

OPTIMIZING SELF WORKBOOK ACTIVITIES

PERSONAL STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

We all have strengths and weaknesses. Knowing and practicing our strengths and understanding and managing our weaknesses set the foundation of self-awareness. Here is a list of common strengths and weaknesses to help you brainstorm your own:

Common Strengths:

Courage

Resilience

Integrity

Empathy

Optimism

Perseverance

Kindness

Self-discipline

Creativity

Humility

Adaptability

Communication skills

Teamwork

Curiosity

Problem-solving skills

Open-mindedness

Dependability

Initiative

Common Weaknesses:

Procrastination

Impatience

Perfectionism

Lack of assertiveness

Overthinking

Difficulty delegating

Hesitancy to say no

Fear of conflict

Low self-confidence

Resistance to change

Inability to handle stress

Inattention to detail

Overcommitting

ACTIVITY

Imagine you are speaking with a high school senior. They must answer the college application question, "Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses" and ask for your response. Would you be able to quickly share your answers with confidence and ease?

Capture what you believe are three clear personal strengths of yours:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now, how would you name or describe your weaknesses?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

PROFESSIONAL STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

During most job interviews you will be asked to express your strengths as a professional as well as your limitations. Although we don't dwell on the reasons for our weaknesses in an interview, we still have to be able to name a few limitations. An interviewee must be able to articulate these with both clarity and humility. Let's practice this now.

ACTIVITY

Your strengths are characteristics that have typically enabled you to shine or to do highly effective work. Your weaknesses are deficiencies that you need to be aware of and manage.

Name three of your professional strengths:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Name three of your professional weaknesses:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

VALUES & BELIEFS

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The benefit of knowing your values and beliefs is that in any given situation you can ask and answer for yourself: Is this true for me or not—and why? Take a moment to think about values and beliefs that ground how you behave and decide. This reflective activity asks you to capture what more deeply drives or defines you.

ACTIVITY

List 4-5 of your values/beliefs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Reexamine these values/beliefs and rank them with number one being the most significant.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

If you could only live by two from this list, which two would they be and why?

- 1.
- 2.

How do these values inform you about yourself? Have you learned something new? Do you want to do something differently? Spend some time reflecting on your answers:

COMPETENCIES & PERSONALITY TRAITS

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This activity asks you to consider 1) the competencies you have developed either formally or informally through education, training, or experience and 2) the personality traits you possess, project, and demonstrate – either favorably or unfavorably. The objective is to encourage self-reflection so as to understand and appreciate yourself more consciously.

ACTIVITY 1:

You are applying for the job of your life. This role has everything you have hoped for in a career. This job excites you and fits your skill set. What are your top three competencies that will enable you to stand above other applicants?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ACTIVITY 2:

A national publication has asked you to write a story about yourself and how you have impacted the lives around you over the past ten years: work, community, and home. The interviewer asks you to name three personality traits that others find in you or would describe about you. What would those traits or characteristics be? Name two favorable personality traits and one unfavorable personality trait.

1. Favorable personality trait:
2. Favorable personality trait:
3. Unfavorable personality trait:

EXTERNAL FEEDBACK

FROM FAMILY & FRIENDS

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Self-awareness is dependent on the feedback and insights of others. How others experience or describe us should align with how we understand ourselves. The external feedback of family, friends, and colleagues is meant to complement your own internal inquiry. Essentially, you want to ask others what was just asked of you in the previous exercises.

ACTIVITY

Review the Strengths, Weaknesses, Values, Beliefs, Competencies, and Personality Traits you identified in the previous exercises. Next, identify 3-4 close friends or family members. You will be asking for their feedback on your responses. Write their names here:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Invite the people you identified above into a conversation on their perceptions of your responses in Chapter 2.

- Is there alignment?
- Is there validation?
- Is there an adjustment?
- Bottom line, do they see what you see, and if not, where and why?

EXTERNAL FEEDBACK

FROM COLLEAGUES & ASSOCIATES

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Self-awareness is dependent on the feedback and insights of others. How others experience or describe us should align with how we understand ourselves. The external feedback of professional colleagues and associates is meant to complement your own internal inquiry.

ACTIVITY 1:

Identify 3-4 trusted colleagues whose opinions and work you respect. Write their names here:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Now, send an email or text to each person asking for direct feedback or observations about their experience with you. Make it clear that you are open to any feedback and that this is your attempt to gain additional clarity on your self-awareness. If appropriate, you can also request this feedback during a 1:1 meeting. If this request is sent via email, give them up to three days to respond. Don't hesitate to send a reminder after the three days and give them another three days to respond.

Here is some sample language you might use: I am attempting to become more self-aware, and value you as a colleague and someone I respect. As a result, I am asking for your feedback on how you experience me professionally. I welcome some context or rationale, but that is not necessary. Thank you for your contribution to my development as a leader. Would you please send me:

1. An honest and thoughtful description of my three strengths.
2. An honest and unfiltered description of my three perceived three limitations.
3. What are 3-4 personality traits or qualities you associate with me?

ACTIVITY 2: Additional questions for more robust feedback from others

- *What do I do well?*
 - *Can you help me identify some behaviors or skills that work in my favor?*
- *What should I do less of as a leader?*
 - *Behaviors or practices that appear to be shortcomings of mine.*
- *As I work with others, how do you experience my overall tone, body language, and professional presence with others?*
- *How do I come across to you or others when I'm under pressure or stressed out?*
- *What is one personality trait I possess that you admire?*
- *What is my most significant opportunity for growth or something I could improve upon to become a more effective leader?*

ACTIVITY 3: Do a forensics on your last two performance reviews

If you feel these reviews were handled fairly and professionally, this could be another credible data point. Invite a trusted colleague or manager to review your last two performance reviews with you for information that you may not see or understand.

1. Note competencies and behaviors you excel at and competencies and behaviors where there is room for improvement.
2. Do your competencies and behaviors support or diminish the expectations and responsibilities associated with your role within the organization? For example, if your role requires strong presentation skills, is this an area of strength for you or an opportunity for growth? What kind of feedback have you received related to this skill?
3. Identify two new skill-building opportunities you will use between now and your next performance review. Write them here:
 -
 -

***(OPTIONAL) ACTIVITY 4: Engage in a formal 360 Review Process**

If you have the support of your manager, consider engaging in a formal 360 review process. Professionally, it is the most effective way to learn about yourself in terms of both competencies and behaviors that support you or limit you. It is a rewarding experience and an opportunity you will want to take advantage of if available.

- Depending on the size of your company, your HR department might have 360 resources or could assist in finding the right instrument for you.
- You could also hire an executive coach to activate and manage the process. This skilled coach would then debrief the 360 with you.

Any actions you may want to take regarding a potential 360 review? Note them here:

**Note: I would not recommend a 360 review process that is not guided by someone trained in the instrument and who knows how to debrief the results.*

YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

What people think and feel about us is another access point to becoming more self-aware. There must be a connection between what you assume about yourself and what others perceive of you. When these align, your sense of self-worth and your ability to contribute more empathically and generously becomes ever more real. The activity below will encourage you to assess both the cognitive and emotional side of your personal brand.

ACTIVITY 1: What do others think and feel about me

I believe the colleagues and leaders I work with currently think the following three things about me:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I believe the colleagues and leaders I work with feel the following three things about me:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How would you summarize what others think and feel about you in one statement?

People think about me: _____

People feel about me: _____

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- How do you feel about these descriptions?
- What do you want to leverage or maximize around these descriptions?
- What do you want to change about how you are understood?

ACTIVITY 2: Digital Brand Inventory - Personal Platforms

1. *Identify any personal (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Reddit) platforms you need to review:*

-
-
-

2. *Name 1-3 friends or family members to review your personal/social platforms:*

-
-
-

3. *On the personal/social platform, examine:*

- Pictures that may be construed negatively.
- Cartoon or political statements that may alienate others.
- Comments about other cultures or races that may seem offensive.
- Statements or quotes that reflect the best and the worst of you.
- Accuracy of your profile.

ACTIVITY 3: Digital Brand Inventory - Professional Platforms

1. *Identify any professional (e.g. LinkedIn, Xing, Slack) platforms you need to review:*

-
-
-

2. *Name 1-3 colleagues to review your professional platform(s):*

-
-
-

4. Ask your colleagues to consider the following:

- Is your professional history represented accurately?
- Have you clearly articulated your skill sets in the “About You” section?
- Does your photo accurately represent you?
- Do your previous jobs contain key metrics?
- Are any awards and certifications listed?
- Do you have 2-3 current recommendations or referrals from previous clients, colleagues, or leaders?

Not sure whether a particular post may be portrayed negatively or positively? When in doubt, remove it. Delete anything that does not align with what you want your personal brand to be. You may also want to add some new content that better captures you and how you want to be known.

ACTIVITY 4: Aspirational Brand

Identify three people within your personal and professional circles you cannot help but admire. They are people close to you (colleagues, family members, friends) who inspire you. Then, associate two qualities that each of them possesses that you might like to consider as part of your personal brand.

Person You Admire #1: _____

- Inspirational Attribute #1
- Inspirational Attribute #2

Person You Admire #2: _____

- Inspirational Attribute #1
- Inspirational Attribute #2

Person You Admire #3: _____

- Inspirational Attribute #1
- Inspirational Attribute #2

Next, identify three people you admire but who are further outside your network. They might be globally known (actors, athletes, musicians, speakers, etc.) or anyone outside your immediate circle of influence. Again, associate two qualities, skills, or professional practices of theirs that you might like to emulate.

Global Person You Admire #1: _____

- Aspirational Attribute #1
- Aspirational Attribute #2

Global Person 2 _____

- Aspirational Attribute #1
- Aspirational Attribute #2

Global Person 3 _____

- Aspirational Attribute #1
- Aspirational Attribute #2

From these activities, draw a circle around the key attributes that seem most significant. Which of these circled attributes speak the most to you? Which ones would you like to develop and improve upon for yourself? What will these do for curating your personal brand? Write 2-3 of those attributes below and reflect on the benefits of these attributes to yourself and others.

1. Aspirational Attribute:
 - Benefits:

2. Aspirational Attribute:
 - Benefits:

3. Aspirational Attribute:
 - Benefits:

ACTIVITY 5: How You Want to be Known by Your Manager

List six words, attributes, skills, or behaviors that you would like your manager to better know you by. Your goal is to enhance these qualities to improve how your manager and others perceive and experience you as a more capable, skilled, and emotionally intelligent leader.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

ACTIVITY 6: Identify an Opportunity for Professional Development

Name one professional development opportunity that will help you to increase a skill or behavior from above that will enhance your brand over time:

-

ACTIVITY 7: Your Personal Brand Statement

Now it's your turn to write down what captures your personal brand. Be honest. Be authentic. What you express for yourself could be highly favorable, lukewarm, or even unattractive. This brand statement will complement your ongoing commitment to self-awareness. It will give you new information that will enable you to make some choices to support a higher degree of intentionality, credibility, and even marketability.

My personal brand is captured in the following statement (likely 2-3 sentences):

Share your personal brand statement with 2-3 others for validation or possible adjustment.

YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Complementary to your personal brand, every leader should know and advocate for their Value Proposition. This is yet another method of optimizing yourself, but professionally framed. A value proposition typically appears in the form of a statement that differentiates you as a professional workplace leader and confirms “why” anyone would want to do business with you.

ACTIVITY 1: Your Particular Purpose

Begin to capture or describe the purpose of your work or career by reflecting on the following questions:

- Why does your work make a difference to you?

- Why does your work make a difference to the function or department you interface with?

- What is the purpose of your role, and how does it add value to your company and its customers?

ACTIVITY 2: Your Experiences, Accomplishments, and Skills

As you settle into your larger purpose, create a short list of factors or experiences that distinguish you from others. This is not the place to be humble. There is nothing egotistical about identifying the best parts of you. It is only arrogance when we flaunt them at the expense of others. If this feels daunting, ask two people you trust to think with you. Create the initial list together.

- Education and certifications:

- Developed skills or competencies:

- Internships or stretch opportunities:

- Professional awards or recognitions:

- Qualities or passions:

- Publications or promotions:

- Is there anything else that matters to you or that you are particularly proud of?

ACTIVITY 3: Why You?

Given what you have listed above, write a paragraph about the value you bring to your work or role. Do your responses from Activity 2 inform you about your unique capabilities? Describe why others would want to do business with you because of these unique factors or differentiators. There is no “right” way to state your value proposition. It just needs to be compelling and clarifying; it likely comes from the core of your being. Remember, you are capturing the “essence” of your value more than the specifics of any one accomplishment or experience.

- Initial free-form paragraph here:

ACTIVITY 4: Capturing Your Value Proposition

Now, with more specificity, let one of the following statements, or all of these statements, assist you in clearly defining why someone would want to work with you, hire you, or promote you.

- My differentiator as a leader is:

- I provide value to this role or company because of the following:

- What makes me uniquely qualified for the work I do is:

- My final expression of my value proposition is the following:

ACTIVITY 5: Share Your Value Proposition

Share your value proposition with 3-5 colleagues, including your manager, peers, and direct reports, if you have them. Ask them the following questions and give them up to five working days to respond.

- Does this statement about my value and unique competencies represent me well? Please share a few thoughts and feel free to tweak some of my language.
- What descriptors, competencies, or qualities may be missing?
- What would you say I do very well in my role that brings real value to the organization?

After receiving feedback from your colleagues, would you like to rephrase your value proposition? If so, write that new description here:

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

At its core, emotional intelligence is a person's ability to identify, understand, and manage their own emotions while also choosing to be attuned to the feelings of others. EQ requires that we know people are not disassociated from their emotions and can often be preoccupied with any number of feelings. Leaders must commit to understanding and empathizing with the whole person.

ACTIVITY 1: A Plan to Develop the Skill of Emotional Intelligence

Plan to commit to this skill development for a minimum of six months. Below are several suggested resources to help you grow your EQ:

1. A number of learning companies provide information, training, and research:
 - Talent Smart EQ www.talentsmarteq.com/
 - Mind Tools www.mindtools.com/
 - Daniel Goleman www.danielgoleman.info/
 - 6 Seconds, www.6seconds.org
2. The Harvard Business Review regularly publishes on EQ: <https://hbr.org/>
3. Take an emotional intelligence self-assessment. I use the EQi, Multi-Health Systems–Beyond Assessments <https://mhs.com/>, but there are a variety of online EQ assessments. You will likely need a trained professional to guide you through the results for comprehension and application.
4. Inquire with your company's HR or Learning & Development Department. Ask if they have some online EQ programs or if they provide training in a hybrid format. How can you participate in EQ skill building, and will they underwrite any associated costs?
5. Do a Google search for recently published articles or papers on emotional intelligence. Scores of options will appear. You'll have to be somewhat discriminating in what you choose to read. I favor *Inc. Magazine*, *Fast Company*, and *Fortune* simply because they are frequently published and are quick reads.
6. Consider engaging an executive coach to work with you primarily on emotional intelligence and setting goals for your practice of EQ. This is what I chose to do for rigor and accountability because it was my most significant opportunity for growth.

ACTIVITY 2: Capture Your Immediate Action Steps

Given the suggestions above and your own ideas, identify two emotional intelligence study actions you can see yourself making for a minimum six-month period.

1.

2.

Name two people you can invite to be accountability partners with and for you:

1.

2.

Given the good work you have just done, how will you optimize your self-awareness? Plan to use these new statements about yourself in a way that adds value to your person and profession. Good Luck.

Any other notes or actions you would like to add for yourself?