

# Work

# Life

YOUR  
STRENGTHS  
Are The PATHS To  
EXCELLENCE

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## NAVIGATOR

What is the one strength that—if you worked on it—would make the difference in your profession? Is it your ability to draw pictures? Translate feelings into beautiful visual images? Take words and put them into persuasive sentences? Are you especially clever with numbers? Can you sing a cappella? Can you inspire people at work? The answers to all these questions will be clues to your natural talents, and most likely to your true purpose in life. Acknowledging and dedicating yourself to your natural talents are the paths to excellence, success, and effortless abundance.

One of my gifts has always been my ability to ask questions. It seems others appreciate that I ask questions in a nonthreatening way that allows others to see their own issues and usually the solutions to their problems. I took this gift for granted for many years. As someone who was in medical training, I thought this was a normal thing to do. Inquiring and trying to get to the root of peoples' illnesses were all part of becoming a doctor.

I realized that this was not such an easy task for every medical student. Later on, when I abandoned the medical profession and started working in the business realm, the same gift helped me again. My ability to ask the right questions at the right moments helped technical projects to move ahead, made people feel good about themselves, and brought business satisfaction within very challenging operations. Once again, I was focusing all my energy on developing other special competencies of mine, but not acknowledging my natural gift. Why?

Only after 30 something years did I realize that my gift—my brilliance—lay in my ability to ask questions. Once I internalized this wisdom, acknowledged my gift, and stopped denying it, I was able to find my true path in life and start doing work in a way that was deeply fulfilling. The beauty of it is—once you stop fighting it—you get answers to all the things that you once had questions about. You are still working hard, but excellence comes much more easily.

So many people, when asked what their gift is, reply either "I don't know" or "nothing." How sad! I am pretty confident that you have at least one thing you do well. If you do not know about it, then ask your family or friends, and they will point something out. Everyone has something unique to offer in this world. Some have strengths that are abundantly obvious. Others, like me, have gifts that may take some investigation to uncover.

Knowing your strengths will allow you to tap into your inner desires, from which you can plot your path of life. Everything is interrelated. Your strengths will reveal your true blueprint in life.

Whether you've discovered your strengths or not, the sad truth is that most people do not take the time to develop their gifts. A prime example is the person who works hard, struggling to rise to the top, while ignoring the very things that come naturally to them. Unfortunately, it happens every day.

One of the reasons this happens is that our gifts—the things that come very easily to

us—are often ignored, or smothered by other duties. Let me explain.

One client of mine, a marketing strategist, built his business using his natural strength (gift) of building relationships. He loved connecting with clients, meeting new people, and personally interacting with others. However, as other business responsibilities set in, he found himself laying his primary strength aside and devoting more time to mundane duties. The result? He began to degrade in his level of excellence. Without focusing his contribution to the business on his strength, he, personally and professionally, started to suffer.

Once he acknowledged this, he readjusted his schedule, dropped all administrative tasks that did not require his personal attention, and devoted two hours of his time to re-cultivating old relationships and building new ones. Within a few months, his business boomed, he felt great, and he had more time.

Are you unsure of what your natural gifts are? It took me a long time to realize mine. The following tips will help you pinpoint the strengths you have that can lead you to the path to excellence:

1. Make a list of the specific things (no more than three) that come easily for you. You may not see them as "special" (like my ability to ask the right questions), but, if you are naturally adept at them, write them on your list.
2. Decide how committed you are to dedicating money and time to developing your gifts.

3. If you are willing to do what is needed to develop these strengths, set some deadlines. Research classes, activities, or counselors who can help you expand on your gifts.
4. Find a mentor who will support you in your efforts to excel.
5. Put a measurable return on your investment. Create a list of reasonable accomplishments that you hope to make after developing your gifts.
6. Think big! Who is your role model, who is the expert in your field? Study them and then see if you like any of their development strategies.

The key here is to remain persistent with the development of your strengths. Many people have paid great sums of money for the help of experts. If you do not feel you are able to grow solely with the help of a mentor, by all means hire a coach or consultant. The end result of having peace and confidence in your personal and professional life will be well worth the cost!

(Source: © 2002 Carole Nicolaidis, president and leadership coach of Progressive Leadership. [www.progressiveleadership.com](http://www.progressiveleadership.com))

## HOLIDAY HINTS

### The Top Ten Nutrition and Fitness Tips for the Holiday Season

Data indicates that the average American gains between 5 and 10 pounds over the holidays, so it's going to take some planning and effort to beat these odds. However, the holidays are indeed special, so if you don't want to enjoy them at the expense of your health, it's worth this extra effort. It also can be great training for staying on track with good nutrition and fitness the rest of the year.

#### 1. Be realistic.

If your traditional approach has been to say "all bets are off" and then to follow your tongue through the season (and perhaps beyond), be content with a few small steps, solidly and successfully taken, which you can build upon. Try to use one or two of these tips a couple of times, and enjoy what success you may have. Even if you end up gaining weight, avoid beating yourself up at all costs! This can not only spoil your holiday experience, but might cause you to stick your head in the sand for the rest of the year. Instead, see what you can learn from the experience. Ask yourself questions like "What could I realistically do better the next time?", "Am I ready to do this?", and "If not, why not and/or what would it take for me to be ready?"

#### 2. Treat these special holiday foods as the delicacies they are and not as the main caloric source in your diet during this period.

Let a little go a long way. Remember to eat slowly. The effect of food on satiating one's

appetite is not felt until about 20 to 30 minutes after eating. If you forget this last fact, there is a good chance you'll feel bloated and uncomfortable instead of deriving the comfort that you may have been looking for. "It lies in my stomach like a rock!" to quote an old friend of mine.

#### 3. Do not starve yourself to compensate for eating holiday goodies, especially in anticipation of an upcoming event during which a lot of rich holiday food will be served.

This can create a hungry beast to be unleashed by the first tasty morsel of holiday cheer. A beast which will then pig-out as if there is no tomorrow. You might even lower your metabolism during the starvation periods. Instead, make sure you eat enough so you don't get hungry, and eat plenty of high-volume/low-calorie/low-fat foods as recommended below (see 5 and 6).

#### 4. Make sure you drink plenty of water throughout the day.

Shoot for at least a half-gallon per day. That's approximately four of those half-liter bottles that are so handy to carry around. If you have a good water source, you can buy four or more bottles at once and then refill them daily. I find that having the day's water already premeasured really helps keep me hydrated. There are a number of good reasons for drinking more water than most people do. One is that it helps curb hunger. When you feel hungry, you may just be dehydrated. Remember, food is often more than 90 percent water.

#### 5. Eat more fresh fruits and veggies, especially prior to eating any holiday goodies.

This helps in two major ways. The foods themselves are healthy, and most people eat far less of these foods than even the most conservative recommendations. Most of these foods are high volume, but low in fat and calories. This means you can literally fill up on them before eating any holiday goodies and thereby eat less of these foods, which are, for the most part, dense in calories, fats, and simple sugars.

#### 6. Eat plenty of high-fiber food.

This group includes whole grains and legumes (e.g., beans). The fiber will absorb some of the fats and also cause the sugars to be released more slowly, thus stabilizing blood sugar levels and cravings. Additionally, drinking all that water will cause the fiber to swell up, and you'll feel less hungry.

#### 7. Increase your exercise.

Start an exercise program. Increase the one you've got or at least keep it on track. This will burn off some of the extra calories, keeping your mood elevated and your appetite down. A fast walk with the right music can work wonders.

#### 8. Understand that increasing one's knowledge about nutrition and exercise, planning, and journaling are the cornerstones of positive healthy lifestyle changes that last.

This of course presumes one is ready and willing to attempt such changes. Due to limited space, we can only say a few words about these important steps. You can start by simply writing down what you eat, when and where you ate it. You could also keep track of what was going on and how you felt at the time. Later you could look up the calorie content and other nutritional values of what you ate. Also write down what exercise you did. After doing this journaling for a while, one's knowledge increases rapidly, and soon one's ability to plan also improves.

#### 9. If you do overdo it with fatty foods, follow it up by making the next day a low-fat day (that doesn't mean starve yourself).

There is research indicating that this will minimize the negative effects of the previous day's fat intake on the cardiovascular system.

#### 10. Remember to feed your spirit too.

May sound corny, but with all the commercialism, it's easy to forget that part of the holidays. I mentioned above that you may feel hungry because you are actually thirsty (see point 4). Similarly, you may overdo it with the calories, but feeding your spirit is what will really satisfy you. As an old song goes, "When you take what's second best, it's hard to get enough." The holidays are all about spirit and, obviously, you must decide what that means for yourself. Maybe it's the joy that comes from fellowship, being with friends and family or just sending out a few greeting cards to people you care about. A good part of holiday spirit for me is to again realize that when all is said and done, the world can be a good place. At the end of our last holiday season, Stacey Brice gave a copy of *Desiderata* to her subscribers as her gift. I'm going to close with the last few lines of it: ". . . whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy." Happy holidays, and when you do eat some holiday goodies, enjoy and savor every bite!

(Source: Tony Weaver, Ph.D.-level biologist (Stanford Univ.) and nutrition and fitness coach.)

## WEB SITE PICKS

[www.SafetyAlerts.com](http://www.SafetyAlerts.com)

A free, comprehensive, and up-to-minute recall Web site and e-mail service that delivers potentially life-saving notifications to e-mail inboxes within 24 hours after a recall is announced. Online, it maintains an easy-to-use database of past recalls, product warnings, and other safety features.

"Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."

—Dr. Seuss

## INSPIRATION

### The Cab Ride

Twenty years ago, I drove a cab for a living. When I arrived at 2:30 a.m., the building was dark except for a single light in a ground-floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once or twice, wait a minute, then drive away.

But, I had seen too many impoverished people who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation smelled of danger, I always went to the door. This passenger might be someone who needs my assistance, I reasoned to myself.

So I walked to the door and knocked. "Just a minute," answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 80s stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940s movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she said. I took the suitcase to the cab and returned to assist the woman.

She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness. "It's nothing," I told her. "I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated."

"Oh, you're such a good boy," she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, then asked, "Could you drive through downtown?"

"It's not the shortest way," I answered quickly.

"Oh, I don't mind," she said. "I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice."

I looked in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were glistening.

"I don't have any family left," she continued. "The doctor says I don't have very long." I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "What route would you like me to take?" I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. We drove through the neighborhood where she

and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing. As the first hint of the Sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico.

Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her purse. "Nothing," I said.

"You have to make a living," she answered.

"There are other passengers," I responded. Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly.

"You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you."

I squeezed her hand, then walked into the dim morning light. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk.

What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away?

On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life. We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unaware—beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one.

People may not remember exactly what you did or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel.

## HUMOR

### Headlines and One-Liners That Weren't Thought Out Before Going to Press

GRANDMOTHER OF EIGHT MAKES HOLE IN ONE

DEFENDANT'S SPEECH ENDS IN LONG SENTENCE

ASBESTOS SUIT PRESSED

DOCTOR TESTIFIES IN HORSE SUIT

TWO CONVICTS EVADE NOOSE; JURY HUNG

FLORIDA ILLEGAL ALIENS CUT IN HALF BY NEW LAW

10 REVOLTING OFFICERS EXECUTED

DRUNK GETS NINE MONTHS IN VIOLIN CASE

COUNTY OFFICIALS TO TALK RUBBISH

CARIBBEAN ISLANDS DRIFT TO LEFT

THUGS EAT THEN ROB PROPRIETOR

GENETIC ENGINEERING SPLITS SCIENTISTS

EYE DROPS OFF SHELF

SQUAD HELPS DOG BITE VICTIM

LAWYERS GIVE POOR FREE LEGAL ADVICE

LAWMEN FROM MEXICO BARBECUE GUESTS

MINERS REFUSE TO WORK AFTER DEATH

JUVENILE COURT TO TRY SHOOTING DEFENDANT

AUTOS KILLING 110 A DAY: LET'S RESOLVE TO DO BETTER

20-YEAR FRIENDSHIP ENDS AT ALTAR

WAR DIMS HOPES FOR PEACE

SMOKERS ARE PRODUCTIVE, BUT DEATH CUTS EFFICIENCY

COLD WAVE LINKED TO TEMPERATURES

MAN IS FATALLY SLAIN

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Why Leaders Choose Executive Coaching

Executives in organizations today are facing a world never seen before. The rate of organizational change and the difficulty in keeping up with new technology and global competition are impacting every industry. Business leaders are asking hard questions about how to improve productivity and create an environment of high performance. Lagging employee morale and insufficient leadership are problems in many organizations. Helping an executive face this challenge is an executive coach.

According to *TIME Business News*, "Coaches are everywhere these days. Companies hire them to shore up executives or, in some cases, to ship them out. Division heads hire them as change agents. Workers at all levels of the corporate ladder, fed up with a lack of advice from inside the company, are taking matters into their own hands and enlisting coaches for guidance on how to improve their performance, boost their profits, and make better decisions about everything from personnel to strategy."

An executive coach is considered by many successful professionals today to be fundamental to their continued growth and develop-

ment—the competitive edge they need. Organizations like Sears, Marriott, Kodak, and others regularly employ coaches to help maximize performance and manage change. In every field of human endeavor in which performance is key, coaching is integral to helping shift an individual's mindset, approaches, and behaviors to ensure more effective action and greater business success.

"What's really driving the boom in coaching is this: as we move from 30 miles an hour to 70, to 120, to 180 . . . as we go from driving straight down the road to making right turns and left turns, to abandoning cars and getting on motorcycles . . . the whole game changes, and a lot of people are trying to keep up, learn how, not fall off," says John Kotter, professor of leadership at the Harvard Business School.

Counseling, mentoring, serving as a much-needed sounding board, and offering brainstorming and consultation, executive or life coaching is sometimes defined by what it's not. Coaching does a lot of things, but it is not therapy, and it's not about giving advice. Coaching improves communication and creates a vision for everyone concerned on issues like work-life balance, productivity, and company as well as individual goals. It's a one-on-one process, an individualized program that provides specific tools and techniques to effectively manage personal and organizational challenges. It's all about company and employee strengthening and growth.

As noted by Zeus and Skiffington in their book, *The Complete Guide to Coaching at Work*, there are four types of executive coaching on a continuum of coaching for skills, coaching for performance, coaching for development, and coaching for the executive's agenda.

**Coaching for Skills** helps the executive learn specific skills, abilities, and perspectives over a period of several weeks or months. The skills to be learned are usually clear at the outset and are typically related to skills associated with an executive assuming new or different responsibilities.

**Coaching for Performance** focuses on the executive's effectiveness in his or her current position. Frequently it involves coaching for one or more management or leadership competencies, such as communicating vision, teambuilding, or delegation.

**Coaching for Development** refers to coaching interventions that explore and enhance the executive's competencies and characteristics required for a future job or role. It can be associated with outplacements, restructuring, and reengineering in the organization.

**Coaching for the Executive's Agenda** generally entails working with an executive on any personal or organizational concerns he or she may have. It can focus on issues surrounding the executive, such as change and company downsizing. Personal issues are more likely to arise in this type of coaching.

It is increasingly recognized that individuals and groups perform better with coaching, and this performance translates into business results. In their new text book, "The Coaching at Work Toolkit," Zeus and Skiffington outline some of the benefits of coaching:

- Coaching for leadership impacts companies through increased productivity, improved communication, increased staff commitment and loyalty, and decreased levels of stress and tension.
- Coaching assists individuals to remain loyal and committed to the company in the face of demanding global business hours, language barriers, differing work ethics, and economic fluctuations.
- Coaching can help prevent executive derailment, which, as some studies suggest, can be as high as 33 percent for senior executives.
- Coaching helps managers develop better interpersonal skills. Some common reasons for interpersonal conflict include executives being too abrasive, too controlling, and too isolated. Coaches work with executives to explore these behaviors, to recognize and regulate their self-defeating beliefs, assumptions, and actions.
- Coaching helps leaders to think and plan more strategically, to manage risk more effectively, to create and communicate vision and mission.
- Coaching aids in developing a culture of trust, commitment, and personal responsibility both internally and with the external world of clients and customers.
- Coaching enables the executive or manager to leverage his or her personal power more effectively.
- Coaching can develop those leadership qualities that have been empirically proven to be associated with success. These include cognitive capacity, social capacities, personality style, motivation, knowledge, and expertise.

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got!

"If fate closes the door, climb in through the window."  
—Anonymous

## HEALTH

### Tea and Heart Attacks

Those who drink moderate to high amounts of caffeinated tea the year before they have an acute heart attack have a significantly reduced mortality risk compared with those who do not drink tea.

Tea contains many antioxidant components, but researchers believe it's the flavonoids

that provide the benefit. The research study that contributed to this conclusion involved following patients for almost four years.

Moderate tea drinkers are classified as consuming 14 cups per week, and heavy tea drinkers 14 or more cups of tea per week. The association between tea consumption and reduced mortality is similar for both all-cause and cardiovascular mortality.

(Source: *Journal of the American Heart Association* 2002. Excerpted by Betty Kamen, Ph.D. and Dr. Michael Rosenbaum, M.D. <http://www.bettykamen.com>)

"Fascination is one step beyond interest. Interested people want to know if it works. Fascinated people want to learn how it works."  
—Jim Rohn

## FINANCES

### Out of Joint

Joint ownership between an elderly parent and a middle-aged son or daughter may pose a tax trap. If you're named joint owner of your mother's bank or brokerage account and you withdraw cash or securities, that act will be treated as a taxable gift. Gift tax returns will have to be filed, and gift tax might have to be paid; after a gift is deemed to have occurred, you'll owe tax on all income and capital gains from the property withdrawn from joint tenancy.

Moreover, you'll lose your basis step-up in the property you withdraw. Say your mother owns stock with a basis of \$10,000 and current value of \$25,000. If you inherit that stock, your basis will be \$25,000, but, if you withdraw that stock, your basis will be \$10,000—you'll owe tax on a \$15,000 gain if you sell the withdrawn shares for \$25,000.

The exception to the above pitfalls: there's no taxable gift if you withdraw assets to pay for your mother's expenses. Therefore, if an elderly relative has named you joint owner of any property, keep records to show that any funds you withdraw are being used on behalf of the original owner, not yourself.

(Source: *Retirement & Financial Planning Report*, published by *FEDweek*.)

### Questions/Comments to:

Evelin Saxinger, Work/Life Program Manager, [esaxinge@hq.nasa.gov](mailto:esaxinge@hq.nasa.gov) or 358-1311.

An online version of this newsletter may be found at <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/codec/cc/navig-12.pdf>