

Book The Truth About You

Your Secret to Success

Marcus Buckingham
Thomas Nelson, 2008
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Recommendation

Marcus Buckingham is a popular author of career advice that is upbeat, if a bit obvious. In this book, he encourages job seekers to focus on their strengths so they can find positions that suit them well. Buckingham provides five tips that he calls the “best advice you’ll ever get.” He lists them, explains them and lists them again to really reinforce them. This workbook even comes with a writing pad to make it easy for you to do the exercises Buckingham suggests. The advice will sound familiar if you have read his previous books, but if you’re stuck in a dead-end job, he explains how and where to start making changes. Buckingham writes for meek and inexperienced people, for job beginners and people who have stopped believing that a job can be fun. If a pep talk would spur you to ditch that painful pencil-pushing position and find something you’re glad to go do when you get up every morning, *BooksInShort* suggests reading this book with your morning coffee.

Take-Aways

- Only two out of every 10 people are truly happy in their jobs.
- Many people initially take the wrong jobs because they don’t carefully consider what their daily tasks will be.
- Many people stay in their jobs simply to pay their bills.
- Organizations are not responsible for finding your strengths and weaknesses – you are.
- Clearly identify your strengths, interests and weaknesses so you can find a job that matches them.
- “Neutralize” your weaknesses by teaming up with someone who complements you.
- Focus on strengths and enhance them.
- To mold your position to fit you, volunteer for jobs you like or suggest to your boss some tasks you’d like to do.
- If you focus each week on two tasks you love, eventually your job will align with your strengths.
- Avoid well-meant advice that is actually poisonous.How to identify your primary strengths, interests and weaknesses;

Summary

Work Your Strengths

You are unique. No one else has the same likes and dislikes, or the same combination of strengths, capabilities and weaknesses. The secret to finding fulfilling work is to focus on your unique strengths, likes and capabilities. Unfortunately, few people can do that. In fact, 80% of employees say they are trapped in jobs that neither engage them, nor “play to their strengths” or basic interests. That means, two out of 10 people are truly happy in their work and the rest spend their days marking time in jobs that don’t satisfy or challenge them. They go to work because they have to pay the mortgage and the bills.

“You want the world to see and feel and recognize and love, and in the end, benefit from the very best of you.”

If you see yourself as being trapped, who do you think is responsible for caging you this way? Your parents or family? Your company or boss? None of the above – you are the only person who is responsible for shaping your life.

Begin the process of change by asking yourself how things got to this point. How and where did you get off the right track, and how can you quickly get back on it? People often pay too much attention to bad advice, to advisors who tell them they “should” do this or “shouldn’t” do that. They tend to follow advice mindlessly and get pushed into things – a career, a lifestyle, a marriage – that don’t really suit them and don’t play to their strengths. To avoid making bad and wasteful choices you will end up regretting, each day repeat three basic truths about personality and personal growth:

1. **“As you grow, you become more and more of who you already are”** – Many people believe that you change as you age, but the exact opposite is true. Sure, your values, skills, hopes, plans and other elements of your life probably will change as you grow older. But the special qualities that make you who you are will not change that much. If you were competitive as a child, you will likely remain so as an adult. If you were friendly and outgoing when you were small, you will become even more of a “people person” as you get older.

2. **“You grow most in your areas of greatest strength”** – Your strongest personal characteristics, areas where you are already more skilled than other people, are the easiest to expand.
3. **“A great team player volunteers his strengths to the team most of the time”** – Teams are made up of individuals who each contribute something special. You will need to move out of your comfort zone sometimes and help the team in ways that don’t come naturally to you. However, your most important contributions will always derive from your areas of greatest strength. The best teams consist of members with differing strengths.

The Five Rules of Work, Life and Self-Improvement

To lead a truly satisfying life, you need a job that matches your strengths and interests. To ensure that you get one, you must understand the world of work and how people fit into it, and you must know some basic truths about yourself. These five rules, which highlight opportunities for self-improvement, will enable you to ascertain what you are up against in the work environment:

1: “Performance Is Always the Point”

Your company has no obligation to enhance your personality. When an organization claims that it wants to hire the best people and wants to help them develop, it is honest – to the extent that it is necessary for its performance. You have to understand that its primary motivation is not to help you find yourself, but to “meet the needs of its customers, serve a mission and make a profit.” This means that your organization will never get to know the real you – what makes you tick, what you care about, what motivates you. As a result, you will get a job where no one feels any concern about whether you enjoy it or not. You, yourself, are responsible for drawing upon your strengths to achieve what your organization needs you to achieve.

“As you grow, you become more and more of who you already are.”

Thus, it’s up to you – and you alone – to get to know yourself intimately, what you are about and what type of job will make you most happy. To attain this self-knowledge, examine yourself. Ask what elements of your work you love. What would you love to be asked to do? Outside of work, what do you like the most? What do you like to read? What type of people do you enjoy? Use your answers to pinpoint your primary interests, then write them down. When you know what you truly love, you will be in a better position to find a satisfying job. Don’t settle for anything that doesn’t interest you completely. This should always be your priority in a job search.

“You’ve been raised to believe that other people know you better than you know yourself.”

2: “Strengths Aren’t What You’re Good At” In a truly satisfying job, your strengths come into play more than your weaknesses. Be precise about them. Saying that one strength is your ability to work well with people isn’t clear enough. Which people? Colleagues? Contractors? Customers? What about angry customers? Just examining activities you do won’t show you your strengths. If you perform well at something, but it drains you, it’s not a strength; it’s a weakness, and you don’t want to plan your career around your personal weaknesses. Strengths “make you feel strong.” If you find an activity exciting, enjoy it while you do it and feel content afterward, it is probably a strength. Spotlight your best abilities with the SIGN acronym:

- **S**uccess – You succeed at it.
- **I**nstinct – You instinctively like it.
- **G**rowth – You can focus on it and develop it.
- **N**eeds – It satisfies your needs.

“Your interests are a very good clue to your strengths.”

List your strengths on paper. When you feel good about an activity or enjoy it, jot it down. Don’t censor yourself – if you love organizing your shirt drawer, include that, too. At the end of the week, develop a “strength statement” about what you have listed. Start with the words, “I feel strong when ...”, then list specific activities. Use active verbs. For example, “I feel strong when I research things” is a good strength statement. However, “I feel strong when I am praised by others” is not a good one – you are not in control of that activity, others are. Be as specific as possible. “I feel strong when I write” is not specific. You probably don’t feel strong when you write a memo about safety regulations. A specific statement might read: “I feel strong when I write research reports on market trends.” Use the three strength statements that make you feel most energized as valuable guidelines when you look for work. Try to match the most satisfying activities with the job you pursue.

“You don’t need anyone to tell you what your strengths are.”

3: “The ‘What’ Always Trumps the ‘Why’ and the ‘Who’” Many people end up in jobs they hate because they focus on the “why” more than the “what.” For example, an idealistic young woman who wants to make a contribution to her community uses that as the reason (the “why”) to select politics as her profession. However, she quickly learns that politics also involves attending fundraisers, soliciting campaign donations from strangers, and participating in numerous local events, including pizza-eating contests and neighborhood sing-alongs. Ambitious candidates must participate in such events – the “what” of politics, day in and day out, to get anywhere politically. The idealistic young woman may find out the hard way that politics is not what she had in mind.

“Without your Strength Statements, you’ll be without your map. And you’ll get lost.”

Unfortunately, many people make a big mistake and never consider the “what” when planning their careers. They have an elevated view of a potential job that keeps them from considering the actual activities that will take up their workday. You may want to become a stockbroker because you want to earn a lot of money, but are you prepared to call hundreds of strangers daily to solicit their business? Or you want to become a nurse to help people, but are you prepared to empty bedpans and administer pills to cranky patients all day? Many job listings don’t describe the actual tasks the positions entail. This can become a problem once applicants are hired and learn that their daily chores do not match their strengths or interests. When you are considering a job, avoid this problem by asking, “What will I be paid to do?” Write down what the employer tells you and ask yourself if that is what you want to do all day. If not, seek a different position.

“You will grow the most in your areas of greatest strength.”

4: “You’ll Never Find the Perfect Job” People who are ideally suited to their jobs seem to be the luckiest people in the world. They are great at their work and they love what they do. However, these people aren’t any luckier than anyone else. Their careers only seem perfect because they have “built” their ideal jobs brick by brick. To accomplish this yourself, focus on work activities that represent your strengths and interests, and avoid activities that represent your weaknesses. Most jobs do not perfectly match the people who do them. Indeed, many people dislike numerous aspects of their jobs. However, they mistakenly assume they must work hardest on the tasks they dislike the most. This old stoic philosophy states that workers should “pay their dues” and “do whatever it takes” to complete their jobs. According to this boneheaded logic, that’s the only way to become a well-rounded employee. The fact is, you will develop yourself more when you concentrate each week on your strengths, not your weaknesses.

“Work can be a great place. A place where you are challenged in just the way you like to be challenged.”

Create a “Strong Week Plan.” Every week, select two work activities that best play to your strengths. This could mean volunteering for special assignments or giving your boss a suggestion about some activity you could handle. Tell him or her, “I think I would be more productive if I ...” Join a class to enhance a strength, or invite a colleague whose work you admire to lunch to find out how he or she approaches work. Whatever you choose, focus each week on two special work activities you love. Eventually, your job description will start to align what you do best and what you like the most.

“The people you work with won’t ever really understand that your weakness is, in fact, a weakness.”

5: “You’ll Never Turn Your Weaknesses into Strengths” Weaknesses are trouble and don’t go away, so understand what they are and deal with them. Write down your weaknesses daily, specifically elements of your job that you find boring or draining. As with your strength statements, write “weakness statements.” Format them like this: “I feel weak when ...” Again, make sure the weaknesses you list represent activities. Do not write “I feel weak when people criticize me.” Instead, write, “I feel weak when I spend time with difficult people.” Get it all on paper.

“To live a strong, successful life, your interests are the first thing you must take seriously.”

The best thing to do with weaknesses is to neutralize them. Stop engaging in activities that make you feel weak. This may not always be possible at work, but it is worth trying. Another way to handle weaknesses is to “partner up.” Maybe someone in your organization has strengths in areas where you have weaknesses. Another tactic is to focus more on your strengths to make some of your weaknesses less important. Or “look at your weakness through one of your strengths.” For example, Rudy Giuliani, former New York City mayor, always hated giving speeches but he loved arguing court cases. He taught himself to transpose his public speeches into simulated courtroom arguments and, thereby, made himself an effective public speaker. The main thing is to eliminate as many weaknesses as possible from your daily routine.

“Five Things That Sound Right but Aren’t”

People who intend to be helpful routinely offer the worst advice about work, life and personal development. When you hear the following ideas, run for the nearest exit:

1. **“Always treat people as you would like to be treated”** – Not true. People “want to be treated” as they like, not necessarily the way you would like.
2. **“There is no ‘I’ in team”** – What a silly idea. A team is a group of individuals who each contribute something special to the mix.
3. **“You should work on your weaknesses”** – Wrong again. Weaknesses only drain you. Neutralize them whenever you can.
4. **“Push yourself beyond your comfort zone”** – Why do that? You will do much better if you work on your strengths in comfort instead.
5. **“Your greatest strength is also your greatest weakness”** – This is totally illogical. Making your strengths work for you is the best way to be happy at work.

About the Author

Marcus Buckingham, a former senior researcher at Gallup, is the author of *Go Put Your Strengths to Work* and *First, Break All the Rules*.
