

Article for Tonic Magazine 5 Ways To Work Out Of Your Strengths

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You've heard it before. *"You can be anything you want to be, if you just try hard enough"*. The intent is good, but the message isn't. It is a myth. It just isn't true. It's not possible.

We can spend loads of hard-earned dosh attending seminars and training events to become better in areas where we think we should be stronger, but end up more and more frustrated and poorer for the effort.

One important thing I am NOT referring to here are character weaknesses. Of course we are to and can, with lots of help and the right mindset overcome them.

A brilliant story, or fable, originally written by George Reavis in 1940 illustrates the issue.

"Once upon a time, the animals decided that they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world, so they organised a school. They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer, all of the animals took all of the subjects.

"The duck was excellent at swimming. In fact, he was better than his instructor. However, he made only passing marks in flying and was very poor at running. Since he was so slow in running, he had to drop his swimming class and do extra running. This caused his webbed feet to become badly worn, meaning that he dropped to an average mark in swimming.

"Fortunately, 'average' was acceptable, therefore nobody worried about it – except the duck.

"The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because he had so much makeup work to do in swimming.

"The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher insisted that he start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed cramps from overexertion, so he ended up with a C in climbing and a D in running.

"The eagle was a real problem student and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing class, he beat all of the others to the top, but insisted on using his own way of getting there!"

There's a better way; it is to live life out of our strengths. When we know our talents and abilities, and do what we do out of that vast pool of resources, everything works better.

Here's '5 Ways To Work Out Of Your Strengths', and live life better.

1. Know what your strengths are.

When we say 'strengths' we're meaning a talent, ability, skill, something we can do we love doing, we can do easily, something maybe we can do better than others. It is the unique way we're wired up.

And we are all wired differently.

A weakness on the other hand is not a failure, or an ability that needs attention or an innate flaw to who we are. It is just an area that we are not as strong to function in as others.

It surprises me again and again that people even into later life still don't know what their strengths and weaknesses are. It took me years to discover or more importantly identity then accept the way I was wired up.

The first step to working and doing life out of our strengths is to know what they are, and there are numerous things we can do to discover them.

Phil Pringle says this; "*Whatever you are good at, is probably your gift*". If we are good at something, if we love doing that thing, if we think about it a lot, if we read about, learn about it, devour information about it easily, if people comment that we're good at this or that, then, it's pretty clear those are our strengths.

Any investment into a course, life-coach, seminar or even sitting round the table with trusted friends and colleagues and asking them to be honest in sharing with you what they see as your strengths and weaknesses, is a wise investment.

2. Accept the person you are.

Part of the issue we're up against here is the pressure to be what we think we should be, the person our parents or teachers thought we could be, or the dream we've carried for years.

Each of us are a unique person. We're wired up in a certain way. We have strengths, and weaknesses, that make us who we are. We should not be ashamed of the strengths we have, but at the same time we should never feel guilty about the weaknesses we have.

Own them, the strong points and the weak points of our talent pool. The mix and makeup of our talents – strong and weak – make us who we are today.

3. Resist the temptation to ‘train our weaknesses’ into strengths.

When we know our strengths and weaknesses it is tempting to try to strengthen our weaknesses. We think we should attend a seminar or get some coaching to ‘make us better’ in that area.

And while that may help, it can only lead to more and more frustration because we were never designed to be strong in that area.

There also seems to be a culture in our world that expects us to be an all-rounder who is good at most things, and can perform above average across many areas.

Tom Rath in his excellent little book *Strength Finder*, says this: *“At its fundamentally flawed core, the aim of almost any learning program is to help us become who we are not. If you don’t have natural talent with numbers, you’re still forced to spend time in that area to attain a degree. If you’re not very empathic, you get sent to a course designed to infuse empathy into your personality. From the cradle to the cubicle, we devote more time to our shortcomings than to our strengths.”*

Lets not do that.

Resist the temptation to train our weaknesses into strengths.

4. Encourage, invest in and follow the desire to ‘train our strengths’ to become better.

When I discovered that my strengths lay in administration, writing, reading, thinking, introversion, it released me from loads of self and culture imposed baggage. I then knew why it was I loved to read, write, teach, think, philosophise, and be on my own.

I discovered that over the years I have ‘come alive’ at the possibility of any training, instruction and growth in these areas.

But the thought of leaning and studying and doing things outside those areas makes me bored, frustrated, and I can’t wait to be out of there!

I have discovered over the years that any investment in time and money into training and enhancing areas of my strengths and talents, pays huge dividends. I’m engaged, interested, passionate, and will stay up late easily at the thought of learning and growing in my strong areas.

So don't be afraid to spend the time and money in growing in your strengths. Your family, your work, your organisation and you personally will be the better for it.

5. Outsource or delegate tasks in our weak areas.

I know all too well, when you're leading an organisation with stretched resources, many times there is no one to do all the work that needs to be done, so, we just get in and do it. Whether we are good at it or not. It needs to be done so we do it.

That philosophy and work style works, for the short term. I know. But in the long term, it just does not. I know. It leads to burnout. I know! It happened to me.

There is a better way however.

I thoroughly believe that in the short (actually really very short) term, we can do things outside of our strengths. When we do, it is a demonstration of our true character.

But we must never use the knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses as an excuse for not doing stuff short term, if the short term need arises.

For long term sustainability of our careers and relationships and everything really, we must learn the art of delegation and outsourcing. If we're in a place where we have people resources, the best thing we can do when called upon to complete a task in the area of our weaknesses, is to get someone else to do it while managing the process, especially if the task is in their area of strength.

There are some jobs around the house I know I can do, but others I know it is best to call in an expert, pay them the money, and let them loose! The money paying them is money well spent. I am happy, the tradie is happy, the family are happy because the job was well done.

Successfully working and living out of our strengths means we will be comfortable to outsource and delegate tasks we know are not our strong points.

Five simple things to live life out of our strengths. Five ways to make life enjoyable, successful, and fruitful. The right people, doing the right things, at the right times, with the right resources (strengths), for the right reasons, simply means..., the right stuff happens!

The implications for our family, our career, business, our organisations and personally are absolutely immense!

So; *“You CANNOT be anything you want to be – but you CAN be a lot more of who you already are”*

Bio:

Stephen Whitwell is an Account Manager for Rhema Media, and has been a minister for 32 years. He writes a monthly e-letter, Brief Word, which circulates worldwide. He has a passion for helping people discover who they are, and for writing and speaking. Stephen is married to Wendy and loves living in the Bay of Plenty and enjoys good coffee, fine food, his growing family (two great children and eight amazing grandchildren!), travel to anywhere at any time for no reason, connecting with people, studying writing speaking and teaching about life issues. He can be contacted at www.goodwords.nz.