

Self-Evaluation: First Step to Better Productivity

By: Alan Buhler

Are procrastination, disorganization, interruptions and external demands getting the best of you? Would you like to be more productive every day?

The fact is about 80 percent of your productive results are coming from a mere 20 percent of your daily efforts. Many people spend their days in a frenzy of activity but achieve very little because they aren't concentrating on the right things. An important part of gaining results from your work is clearly defining what you need to focus on.

Unfortunately, many people work hard all day doing little jobs that don't actually affect the quality of their work or contribute to positive results. When deciding what your work priorities should be each day, three areas should be considered: clarifying what you enjoy, identifying your strengths and weaknesses, and understanding what your job is and what constitutes excellent performance.

Do what you enjoy: It's important for your own quality of life that you enjoy the work you do. If you know what you like and dislike, you likely will be more able to move your job toward doing the things that you enjoy. This is important, because you're much more likely to do your job effectively if you love it rather than if you loathe it. With that being said, it is important to remember that nearly every job has tedious or unpleasant elements to it, and it's important that these elements of the job also are done properly.

Concentrating on your strengths: As you work to identify the type of work you would enjoy, it's also important to know your unique talents and weaknesses. In addition to identifying your strengths and analyzing your weaknesses, you need to examine the opportunities available to you and the threats that might derail your efforts. It simply makes sense to find a job that suits your strengths and doesn't highlight your weaknesses.

To help identify your strengths, answer the following questions:

- What advantages do you have over others?
- What kinds of things do you do well?
- What relevant resources are you able to access?
- What do other people see as your strengths?

Consider this from your own point of view and from the point of view of the people you deal with on a regular basis. Don't be modest but be realistic. If you have difficulty determining your strengths, try writing a list of your characteristics. Some of these characteristics might be your strengths.

Next, identify your weaknesses by answering the following questions:

- What could you improve upon?
- What do you consistently do badly?
- What activities should you avoid?

Again, consider this from an internal and external basis. In other words, do other people seem to perceive weaknesses that you don't see? It is best to be realistic now and face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

To identify the opportunities that are available to you, answer these questions:

- Where are the good opportunities facing you?
- What are the interesting trends you are aware of?

Useful opportunities can come from such things as:

- Changes in technology and markets on both a broad and narrow scale.
- Changes in government policy related to your field.
- Changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyle.

A useful approach to looking at opportunities is to look at your strengths and ask yourself whether these open up any opportunities. Alternatively, look at your weaknesses and ask yourself whether you could open up opportunities by eliminating them.

Finally, identify the threats that might derail your progress by answering these questions:

- What obstacles do you face?
- Are the required specifications for your job changing?
- Is changing technology threatening your position?
- Do you have bad debt or cash-flow problems?
- Could any of your weaknesses seriously threaten you?

Carrying out this analysis often will be illuminating -- both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done and in putting problems into perspective.

Understand how to achieve excellence at your job: The best way of ensuring that you concentrate on the right things is to be on the "same page" with your employer.

You should ask, and get answers to, the following questions:

- What is the purpose of your job? If possible, express this in a single sentence starting with the word "To." For example, "To generate revenue for the company as per the goals set forth by senior management."
- What are the measures of success? Know how your employer will decide whether you're performing your job well. Find out what the key targets are and how achievement of those targets will be measured.
- What is exceptional performance? Find out what factors will be considered to determine exceptional performance, how it will be measured and what you can do to achieve it.

- What are the priorities and deadlines? You need to know this so that when you are overloaded with work demands, interruptions and meetings, you'll know what to focus on.
- What resources might be available? Knowing the resources available to you will ensure that you are using all the tools at your command.

If you answer these questions, you'll know how to do your job in precisely the right way. If you know what exceptional performance is, you can plan to achieve it using all your resources. By concentrating on the right priorities, you'll make sure that you always are working as effectively as possible.



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