***Personal Product Development***

Have you ever asked the question “What will it take to achieve my ultimate career goals or even get to the next level in my career?” We all have at one time or another wondered how to advance our career or address that area of development that may be preventing us from achieving our goals. To really focus on your development and advance your career, you need to know yourself better than anyone else and to be able to clearly and concisely present that knowledge to others in both verbal and written form. This article will help to guide you through the very personal process of reflecting upon strengths and development needs so that you may use that self-reflection to create a solid foundation for your future success.

It is not an easy task to come to the realization that with every day and with every action we must seek to improve upon that which we just achieved. This brings to mind something Abraham Lincoln said, “I do not like that person very much, I must get to know them better”. If you think about his statement, is your next thought that perhaps I need to look at myself and who I am, what I do, how I do it and why. Do I like who I see? Do I really know myself well and have I continued to improve who I am? Have I focused on or ignored the development of my product…me? Fast forward to the days of internet quick access, training programs for just about anything and an increasing and needed focus on talent development. We have the benefit of so many options. However, consider this, “Will that benefit and the potential it should develop be sustained and deliver a maximum ROI, if the foundation upon which it is built is not as strong as it should be? In case you are wondering, you are that foundation and you must develop the complete product you are selling every day as you grow in your career. If you choose to simply move forward without this understanding you need not ask why you have not achieved your potential, the answer will likely be that you did not get to know yourself better.

It is imperative that in order to realize your potential and truly emerge as an individual, a member of a team or as a leader, that you make the effort to strengthen your product and your foundation in order to maximize the opportunities and potential that is within each of you. The recommendation is to engage in a very intrusive, difficult yet very simple process to re-connect with your product, truly identify what you do well and what you need to develop and why. If embraced completely, this will not be easy because with each question, you should think of several more until you have exhausted that topic or issue. Once you have achieved that understanding, your foundation is stronger, your product is more compelling and your personal ROI will be reflected in your relationships, your potential and in your career. The Personal Product Development Process is a very simple yet revealing process designed to re-connect you with all aspects of your career to date. It is a basic process of applying the very fundamental questions of who, what, when, where, why and how to every aspect of your professional development or career beginning with your education.

The result will be a stronger foundation upon which to build sustained results from training and development, prepare a better resume or “sales document”, aid in developing your relationships and capability to respond to any development opportunities or interview better that your competition. A key factor to the success of this intrusive review is **your complete objectivity and willingness to address:**

* *The* ***successes*** *in each role, company, and career highlight (i.e. M&A, sales, promotions, contract negotiations, etc.)What did you learn? How did it affect future decisions? Etc…*
* *The* ***failures*** *or shortfalls in each role, company, etc…we all have them! What was it? Was it important? How did you overcome it? What did you learn? Why? Etc…*
* ***Key business relationships*** *(or political environment) that contributed to your success, shortfall or even loss of position. What did you learn? Why is it important? How has it affected your career? Etc...*

This is a critical step that really provides you with the methodology to get in touch with your “product” (you) and the value you bring. This process is critical to your self-assessment and should be completed to provide a complete diagnosis insight into the following:

* ***Setting and delivering priorities*** *– demonstrate your ability as a critical thinker and ensures you are pursuing the correct options for you at this stage of your life and career. This is a process that should become a habit that is continually reinforced and often leads to stronger performance.*
* ***Training and Development*** *– establishes that strong foundation based on a thorough and more complete understanding of your “product” and how to make it better. Most programs do not consider this; however, if you make the effort the ROI will increase and should be sustained. This is entirely up to you to learn and ensure that this investment is sustained and continually reinforced.*
* ***Networking facilitation****- the ability to address any number of situations from a strong knowledge base that will show your integrity, credibility and authenticity. You will build relationships and strengthen your network. Being in touch with who you are, knowing your product and the value you bring to relationships will make you a better communicator and memorable to others.*
* ***Resume preparation*** *– a metrics driven resume will be the result in which the ROI of “buying your product” is well stated. Remember your resume is your sales document the purpose of which is to highlight capabilities to the level that any reviewer will be compelled to call. Step back, review your resume, have someone close to you review it. If you or they would want to learn more than move forward, if not, change it until the answer is definitely yes!*
* ***Interview preparation****- You can answer any question regarding your career, identify strengths, weaknesses and what you have learned credibly without hesitation. In the interview process it may not be the strongest candidate on paper who wins the interview, it is more often than not the best prepared candidate who will win. Remember when filling a role, a company is looking for the best candidate overall, assuming the technical skills are there, it may get down to cultural fit.*

*Remember you also want to ensure it is the right next move and by knowing your product, you will make the right decision about the next role because you have a stronger appreciation for what is really best for you. Interviews should always be a give and take.*

Your very personal product development process will be built by you from the information you have as you do your own self-assessment as well as answering the following set of questions with regard to your education and career history. Please note that these questions should be asked as you examine your career and with each change in your career. This information will form the basis for a better grasp of your product; strengthen the foundation for your future development, resume or continuous improvement. It will also be useful when faced with a full assessment, situational or behavioral based assessments of interviews.

Please note that these questions are not all inclusive and can and should be amended to address your unique circumstances. With each answer, it is not expected that other questions will come to mind, answer them until you have a complete answer. Remember this process is only as effective as you decide it should be. These questions are not an all- inclusive list so please expand the list to address your unique career and development. It is also prudent to ask a trusted adviser for their input. Keep all your notes as their value will never diminish if done objectively and openly. Always ask HOW and WHY...as deeply and often as needed…until you are 100% satisfied…and then…do it again.

**EXPERIENCE: Please follow this exercise for each position, group of positions and companies in your career.**

What was the name of your employer?

What did the company do*? (Consider one statement and include size of company, industry, market, location, etc.)If there is parent company use that description as cover and then provide detail of your particular segment, division, etc.*

What was your job title? Why did you choose that company?

How did you come to work for company?

When were you with the company? How long? Why so short a period? (If applicable)

You had multiple jobs in company? Why were you chosen? How did you drive results?

What were your responsibilities?

What skills were required to do your job effectively?

How did you make a difference? Why? Be real here…even if not the best answer

What motivated you in your jobs? What did you like most? Why?

What were your accomplishments? Think this through and develop list.

* Metrics are key
* Focus on meaningful statements considering quantity, quality, cost savings, revenue and EBITDA, ROI, Productivity, P&L, etc.
* Pass the “ does it matter test” i.e. Created a new marketing plan…*Not enough*, need to identify market, impact on market share, contribution, etc…must be MEASURABLE
* If your reaction is “so what” then so will the readers. Need to complete the “ value” of each accomplishment
* What didn’t you do well? What did you learn from the experience? Be honest; use self-assessment here as well. This is strong interview prep although not used in resume. Critical question in identifying ability to move forward, work under pressure, etc.
* KEY: Turn the answer into a positive spin that can be supported by examples. Think PMA (N. Hill)
* What was the impact on company, role and career?
* How did it effect you at the company?
* Why did you leave for another role?
* What was your salary? Total compensation?
* What are you missing about this part of your career?
* What was the culture like at the company? How did it affect you?

**CRITICAL BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS**

* Who were the individuals with whom you worked closely and who had a material effect on your career at each company?
* What is your status? Trusted colleague? Advisor? Peer?
* What did you learn from the relationship?
* What would you do differently? Why? Difference s/t and l/t?
* How did it affect your relationships in later roles?
* How do you react in a politically infused situation? How does adversity affect your interactions? What would you do differently?
* How has it affected your career? Do you like the answer? No...then what?; YES…how can you leverage?

**EDUCATION: (Undergraduate and Graduate School)**

* Did you go to college? Why? What was the basis for selection?
* What was your major in college? Why? Did you change majors? Why? Do you use it today? If not, with some update, can or should you?
* Where did you go to school? (If you did not attend school, why not?)
* Why did you choose the school?
* When did you attend? When did you graduate? Always good to list so as not to be misinterpreted, although you may hear different advice here.
* How were your grades?

**Additional Consideration: (Interviews mostly)**

* What were your favorite subjects? Why?
* How did you pay for school?
* What extracurricular activities were you involved in at school? Sports? Clubs? Volunteer? Student Government? Greek organizations- social or service? Do you continue at some level today?
* What are some of your key memories from college? Since leaving school and invested in or attended development opportunities? Together, what is the impact on who you are today?
* How do you feel your non-academic involvement at school contributed to your choices upon graduation?
* Graduate school? – **start over again with above questions**.

If after going through the process above you do not have a better understanding then carefully review your output and if needed, continue to ask the questions until you have the answers that you require to move forward. Every answer should be understood as to “how and why” the information has contributed to where you are today. Review this information with your spouse, partner or trusted advisor and listen to their feedback. This may not be easy but ask for and process their candid feedback and use it to cement that foundation. If you have a coach, ask them about taking formal assessments and if the results may be useful at this time to help you resolve any additional questions or doubts you may have.

The key to benefiting from this process is embracing it with complete objectivity about your successes, failures and relationships to establish a baseline for and/or reconnect with your “product” (you). Maintaining this level of candor throughout the entire process is critical to your self-assessment and embracing this methodology will provide you with complete insight into the value you bring and where you want your journey to take you. Every day is an opportunity to grow stronger with greater purpose and by your own design, greater results. Establish a time to review and continue to refine the outcome of this process, use this as your very personal review of where you are, why you are there and how can you continue to improve and strengthen your product and by default, your performance and marketability.

Regardless of whether you are vying for that next promotion, anticipating a career change, in transition or simply expanding your network, you should be building and reinforcing that strong foundation. Use your new found knowledge and appreciation for “who you are” to build the foundation that will present the best value that you bring and give you the confidence to make a great presentation both verbally and in writing every time. Plato is quoted, “the first and best victory is conquering self”. To follow that thought, knowing your product will give the edge to achieve your ultimate victory giving you the confidence to move forward regardless of where you are today. You decide what is next and why and how will you achieve that goal.