

# KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

How to figure out what you do best

**A**ll individuals have strengths and skills that they have honed to perfection through a multitude of experiences. But we may think less often about how to effectively use our organization's strategic strengths. Sure, we may have a list of our tactical strengths from a SWOT analysis. But we may not have taken the next step of seeing how those tactical strengths build strategic value.

We believe there are four organizational strengths that need to be in sync in order for you to build value. One of the following usually emerges as your primary organizational strength: vision, culture, customer focus or process.

## Vision

Organizations with vision as their strength are those that "see around corners."

They create the next new thing. Apple is an example of a company that shapes the future. For example, the leadership at Apple created a music environment for consumers that

few of us would have imagined. Does your organization have the resources and talent to recognize trends and consumer wants or needs that have yet to be uncovered? If so, this might be your primary organizational strength.



## Culture

Some organizations nurture a culture as their primary strength. Many of these companies are found on *Fortune's* Best Companies to Work For list. What do they have in common? They have a core belief that culture is the "secret sauce" necessary to create great customer interactions. They know what's important to their employees and screen them well before they join the company to ensure they fit. Are your customers drawn to your company because of your people? If so, culture may be your top strength.

## Customer focus

Nordstrom creates an environment in which knowledge of the customer is its primary organizational strength. It creates systems that allow employees to know their customers better than their competitors. Nordstrom also encourages its employees to adapt to the needs of their customers rather than having customers adapt to rigid company processes. Do you know your customers so well that you can anticipate their needs? If your customers believe this, this could be your strength. If you don't ever survey your customers, this probably isn't your organizational strength.

## Process

Finally, some organizations excel at maximizing processes. Are you like UPS, which not only excels at creating

efficiencies for itself but consults to help other organizations do the same? Are you adept at continuously implementing efficiencies? If so, process may be your primary organizational strength.

Of course, every organization has to perform well in each of these areas. The organizations we lead have to think about the future, build a workplace that people want to engage with fully, maximize efficiencies and understand customer needs. At the same time, we know that we can't be the best at each of them. One of those strengths will rise to the top based on our investment of time, money and effort. Even Michael Jordan couldn't be the best at everything.

How does knowing your primary organizational strength help? It's part of your guide for investing your time, money and talent. When faced with tough choices, you will know that, in order to keep your edge, you need to invest in your primary organizational strength. When tempted to cut back, just ask yourself if you would want Apple to reduce resources spent in product development or Nordstrom to cut back on training employees in the best way to meet customer needs.

Do you know your primary organizational strength? Are you investing the time, talent and money to "sharpen your saw" and continue to excel in that strength? <<

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