

Your Personal Vision SWOT



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A useful tool for investigating any conflict between your personal vision and that of the corporation is the traditional SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) exercise. This executive “SWOT on steroids” provides a structured way to look at the positive and negative drivers that influence your ability to gather, analyze, and synthesize ideas that come to you in the corner office. How you make decisions based on incoming information is a skill critical to choosing the right alternatives for the future of your company.

Schedule at least 30 minutes when you can shut the door and turn off the phones to conduct your personal-vision SWOT. On the desk, lay out four sheets of clean paper. Write your personal vision first and then your company vision underneath it on each piece of paper. Next, label the sheets Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. On the sheet labeled Strengths, quickly list all the good things about how your personal vision supports or is supported by the company vision. Do not take more than five minutes to do this. Next, on the paper marked Weaknesses, take five minutes to list any inconsistencies or risks apparent between your personal vision and that of the company.

Now, switch gears just a bit for the last two pages. Opportunities and Threats are external forces, just as Strengths and Weaknesses are internal. For the page marked Opportunities, write down any changes you foresee in the future of your company or organization that will positively impact your personal vision. Again, keep to the five-minute limit. You can do this multiple times, if you feel there are other thoughts just outside your grasp. Finally, take the remaining five minutes for the Threats page. What do you see coming down the corporate pike that will negatively impact or delay the advancement of your personal vision?

Once you have written on each of the four pages, sit up and take a deep breath. Do not attempt to resolve or even research anything you have written for at least 24 hours. Trust your subconscious to sort out the ideas a bit before you make any decisions on whether action is required as a result of

your personal SWOT. Schedule time to revisit your SWOT writings within the next 72 hours. At this second session identify which areas have the most benefit and the most risk for your career. Choose whether you wish to approach your leadership responsibilities in the company to maximize the benefits to your personal vision, or whether it is more appropriate to minimize the risks. Usually, if the company is tracking well to its vision and market, you will have more time to focus on the benefits to your personal vision. When the company needs your direct energies to short-circuit industry or market threats, the best approach is to focus clearly on corporate performance and, at best, minimize any damage the required decisions may cause to your personal future. With any luck, you are in a position to address a little of each.

Finding Your Right Spot

The responsibilities of the senior executive are advertised as strategic. In reality, the position holds a good deal of short-term decision making within the current setting. Preparing for the long-term is a moving target; our job is to scan the horizon for the best pathway for both ourselves and for our organizations.

Use your personal-vision SWOT as a reminder to support your own career while making the best decisions for the future of the company. Review your SWOT pages at least monthly, updating them as appropriate. Make the right decisions for the company first, then validate that the company's future is consistent with your own. If at some point you find that you and the organization are growing apart, start making plans for a smooth transition of power while you create another path for yourself.