

# Managing Oneself

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By Peter F. Drucker  
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## Highlights from the article:

Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves - their strengths, their values, and how they best perform.

Companies today aren't managing their employees' careers; knowledge workers must, effectively, be their own chief executive officers. It's up to you to carve out your place, to know when to change course, and to keep yourself engaged and productive during a work life that may span some 50 years. To do those things well, you'll need to cultivate a deep understanding of yourself - not only what your strengths and weaknesses are but also how you learn, how you work with others, what your values are, and where you can make the greatest contribution. Because only when you operate from strengths can you achieve true excellence.

## **What Are My Strengths?**

Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong. More often, people know what they are not good at - and even then more people are wrong than right. And yet, a person can perform only from strength. We need to know our strengths in order to know where we belong. The only way to discover your strengths is through feedback analysis.

Put your self where your strengths can produce results. Work on improving your strengths. Go to work on acquiring the skills and knowledge you need to fully realize your strengths.

It is equally essential to remedy your bad habits - the things you do or fail to do that inhibit your effectiveness and performance. Such habits will quickly show up in the feedback.

We all have a vast number of areas in which we have no talent or skill and little chance of becoming even mediocre. In those areas a person - and especially a knowledge worker - should not take on work, jobs, and assignments. One should waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. It takes far more energy and work to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence. And yet most people - especially most teachers and most organizations - concentrate on making incompetent performers into mediocre ones. Energy, resources, and time should go instead to making a competent person into a star performer.

## **How Do I Perform?**

Too many people work in ways that are not their ways, and that almost guarantees non-performance. How one performs is unique ... it is a matter of personality. A person's way of performing can be slightly modified, but it is unlikely to be completely changed - and certainly not easily. Just as people achieve results by doing what they are good at, they also achieve results by working in ways that they best perform.

A few common personality traits usually determine how a person performs. Here are a few questions to ask yourself ...

Am I a reader or a listener? Do you think things through or talk them out?

How do I learn? Schools everywhere are organized on the assumption that there is only one right way to learn and that it is the same way for everybody. But to be forced to learn the way a school teaches is sheer hell for students who learn differently. There are probably half a dozen different ways to learn and most people know how they learn best. Acting on this knowledge is the key to performance. Not acting on this knowledge condemns one to nonperformance.

Do I work well with people, or am I a loner? If I work well with people, in what relationship? As a subordinate? As a team member?

Do I produce results as a decision maker or as an adviser? A great many people perform best as advisers but cannot take the burden and pressure of making the decision. A good many other people, by contrast, need an adviser to force them to think; then they can make decisions and act on them with speed, self-confidence, and courage.

Do I perform well under stress, or do I need a highly structured and predictable environment?

Do I work best in a big organization or a small one?

The conclusion bears repeating: Do not try to change yourself - you are unlikely to succeed. But work hard to improve the ways you perform. And try not to take on work you cannot perform or will only perform poorly.

### **What are My Values?**

To work in an organization whose value system is unacceptable or incompatible with one's own condemns a person both to frustration and to nonperformance. For example, whether a business should be run for short-term results or with a focus on the long-term is a question of values. Organizations, like people, have values. To be effective in an organization, a person's values must be compatible with the organization's values. They do not need to be the same, but they must be close enough to coexist. Otherwise, the person will not only be frustrated but will not produce results.

What one does well - even very well and successfully - may not fit with one's value system. In that case, the work may not appear to be worth devoting one's life to (or even a substantial portion thereof). Values are and should be the ultimate test.

### **Where Do I Belong?**

Most people, especially highly gifted people, do not really know where they belong until they are well past their mid-twenties. Once people are clear on their strengths, where they best perform, and their values, they can and should decide where they belong. Or rather, they should be able to decide where they do not belong.

Successful careers are not planned. They develop when people are prepared for opportunities because they know their strengths, their method of work, and their values. Knowing where one belongs can transform an ordinary person - hardworking and competent but otherwise mediocre - into an outstanding performer.

### **What should I Contribute?**

Pursue ambitious, meaningful goals that make a difference to others.

## **Responsibility for Relationships**

To be effective, you have to know the strengths, the performance modes, and the values of your coworkers. That sounds obvious, but few people pay attention to it. Each coworker works in his or her own way, not your way. And each is entitled to work in his or her way. What matters is whether they perform and what their values are. As for how they perform - each is likely to do it differently. The first secret of effectiveness is to understand the people you work with and depend on so that you can make use of their strengths, their ways of working, and their values. Working relationships are as much based on the people as they are on the work.

Even people who understand the importance of taking responsibility for proactive communication in relationships often do not communicate sufficiently with their associates. Whenever someone goes to his or her associates and says, "This is what I am good at. This is how I work. These are my values. This is the contribution I plan to concentrate on and the results I should be expected to deliver," the response is always, "This is most helpful. But why didn't you tell me earlier?"

Organizations are no longer built on force but on trust. The existence of trust between people does not necessarily mean that they like one another. It means that they understand one another. Taking responsibility for relationships is therefore an absolute necessity. It is a duty.

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