skill, said Paul Sorbera, president of the New York-based executive search firm Alliance Consulting. "Without a doubt, highly successful people often are great at a few things and weak in other areas. Developing and playing to one's strengths are key to distinguishing one's career," he said. "That being said, one skill that is universally valuable is communication. Written and verbal communication is very important to advancement."

Also, emphasizing your strengths does not mean you should pretend your weak spots are nonexistent.



“The research is very clear that people cannot bury their head in the sand when it comes to their weaknesses. You need to be aware of your weaknesses and figure out the best ways to manage around them,” Rath said.

However, “There are big differences between managing and fixing weakness,” he said. “If you spend the majority of your time trying to fix all of your weaknesses, there is very little chance you will ever be great at anything.” ♦



Focus on what you do well at work and then do it better, according to experts, who say that this is more important than improving weaknesses.

