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Canada's Association of Information Technology (IT) Professionals

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Career Tip: Change or Stagnate! -- Personal SWOT Analysis for Career Growth**Are you in career stagnation?**

I feel one of the hardest challenges for IT professionals is to reach beyond their comfort zone. Ask yourself, are you feeling too comfortable in your job? This can be a key indicator of stagnation, complacency, and career stall!

It's good to take ownership and control over your future. I believe there's a lot to be gained by incremental improvements on a continual basis. I often advise IT pros to assess their situation at least monthly and look at opportunities to move forward. Ask yourself, "How can I add and gain value and what do I need to do to grow?" This is the hard part since growth means discomfort. And discomfort encourages avoidance. Who hasn't avoided making difficult or challenging career moves? However, to me, this is a signal for an opportunity that can be missed.

In fact, if I'm feeling too comfortable, I know I'm not growing. There has to be a tool or formal process for doing a career check. I recommend doing a self SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is something companies should be doing regularly to ensure differentiation, and competitiveness. However, the same principles apply to career growth for an IT professional. It is something I talked about at the last career day conference where I was the keynote.

So what is a self-SWOT analysis?

You assess your own personal Strengths, Weakness-this is the SW part of (SW)OT. I recommend you do this assessment on three: People, Process, and Technology. How are your people skills: communication, speaking, collaboration, team-building, leadership, writing...to name a few? How are your business process abilities-do you understand the processes used in your industry and in your organization? What is the extent of your business knowledge: business planning, strategic planning, finance, business agility factors, governance, regulatory compliance, etc.? How about your grasp of relevant technologies and future ones? If you determine any shortfalls or gaps, then you need to strengthen them by taking on courses, projects, opportunities where these kinds of skills will be sharpened.

Then you also analyze external Opportunities and Threats-this is the OT portion of SW(OT). When I say external, I mean coming from the environment around you. External opportunities are events, trends, changes occurring that allow you to grow your career. For example, the trend towards online collaboration, SOA, and blogging is an opportunity. The new Microsoft technologies in Windows Server, Vista, Virtualization, Office 2007, Windows Live, are opportunities. The shift towards having a deeper understanding of business processes, overall business and industry knowledge is an opportunity. Large upcoming retirements in senior IT ranks are opportunities. Often opportunities can appear as threats to you since they involve change. However embracing change provides you with a career leadership opportunity.

Threats are disruptive forces that can stall your career. Threats can be technological, economic, political, environmental, ... there are no limits. Outsourcing in the technical specialist areas can be a threat that requires you to rethink where you should be focusing your career. Economic downturns in certain industry sectors is another threat. You should be looking to move into other verticals.

The key is to match your personal strengths against new external opportunities. If there are new opportunities that you can't take advantage of since you don't have the required skills, then the skills you lack are weaknesses. I recommend working on overcoming these weaknesses so they become strengths. You also should work on reducing or countering external threats. The prior shift to outsourcing of more commoditized jobs was a threat. To reduce this, you would acquire skills in areas that are difficult to outsource such as those that are mission critical to the organization. Typically, this would require taking a more business focus outlook. I should note that the trend towards outsourcing is reversing (in some areas) and moving these functions inside the organization, especially if they are critical to business agility.

A SWOT Example

Let me work through an example of a self-SWOT analysis. Mary as an IT pro is great at acquiring new skills since she has to stay current with constantly evolving IT trends. This is a strength. The movement towards a more business focus in IT roles is an external opportunity. Mary takes courses in business and works towards her CIPS I.S.P. to take advantage of this new opportunity. Mary is reluctant to interface with business workers and has difficulty in making presentations. This is a weakness so she starts taking courses in communications, and joins a speaking club where she can improve her skills. In her job when there's a request to make a presentation before business managers, she volunteers. Mary is applying her newly conquered weakness to these opportunities so she can gain recognition outside of her specialist domain. She also gets recognition before management that she want to move into more senior roles. 40% of IT specialist jobs are being eliminated. This is an eternal threat so Mary looks to broadening her skill set outside of the specialist area and starts studying business process management. Mary conducts this self-assessment every month and makes the necessary changes to move her closer to her goals.

I want to hear from you ... comment here or send me an e-mail as sibaraki@cips.ca

Thank you,
Stephen Ibaraki

Published Tuesday, June 13, 2006 1:17 PM by [cdnltmgr](#)
Filed Under: [Stephen Ibaraki](#), [Guest Bloggers](#), [Career Tips](#)

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Interesting Finds: June 13, 2006 PM edition

Wednesday, June 14, 2006 1:34 AM by [Jason Haley](#)

Interesting Finds: June 13, 2006 PM edition

Wednesday, June 14, 2006 1:35 AM by [Jason Haley](#)

re: Career Tip: Change or Stagnate! -- Personal SWOT Analysis for Career Growth

Wednesday, June 14, 2006 10:36 AM by [Jing Chen](#)

Hi, Stephen:

Thanks for combining the strategic planning model with personal development. I would just add one more element for individuals:

For individuals, there is one more ingredient that is often lacking for corporations - passion or interest. Often times, your passion or interest is directly tied to your strengths, but not always. The easiest path to success is when you combine your passion/interest, strengths with opportunities. This has been said enough so I will just stop here. :)

Additionally, it helps to have a mentor/coach to work with you on your SWOT analysis. This person can often provide some fresh and objective insight, and can also help you to be accountable with your action plans. To be honest, I don't have such a person, and would need to find one.

Thanks a lot Stephen for your postings. I like reading this forum everyday during meal time.

Cheers

Jing

re: Career Tip: Change or Stagnate! -- Personal SWOT Analysis for Career Growth

Wednesday, June 14, 2006 6:37 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#),
[FCIPS,I.S.P.](#), sibaraki@cips.ca

When doing a SWOT analysis, take a Word or Excel document, title it Strengths and then list your internal strengths in one column; in another column, put a weighting of each item's relative importance. Then sort on this weighting column so your strongest attributes are listed first. This forces you to recognize the value of your various strengths. Take another document and title it Weaknesses. List your weaknesses in one column; in an adjacent column, put a weighting of each item's relative importance. Then sort on this weighting column so your strongest weaknesses are listed first. This forces you to recognize and rank your weaknesses. Follow the same process for the external Opportunities and Threats: create a sheet for each; write your list in one column; record your weightings in another; sort so the highest weighted items are listed first. This again forces you to recognize and rank the external Opportunities and Threats.

Now create a GRID. Listing the Strengths and Weaknesses at the top and Opportunities and Threats along the left side. At the intersection of Strengths and Opportunities, you list what strengths can be used to take advantage of specific opportunities. At the intersection of Strengths and Threats, you list what strengths can be used to reduce specific threats. You repeat this process for Weaknesses. At the intersection of Weaknesses and Opportunities, you list what weaknesses you must overcome to take advantage of specific opportunities. At the intersection of Weaknesses and Threats, you list what weaknesses you must overcome to reduce specific threats.

By formalizing the process, you create a vehicle for incremental improvements and continual change that will generate many career successes.

Cheers,
Stephen Ibaraki, FCIPS, ISP

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