Play to Your Strengths &
Find “The Zone” in Your Career

by

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Athletes and artists often talk about being in “the zone.” The zone is that place of high productivity—when everything else around you falls away and you are extremely focused on the task at hand. From a work perspective, we think about that zone as a place of high engagement, and we believe that when you are there, you are not only highly productive, but also highly satisfied personally.

Last month we talked about the importance of doing work that is consistent with your values, but that’s only half of the equation. To find a career that is truly satisfying—one that puts you in “the zone” more often than not—it’s critical to know your strengths.

Thinking about your strengths at work is about asking yourself these simple questions: What can I do or what do I know? How do I get my work done?

What can I do or what do I know?
Job-specific skills and expertise answer the question, “What can I do or what do I know?” These are often associated with your particular profession or organization/role. To develop job-specific skills, consider the following career development tips:

- Attend industry events.
- Network with individuals or groups with similar interests.
- Subscribe to receive articles pertinent to your industry and read one to two each day to consistently build your knowledge of the space.
- Watch TED Talks and other videos about your industry and trends occurring within it.
- Write an article on the topic or industry at hand for your organization’s newsletter or an industry publication.
- Pursue an advanced degree, nanodegree, or certification.

How do I get my work done?
Common work skills and competencies answer the question, “How do I get my work done?” To develop common competencies and strengths at work:

- Discuss techniques with someone who excels at the skill; ask him or her to coach you.
- Review past events; ask yourself and those around you what you should do differently going forward to achieve a better result.
- Apply newly acquired skills or knowledge as soon as possible, and consider trying them out in a “safe” or low-risk environment first, perhaps outside of work with family or friends.
- Volunteer for projects or take on stretch goals that will challenge you to master the skill.
- Elevate your skills by coaching or mentoring others in that area.

Careers built on strengths are not only successful, but they are satisfying as well—satisfying for your employer who benefits from your contributions and satisfying for you as you use capabilities you enjoy and come somewhat easily to you. Doing work that helps you lean in to your strengths allows you to:

- Build upon your strengths even more.
- Receive recognition for your accomplishments (often leading to career progression).
- ENJOY your work.

When your values are being satisfied and you are playing to your strengths, you are more likely to enjoy your work, more likely to be engaged, and more likely to have more zone-like moments. Maximizing your time in “the zone” is the simplest way to love what you do.