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The Desired Outcome

This Month: Investing in Strengths

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YOUR BUSINESS

You think THAT's impressive?

Three thoughts to take away from this article:

1. If you take your strengths for granted you are shooting yourself in the foot
2. Focus on fixing your weaknesses is a waste of time.
3. Big success comes from knowing what you are really good at and DOING THAT!

It seems built-in to being human – to want what we don't have. We want to be good at things we are not good at. And we spend a lot of time thinking about how to fix ourselves.

One of the reasons we focus on our weaknesses is that we tend to take our natural strengths for granted.

Because they come so naturally, our strengths don't seem very impressive to us.

If something is easy to do, it just doesn't feel important and impressive. But when other people do things we are not good at – we are very impressed!

The funny thing is – they are looking at you the same way. Whatever they do easily is not impressive to them, but what you do well – Wow, that is really something!

Taking your strengths for granted is shooting yourself in the foot. Here's why:

1. You focus too much energy on "fixing yourself"
2. You don't fully take advantage of your strengths

You focus too much energy on "fixing yourself"

When you take your strengths for granted, you tend to focus your energy on fixing things vs building things.

Think about it. If you put one unit of energy into fixing a weakness, you will get a minor gain (because you are not very good at it to begin with!). If you put that same one unit of energy into building on a strength you will get a much bigger gain.

It's really as simple as that.

Find ways to further build on what you are already good at, and energy will gather, success will follow, and the crowds will cheer.

If you spend lots of energy on trying to fix a weakness, you will waste a lot of time, accomplish very little, and miss an opportunity to create something good.

If you watch people who succeed you will often find them working in fairly narrow band of activities -- the ones they are best at. Then they surround themselves with people to fill in their weak spots.

You don't fully take advantage of your strengths

If you take your strengths for granted they will remain under-used, and you will be forfeiting both business advantage and personal gain. i.e., shooting yourself in the foot!

Let me give you an example. There is a survey tool I use in my [Career and Leadership workshops](#) which is a book you can buy called. "Strengthsfinder 2.0" by Tom Rath. You can find it on Amazon. The book gives you a pointer to an online survey and you answer a bunch of questions and you will get a report of your top 5 strengths.

Three of mine were Maximizer, Arranger, and Individualization. I had never really heard these words before to describe strengths, but I found those new labels to be very enlightening and useful.

It made me think about the fact that I always built great teams.

By learning those labels, I realized that I had a gift for clarifying a winning strategy (maximizer), building the right organization structure to execute it (arranger), having the guts to make changes and get the right people in the right jobs (individualization), and delivering clear goals for the whole organization to get on board (arranger).

Before having those labels I took that all for granted, because it was not difficult for me. It came naturally to me, and I thought that was what all executives did, and every one did it as well as I did.

But once I had those labels two things happened.

1. I looked around and realized that not all executives were good at this! They were good at other things that I was not, but they were not good at this.
2. I decided to do those things more on purpose. It enabled me to move more decisively, and "re-arrange things" with confidence.

So I got a bigger business gain.

People within my organization would say things like "after all the re-orgs we have been through we are finally in the right organization!", or, "it's good to be in an organization that is run so well"...

I stopped wasting energy trying to get better at the things I was not very good at: like market analysis, tracking of execution details, being a technology visionary, and instead I focused on the things I was good at – building teams, communicating, and getting strategies executed.

The business won, and I won. I was more satisfied in my work, and I was more successful.

Focus on Strengths is the path to Great Leadership

Here is the secret to great leadership: Figure out who you really are, and what you are really good at and DO THAT.

Put yourself in a position to be doing what you are naturally good at as often as possible, and you'll be a great leader.

Look for where your energy multiplies and go there. Avoid what drains it.

Great leaders are great because they are effective, inspiring, and consistent.

What better way is there to be effective, inspiring, and consistent than by doing the things you are naturally good at most of the time?

Finding your Strengths

I recommend three exercises for focusing on your unique strengths.

1. The first one is to think about your job and make three lists.

- ✦ Parts of your job that you are really good at, enjoy, and you thrive while you are doing them.
- ✦ Parts of your job that you are very competent at, but do not particularly enjoy doing.
- ✦ Parts of your job that you do because you have to, but you don't enjoy and would prefer to not do them.

Focus on that first list. How can you amplify it? What additional things can you do that take advantage of the skills used in that first list?

Look at ways to outsource or delegate the things in the other two lists. Even if you are an individual contributor you can always find ways to focus more time on the things you are good at.

2. The second exercise is to use the StrengthsFinder 2.0 book by Tom Rath, mentioned above. Get it on Amazon and take the online survey.
3. Get input from others. One of the best ways to discover things you take for granted is to ask other people. Talk to friends, family, former colleagues. Ask them to describe your leadership style, what types of situations they think you thrive in, and what is unique about how you approach your work?

The more you can focus on your natural strengths, the less you will take them for granted and the more you can use them to the benefit of your business and your career.

One last thought:

Know the difference between a Weakness and a Behavior Problem

Sometimes people have specific behavior issues which are undermining their effectiveness. Those are worth addressing.

What I'm saying is to make sure you are differentiating between destructive behavioral issues "things that are pissing people off", and weaknesses "things you are simply not good at".

It is worthwhile and necessary to fix behavior problems, but beyond that, focus on building on your strengths instead of worrying about the things you wish you were better at, and you will create the biggest win for your business and your career.

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YOUR PEOPLE

Building your team on Strengths

There is nothing more important to your success than having a great team. I have discussed aspects of this in prior issues, such as [Is Your Team really working for You?](#) and [Not Delegating is NOT a Choice](#)

As a manager it is your job, not just to manage and deliver the work your team

is responsible for, but to build the strongest team possible.

Smart people can do a lot of different things. So we often have a tendency to “make due” with people in roles who can do the job, even if it’s not the ideal job for them.

But think about having a team where each person is in a role that plays to their natural strengths. A team where every person is thriving and doing great work that comes naturally to them. Think about how clear and motivated they would be.

Your job is to build THAT team.

Here is how you can do it:

1. Start with a blank sheet
2. Really get to know people
3. Create the right roles
4. Build the team on strengths

Start with a blank sheet

This is so critical, and often overlooked. When you inherit a team, there is a tendency to assess each person, and as long as they are not failing, leave them to do the job. This is not building a team on strengths.

You need to ask the following questions:

- ❖ What are the big desired outcomes for my team?
- ❖ What are the most important roles required to deliver those outcomes?
- ❖ What are the most important strengths that the people in each role need to have?

This is a blank sheet approach. If you start here you will have the opportunity to map the right people with the right strengths into the right roles.

If you never go through this step you end up with roles that exist for the wrong reasons, typically because there happens to be a person in them, and with people in jobs who are not necessarily contributing at their top performance.

Really get to know people

Mapping strengths takes some extra effort in getting to know people. You need to really understand what they do well and why.

You need to understand what kinds of work feeds their energy and drains it.

You need to dig in to learn what their strengths are, that they themselves may be taking for granted.

Only then will you be able to maximize their role in your team.

Create the right roles

Business has a huge amount of inertia for “business as usual”. One of the hardest things that businesses face is getting people to stop doing what they are doing and start doing what they need to be doing.

Creating the right (new or different) roles, will scare people, will upset incumbents, will send you into extra difficult negotiations, will shake up processes that have been working, and endless other good reasons not to act.

But moving forward with the wrong organization, even with good people in the wrong roles, will be a constant drain on your energy and your effectiveness.

Building your team on strengths

Once you map the right people based on strengths into the right roles based on business need, your team will thrive, you will be able to delegate everything you should be delegating, and your team will perform heroic acts that consistently surprise you.

Your team will be operating on their strengths, and you will be standing back in awe, because their strengths will be different than yours!

A note to individual contributors & consultants.

All of the above holds true for you too. The more you can step back, assess all the aspects of your role, and spend time where you thrive, the more clear it will be where you need to partner. You can choose what type of assignments you should go after to have the most impact, and get the most satisfaction.

You still work as part of a team and can have an impact on how the work gets assigned, if you take the time and energy to do this on purpose.

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YOUR VISIBILITY

WHY you do things well

If you don't have your strengths in focus, you are missing an opportunity to build your credibility and present yourself at your best.

You are probably practiced at talking about your skills and what you have done in your career. But this is only part of the picture.

Your natural strengths are what allow you to create a unique, and strongly positive, and highly credible impression.

If you take them for granted you might talk about the business results you achieved, but you will miss the opportunity to show HOW and WHY you consistently and repeatedly can be counted on to deliver those kinds of results.

Here are some examples about how focusing on your strengths can help you present yourself:

- ✦ I have core strengths around taking action and relating to people. The reason I deliver results so effectively is that I can move very quickly and not kill people in the process.
- ✦ I have strengths in being both analytical and empathetic. Because of that I get the data right, but I know how to present it so people care about it -- people are motivated to act.
- ✦ I have strengths in problem solving, and engaging people. So I am able to respond to crises in a way that is efficient and involves the right people at the right times, so the problem stays fixed.

Your personal "elevator pitch"

It is important to have an elevator pitch about yourself that is rehearsed and is compelling. And it must be short (1-2 minutes) and not boring!

The best way to make it compelling is to build it from your strengths.

If you only talk about your skills and your experience you will always appear junior to someone who is willing to talk about who they really are, what their values are, and what you can expect of them as a person.

It doesn't need to be personal content, but it does need to be personal.

Your strengths are the foundation to present yourself in the most authentic, impressive and inspiring manner.

Even if you are not interviewing for a job, you need to meet people in other organizations, or clients, partners, and employees. If you are willing to say, "This is something about me you should know", and have a crisp statement about who you are that includes your values and natural strengths, you will stand out and make a positive and lasting impression.

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YOUR LIFE

Sharing your strengths with others

I have many conversations with people who would like to find a way to "give something back", but many struggle to figure out what that should be.

Somehow most people seem to come to the conclusion that the thing you are supposed to do to give back is to work at a soup kitchen -- Not everyone is cut out for the soup kitchen.

Instead, why not think about this in terms of your strengths? What are you really good at? What do you enjoy doing? And who would benefit from it?

There are all kinds of organizations who need support with operations, communications, technology, marketing, web presence, data management, automation, you name it.

Think about some organizations that interest you and think about how your natural strengths could be of service. That way you will have a lot of energy to give and get a lot of satisfaction from doing that, and they will benefit greatly from having help from an expert!

And don't forget to be a mentor.

Mentoring is an easy and natural way to share your strengths with others. Remember what you are good at is genuinely impressive to other people even though it is not impressive to you! Share it with others.

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I hope you have found some useful ideas that will help you do something specific to build value in your career and business and enjoy your life.

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to get your own copy each month.**

About Patty

Patty Azzarello was the youngest general manager at HP ever at the age of 33. She ran a \$1B software business at the age of 35 and was a CEO for the first time at the age of 38. Patty is known for her personal leadership qualities, her straightforward and practical manner, and her genuine interest in making a real connection with people to help them to advance their career and business, and to find ways to enjoy their life more.

[More About Patty >>](#)

Today Patty Azzarello is the CEO of Azzarello Group, www.AzzarelloGroup.com a unique services organization focused on helping companies develop and motivate their top performers and grow their business.

Azzarello Group delivers practical, experience-based tools, through products and services including, executive coaching, public speaking, leadership workshops, online programs, and consulting with teams on business execution.

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