



# You're better than you think (at some things!)

By Pierrette Desrosiers

**W**hat is the most important skill to be developed in a leader? When 75 members of the Advisory Board of the Graduate School Administration from Stanford University were asked this question, the consensus was "self-knowledge."

But how well do managers and entrepreneurs (the leaders) know themselves? Only 10 per cent have a realistic perception of themselves. As just one example, 75 per cent consider themselves to be in the top 25 per cent for competence and intelligence!

Can you list your 10 greatest strengths as well as 10 things you need to work on? When I ask participants to answer this question in 15 minutes during my training sessions, quite a few of them feel unsettled. Knowing your strengths and your weaknesses (things you need to improve upon) is one of the key abilities that comes with emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups.

It's not new. Socrates, one of the greatest Greek philosophers, made this concept famous more than 2,000 years ago when he said: "Know yourself."

Why is it important to know your strengths and your weaknesses? Take Mark, for example. He decided to triple his dairy production and thought that with the right equipment and a good account manager, everything would fall into place. He was dumbfounded when he realized that it was much easier to add cows to his operation on paper than in real life. Going from a business he ran with his wife to a business with three employees required different competencies, abilities and interests. Reality was far from what he had pictured.

"Had I known that human resources management was so difficult and that my job would change so drastically, I'm not sure I would have made the same decision," says Mark. "Human relations and management day in day out are not my strengths." Of course, Mark could work on these skills, but it is an increasingly accepted fact that in order to perform well, a person is best to work in an environment that relies on his strengths, not his weaknesses. We must adapt our work, our roles and our responsibilities to who we are, not the opposite.

For a long time, experts thought that with training, time, energy and motivation, anyone could excel at anything. Companies invested thousands of dollars to help employees and managers overcome their weaknesses. At best, by working very hard on

your weaknesses, you could become average in an area, but never outstanding.

By focusing on your strengths and your natural talents, however, you will excel. As a bonus, you will feel fulfilled and enjoy your work even more so.

Of course, we must be fully aware of our weaknesses. We must identify them, recognize them and understand how they can affect our business. We must surround ourselves with people whose strengths compensate for our weaknesses. This does not mean that we cannot improve ourselves. However, the success of our business should not rest on our weaknesses but on our natural talents. For example, if you are not a natural salesman, but prefer to work in administration, it would be best to hire someone else to look after the sales.

Working with our weaknesses rather than with our natural strengths and then expecting the best return on our investment would be like a farmer attempting to grow a certain crop in a soil that is inappropriate for that seed. Even if he fertilizes the soil, it will still only result in an average harvest.

Therefore, before undertaking a big project and making major changes that will affect your role, ask yourself if this change allows you to use your strengths and shifts the focus away from your weaknesses. As long as it does, you will be motivated, more resilient to stress, and happier. And, you will perform better in your business.

## Take the test:

In 15 minutes, make a list of your 10 strengths and 10 weaknesses.

If you stop after three strengths only, you are either being too modest or you don't know yourself. If you find many more weaknesses than strengths, your self-esteem suffers. Finally, if you only write down strengths and almost no weaknesses, you are quite sure of yourself, but it may be in your interest to ask people around you for feedback.

Do you really want to know yourself?

Ask five people who know you well and whom you hold in high regard to describe your main strengths and weaknesses. This is an excellent exercise in self-knowledge... and humility.

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