

# Capitalizing on your strengths

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ighly successful people are extremely self-reliant. They accept complete responsibility for themselves and everything that happens to them. They look to themselves as the source of their successes and as the main cause of their problems and difficulties. When things aren't moving along as fast as they want, they ask themselves, "What is it in me that is causing this problem?" They refuse to make excuses or to blame people. Instead, they look for ways to overcome obstacles and to make progress.



otally self-responsible people look upon themselves as self-employed. They see themselves as the president of their own personal services corporation. They realize that no matter who signs their paycheck, in the final analysis, they work for themselves. Because they have this attitude of self-employment, they take a strategic approach to their work.

The essential element in strategic planning for a corporation or a business entity is the concept of "return on equity." All business planning is aimed at organizing and reorganizing the business resources in such a way as to increase the financial returns to the business owners. It is to increase the quantity of output relative to the quantity of input. It is to focus on areas of high profitability and return and, simultaneously, to withdraw resources from areas of low profitability and return. Companies that do this effectively in a rapidly changing environment are the ones that survive and prosper. Companies that fail to do this form of strategic analysis are those that fall behind and often disappear.

### increase your return on energy

To achieve everything you are capable of achieving as a person, you also must become a skilled strategic planner with regard to your life and work. But instead of aiming to increase your return on equity, your goal is to increase your return on energy.

Most people in America start off with little more than their ability to work. More than 80 percent of the millionaires in America started with nothing. Most people have been broke, or nearly broke, several times during their young-adult years. But the ones who eventually get ahead are those who do certain things in certain ways, and those actions set them apart from the masses. Perhaps the most important thing they do, consciously or unconsciously, is to look at themselves strategically, thinking about how they can better use themselves in the marketplace, how they can best capitalize on their strengths and abilities to increase their returns to themselves and their families.

Your most valuable financial asset is your ability to earn money. Properly applied to the marketplace, it's like a pump. By exploiting your earning ability, you can pump tens of thousands of dollars a year into your pocket. All your knowledge, education, skills and experience contribute toward your earning ability—your ability to get results for which someone will pay good money.

### what is your marketing skill?

One of the greatest responsibilities in life is to identify, develop and maintain an important marketable skill. It is to become very good at doing something for which there is a strong market demand. In corporate strategy, we call this the development of a "competitive advantage." For a company, a competitive advantage is defined as an area of excellence in producing a product or service that gives the company a distinct edge over its competition.

In capitalizing on your strengths, as the president of your own personal services corporation, you also must have a clear competitive advantage. You must do something that makes you different from and better than your competitors. Your ability to identify and develop this competitive advantage is the most important thing you do in the world of work. It's the key to maintaining your earning ability and the foundation of your financial success. Without it, you're simply a pawn in a rapidly changing environment. But with a distinct competitive advantage, based on your strengths and abilities, you can write your own ticket. You can take charge of your own life. You can always get a job. And the more distinct your competitive advantage, the more money you can earn and the more places in which you can earn it.

There are four keys to the strategic marketing of yourself and your services. These are applicable to huge companies such as General Motors, to candidates running for election and to individuals who want to accomplish the very most in the very shortest time.

### one: specialization

No one can be all things to all people. A "jack-of-all-trades" also is a "master of none." Specialization is the key. Men and women who are successful have a series of general skills, but they also have one or two areas where they have developed the ability to perform in an outstanding manner.

As you determine your area of specialization, put your current job aside for the moment and take the time to look deeply into yourself. Analyze yourself from every point of view. Rise above yourself and look at your lifetime of activities and accomplishments in determining what your area of specialization could be or should be.

You might find that you are already capitalizing on your strengths and your current work might be ideally suited to your likes and dislikes, to your temperament and your personality. Nevertheless, you owe it to yourself to be continually expanding the scope of your vision and looking toward the future to see where you might want to be going in the months and years ahead. Remember, the best way to predict the future is to create it. Therefore, your main job is to decide which of your talents you're going to exploit and develop to their highest and best possible use right now.

So what is your area of excellence? What are you especially good at right now? If things continue as they are, what are you likely to be good at in one or two or even five years from now? Is this a marketable skill with a growing demand or is your field changing in such a way that you are going to have to change as well if you want to keep up with it? Looking into the future, what could be your area of excellence if you were to go to work on yourself and your abilities? What should be your area of excellence if you want to rise to the top of your field, make an

their work makes them happy, and the happier they are, the more enthusiastically they do it, and the better they do it as well.

### two: differentiation

You must decide what you're going to do to be not only different, but also better than your competitors in the field. Remember, you have to be good in only one specific area to move ahead of the pack. And you must decide what that area should be.

### three segmentation

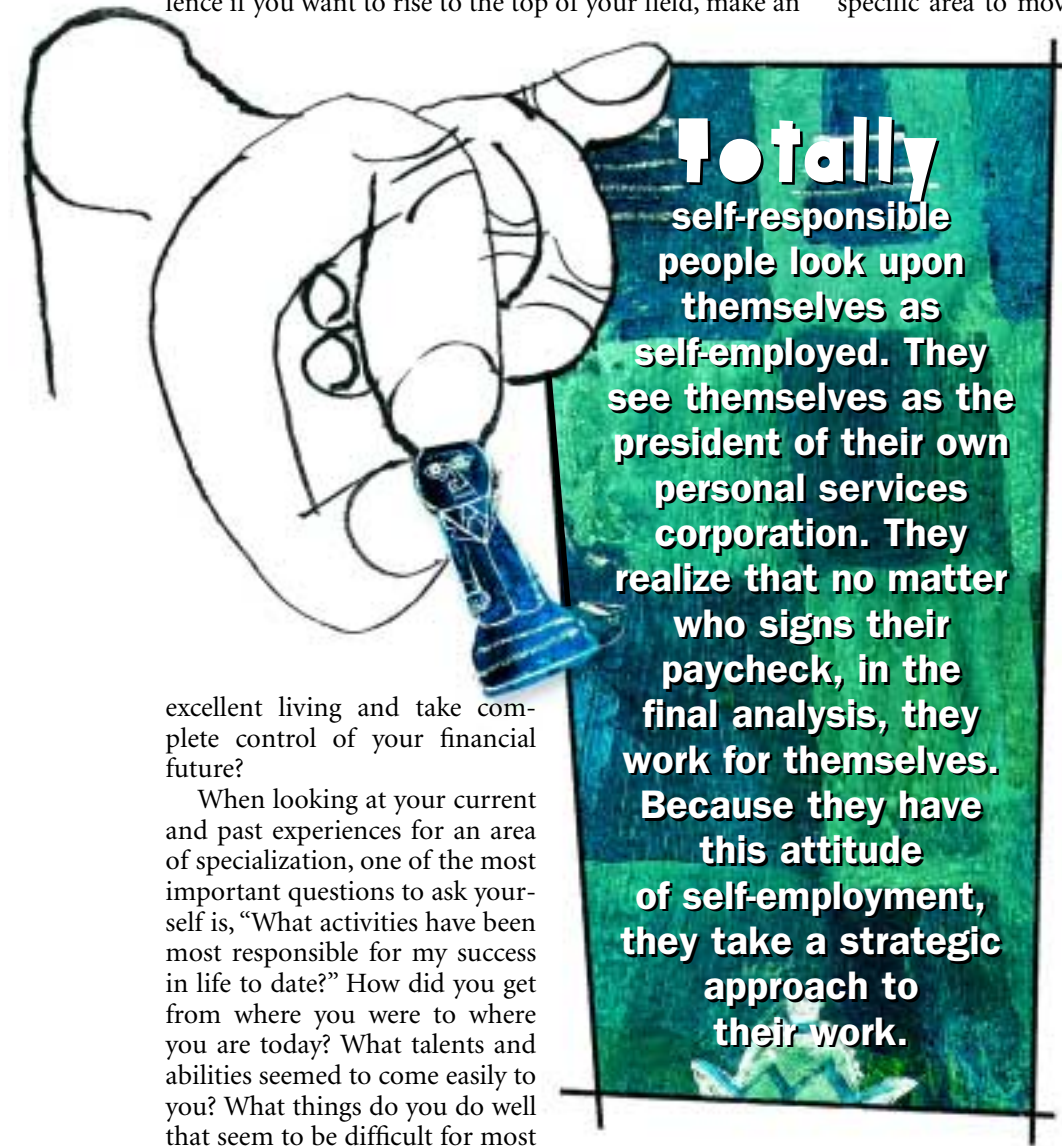
You have to look at the marketplace and determine where you can best apply yourself with your unique talents and abilities, to give yourself the highest possible return on energy expended. What customers, companies or markets can best utilize your special talents and offer you the most in terms of financial rewards and future opportunities?

### four: concentration

Once you have decided the area in which you are going to specialize, how you are going to differentiate yourself and where in the marketplace you can best apply your strengths, your final job is to concentrate all of your energy on becoming excellent there. The marketplace pays extraordinary rewards only for extraordinary performance.

In the final analysis, everything that you have done up to now is simply the groundwork for becoming outstanding in your chosen field. When you become very good at doing what people need, you

begin moving rapidly into the top ranks of working people everywhere. ■



excellent living and take complete control of your financial future?

When looking at your current and past experiences for an area of specialization, one of the most important questions to ask yourself is, "What activities have been most responsible for my success in life to date?" How did you get from where you were to where you are today? What talents and abilities seemed to come easily to you? What things do you do well that seem to be difficult for most other people? What things do you most enjoy doing? What things do you find most intrinsically motivating? What things make you happy when you are doing them?

As you capitalize on your strengths, your level of interest, excitement and enthusiasm about the particular job or activity is a key factor. You'll always do best and make the most money in a field that you really enjoy. It will be an area that you like to think about and talk about and read about and learn about. Successful people love what they do and can hardly wait to get to it each day. Doing

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