



Live Your Strengths

Welcome to the February 2010 edition of *Live Your Strengths*, the monthly e-newsletter from In Search of Excellence.

In this Edition:

- Choose Your Focus When Creating Systems
- *Live Your Strengths* Monthly Challenge: The 4 Key Questions

Choose Your Focus When Creating Systems

In an earlier newsletter, I wrote about the importance of creating systems to help you find more time to focus on the value-added activities in your work and personal life. I have received many responses to that article from people who have seen the wisdom of this idea, but have found it hard to identify where they should start.

So this month, let's re-visit the idea of systems. This time however, let's start by identifying WHY you want to create systems. This focus will help you zero in on which systems will have the greatest impact on freeing up your time and helping your life to run more smoothly.

Which one of these goals is most important to you right now?

- To access information to help you make better business decisions
- To make better use of your time, either by working more efficiently or by delegating some of your work
- To allow for future growth and/or expansion of a business
- To prepare to sell a business
- To have the opportunity for time off or semi-retirement
- To provide more consistent, reliable service to your customers or clients
- To prepare for emergencies (for example, unexpected illness or sudden employee termination)

Which of these goals is your *most immediate* priority? Please identify one or two only. The reason I ask you to be very clear about your priorities is because the systems you develop first will vary depending on your immediate goals.

For example, if you are a business owner, it may be that you eventually want to expand your business, but right now, you need better information from your business to make the strategic decisions to build the foundation for that growth.

Once these initial priorities and needs have been met, you can then start on the next set of goals.

Now that you have identified your *primary* reason for wanting to create systems, begin with the activities that will give you the highest payoff right away. I am a firm believer in the 80/20

principle, which states that 80% of your results come from 20% of your activities. If you can identify even 1-2 key activities that you are not currently doing in an efficient way, you can likely make some big improvements very quickly by creating some simple systems.

Are you ready to start creating systems to help you become more effective and efficient? Join me in this month's *Live Your Strengths* challenge.

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge: The 4 Key Questions

As you identify which activities will be your first priorities for creating systems, consider these questions:

1. *Is the system already in place and just needs to be documented?* If this is the case, you have a great place to start and you may need to spend a couple of days just “following yourself around” to document how you are currently doing each of your tasks. Once this information is recorded, it can be used as training material to show others how to do your job and allow you to delegate more effectively.

This documentation is also important in preparing for emergencies. If necessary, this would allow someone to locate passwords, pay bills, know how to contact important people, and so on. These steps can alleviate a lot of stress from an already stressful situation.

2. *Do you need to create a usable ‘set’ of information?* What kinds of information would make your decision-making more efficient? Are there monthly/quarterly reports you could run? Are there people you could meet with on a regular basis to learn key information for your decisions?

Perhaps you have all the raw data you need in front of you but are regularly spending time trying to convert it into a format that will allow you to analyse it more effectively? What would it take to develop a system that would present the data in a usable format that works for you?

3. *Do you need to resolve an issue in the physical environment?* For example, is there something about the way your office or business is physically arranged that is preventing a smooth flow of work? This is especially applicable to people who spend a lot of time on the road and need to consider their car as their office for part of the day. How could you arrange your workspace differently to help you be as efficient as possible?

4. *Do you need to apply lessons learned from recurring events?* If you perform a task or activity on a regular basis, don't re-create the wheel each time. Develop schedules, templates, and other tools to help you be more efficient.

For example, do you host an annual/quarterly event that could benefit from some detailed recordkeeping? If you have ever found yourself asking “Now when did I need to contact the media last year to inform them about this event?” or “Who was the supplier I worked with last time?” – you could likely benefit from developing a quick checklist of important contacts and a workflow that shows what needs to happen and when.

Do you repeatedly get asked the same questions from clients/customers? Perhaps it would make sense to create a list of answers to frequently asked questions that you can easily cut and paste into emails and then tailor as needed.

These are only a few of the many places you could start to add systems which will make you

more effective every day. Be creative in developing systems so that they work for you and don't be afraid to keep modifying your system until it provides you with exactly the right information or assistance you need.

Could you use some guidance with this challenge? Call Denise for a free 30-minute coaching session to make 2010 your best year yet!

Cheers,

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