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We live in a weakness-focused world. Based on the erroneous belief that good is the opposite of bad, for thousands of years humanity has been fixated on faults and failures. True, we are each imperfect, but our weaknesses reveal little about our strengths--which we must cultivate from instinctive talents and champion in our everyday lives rather than letting these gifts languish while we spend most of our time trying to fix weaknesses.

This issue becomes all the more vital in light of the fact that the brain’s reticular activating system is primed to magnify negative incoming messages --including perceived faults--and to minimize the positive. Criticisms and weaknesses tend to be amplified in the higher brain centers; in other words, they are blown out of proportion. Therefore, they must be managed with care. We are far better served by focusing most of our energy and attention on positive activities and pursuits that bring us vigor and satisfaction.

As you sharpen your self-observation powers about current strengths and talents, you increase your chances for greater success by:

1) *Finding new ways to apply your defining strengths.* Notice how much--or how little--time you spend developing or applying your strengths. How can you improve the fit between what you do from day to day and what you shine at doing?

Many of us get so caught up being busy that, looking back, we realize we’ve spent much of our time gridlocked or just plodding along instead of using our strengths to maximize our effectiveness. People who work to their strengths get things done better and faster.

2) *Knowing the difference between weaknesses and nontalents.* As one research project summed it up, “Each of us is a couple of talent cards short of a full deck.” That makes sense. Let’s consider the difference between a weakness and a nontalent. A nontalent is a behavior that is perpetually a struggle. You might have a nontalent for remembering names or thinking artistically. Should you spend time trying to fix this? You could learn a way to memorize names. You could take art classes. But chances are not much will change. It’s normally best to ignore your nontalents unless it becomes a weakness for you if you find yourself in a role where success depends on it.

If you are working on a neighborhood council or in a service business, your nontalent for recalling names becomes a weakness because other people want you to recognize and value them by name. If you are trying to plan ahead, then a nontalent for strategic thinking becomes a weakness because you can’t seem to guess what lies just around the bend. If you’re working on a marketing campaign, a nontalent in creativity becomes a weakness when you can’t come up with new graphic design ideas for an advertisement.

3) *Managing weaknesses out of your way.* The first question to ask yourself about something you don’t do well is: Does this require additional knowledge or know-how? Every one of us has experienced the benefit of developing insights or skills that help us handle certain situations. Let’s say you can’t keep up with your schedule because you’re being driven crazy by a difficult software program that you just can’t get the hang of. So you take a class or get some coaching on making this software run smoothly, and almost instantly the

weakness vanishes.

There are three primary ways you can deal with a weakness:

1) *Create a support system.* In many situations, the most expeditious way to manage a weakness is with a support system that works around the shortcoming so it doesn’t get in the way. If you struggle with remembering names, buy a name-filing system and refer to it often. If you are a terrible speller, use a spell checker every time you send a letter.

2) *Find a partner whose strengths complement your weaknesses.* If you tend to be visionary but impractical, then, when you sign on for a project, make sure to enlist the help of someone who is exceptionally practical. Few people who excel in life are well-rounded in a literal sense. It’s the working partnerships that are well-rounded. These individuals do not turn their weaknesses into strengths. They accept that they are not perfect and realize that this would take far too much time, energy, and effort, and it would distract them from making their best contribution. The key is to match one person’s valleys with another individual’s peaks.

3) *Find another role.* If you find yourself spending most of your time trying to manage around weaknesses, then stop doing it. If additional training, a support system, or a complementary partnership isn’t working out for you, then search for an alternative role. Everyone is great at something. The key is to keep searching until you find the right fit for what you do best--something you are naturally talented or highly skilled at doing.

If you truly desire to be successful and effective in life, emphasize your strengths and manage your weaknesses.

~ The End ~