

The CEO Advantage: Build on Strengths to Achieve Time Mastery

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

The CEO of a successful company learned from members of her senior team that their biggest challenge was not having enough time to get everything done. She understood completely. Too much work and too little balance had her worried about burning out herself. Concerned the company may lose productivity, not to mention valuable talent, she struggled to find more time and juggle key projects better. It wasn't helping.

CEO mistake

Accelerating performance in demanding times isn't just about managing your schedule. It's about building on your strengths. Capitalizing on what you do well allows you to work smarter, not harder. Ultimately, it's the only way to achieve time mastery and life balance in the face of constant and growing demands, both personal and corporate.

Consider this. Research from the Gallup Organization shows that 87% of employees believe that fixing weaknesses is the best way to accelerate performance. What's more, only 17% of employees believe they use all of their strengths on the job and only 20% spend most of their time discussing their strengths during performance reviews. We're focusing on the wrong thing!

In this case, our CEO found herself spending far too much time on activities that were not her areas of strength. She was also making too many of the business decisions, which created a bottleneck and certainly didn't play to the strengths of her team. In addition, it was hard for her team to tap into her schedule, causing them to feel disconnected and unable to set priorities.

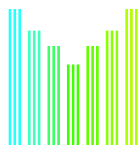
CEO solution

To tackle this time-management problem, the CEO and her team participated in a time-mastery workshop. To begin, the executives listed their top 10 activities in each of their current roles and then self-rated their ability to perform each activity as masterful, excellent, competent or incompetent. They then gave each other feedback on individual strengths as well as opportunities for improvement.

It got really interesting when each person was challenged to stop doing or minimize the activities rated as either competent or incompetent. Instead, he or she was to focus on spending 80% of his or her time on areas of strength – activities ranked as masterful or excellent.

To ease the transition, executives developed a 90-day plan with clear objectives to build on their strengths. In each case, they were instructed to spend most of their time on the three most vital activities needed to drive the results for which they were accountable. In addition, each executive developed a top 20 list of key business relationships, both internal and external, to foster over the next 90 days.

At the end of the 90-day period, there was a new and significant vitality to the executive team as each member reported being more productive and less frazzled. Building on strengths may not be



what comes to mind when considering time management, but ultimately it is the path to driving continued and growing performance. •

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