

SWOT ANALYSIS FOR CAREER PLANNING

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Choosing a career is a difficult matter in itself! Adding to this, the opinions of friends and parents, may make you almost caught up in a confusing situation where making a decision is definitely *onerous* if not *unattainable*. It should be kept in mind that the decision for each individual is different, since everyone is a distinct individual. Choosing a career is, in fact a multi-step process. It involves gathering information on a number of things, the first being your core inner SELF, followed by other peripherals of your personality such as your *aptitude* and *attitude*, *passions* and *aversions*, *acumen* and *adroitness*. This gathering of information is more of a sort of *soul searching contemplation* than any *research based investigation*. You can avoid this baffling situation by devising a *tool* for strategic planning process to plan your career the way you want. However one such tool could be adopting technique of SWOT analysis for career planning.

SWOT, the acronym of STRENGTH, WEAKNESS, OPPORTUNITY & THREAT, is an analysis that focuses on the *internal* and *external* environments, examining *strengths* and *weaknesses* in the internal environment and *opportunities* and *threats* in the external environment. Imagine your SWOT analysis to be structured like the table below:

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SWOT Analysis

INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● STRENGTH ● OPPORTUNITIES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WEAKNESS ● THREATS

In order to construct your own SWOT analysis and to set a course for your career planning, you could start off by examining your current situation. What are your strengths and weaknesses? How can you *capitalize* on your *strengths* and *overcome* your *weaknesses*? What are the external opportunities and threats in your chosen career field?

INTERNAL

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal positive aspects that are under control and upon which you may capitalize in planning ● Work Experience ● Education, including value-added features ● Strong technical knowledge within your field (e.g. hardware, software, programming languages) ● Specific transferable skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, leadership skills) ● Personal characteristics (e.g., strong work ethic, self-discipline, ability to work under pressure, creativity, optimism, or a high level of energy) ● Good contacts/successful networking ● Intercommunication with professional organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal negative aspects that are under your control and that you may plan to improve ● Lack of Work Experience ● Low education, Lack of goals, lack of self-knowledge, lack of specific job knowledge ● Weak technical knowledge ● Weak skills (leadership, interpersonal, communication, teamwork) Weak job-hunting skills ● Negative personal characteristics (e.g., poor work ethic, lack of discipline, lack of motivation, indecisiveness, shyness, too emotional) ● Isolation, no good contacts or networking ● No communication with professional organizations

EXTERNAL

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive external conditions that you do not have control on but of which you can plan to take advantage. ● Positive trends in your field that will create more jobs (e.g., growth, globalization, technological advances). ● Opportunities you could have in the field by enhancing your education. ● Field is particularly in need of your set of skills. ● Opportunities you could have through greater self-knowledge, more specific job goals. ● Opportunities for advancement in your field. ● Opportunities for professional development in your field. ● Career path you've chosen provides unique opportunities. ● Wide scope of advancement due to geographical aspects that may work in your favour. ● Strong network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative external conditions that you do not have control on but the effect of which you may be able to lessen. ● Negative trends in your field that diminish jobs (downsizing, obsolescence). ● Competition from your associate of college graduates. ● Competitors with superior skills, experience, knowledge. ● Competitors with better job-hunting skills than you ● Competitors who went to schools with better reputations. ● Obstacles in your way (e.g., lack of the advanced education/training you need to take advantage of opportunities). ● Limited advancement in your field, advancement is cut-throat and competitive. ● Limited professional development in your field, so it's hard to stay marketable ● Companies are not hiring people with your major/degree.

- Explore your own self-perception of your strengths, but also put yourself inside a prospective employer's head as you consider your strong points. Avoid false modesty, but also be earnestly honest and realistic with yourself. Start out by simply making a list of words that describe you; the strengths and weaknesses of your personality.

- One of your greatest strengths can be your keenness to the work you do. Some people know from an early age what kind of work will make them happy. For others, *nailing down* the self-knowledge that leads to career fulfillment comes from a process of exploring interests, skills, personality, learning style, values and sometimes their current *needs*!
- In assessing your weaknesses, think about what the prospective employers might consider to be the areas you could improve upon. Facing your frailties now can give you a huge head start in career planning later!
- As human beings, we find it relatively difficult to identify the areas where we are weak. But this assessment helps to identify areas where you may need to improvise. If you identify a skill that you know is required in your chosen field, but unfortunately you are weak in that particular area, what you need is just to take immediate steps to first rectifying and then strengthening those weak areas. Past performance appraisals and even your grades and teachers' comments from school can provide valuable feedback.

Having analyzed your strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities, also try to analyze how to capitalize on your strengths and minimize or for that matter, eliminate your weaknesses to some extent. Next, you could start planning on how to market yourself, your acumen, your area of expertise. You could adopt the following three-step process to strategize your self-marketing process:

- **Determining objectives.**
- **Developing marketing strategies.**
- **Strategizing action plans.**

Determining Objectives — It is of paramount importance that you define your career objectives first. You could do this just by pondering over some questions as: What are the professions that give you a sort of *kick*? What are the areas where you could use the skills that just come inherently to you? What is your dream (ideal) job upon completion of your studies (or the job you would like to transit to from your current job)? What are some other positions/areas (second alternative) that you could accept at least for a time being if not in a long run? What is your career goal five years down the line?

Developing Marketing Strategies —Having determined your career objectives you need to make a broad marketing strategy, or to be more specific your USP (unique selling proposition), for attaining your career objectives. What are the sectors, companies or organizations you're going to target to obtain your objectives—

your dream job? What strategy would you adopt to approach the recruiters of those dream jobs? How will you communicate with these firms? The strategies you identify should utilize all of the resources available to you, such as your personal network, services provided by professional consultancies or a powerful recommendation from a mentor.

Strategizing Action Plans — According to marketing principles, your marketing strategies should be transformed into specific action plans that answer a number of questions, including: What should be your first step towards attaining the determined objective? What should be the appropriate time to execute your plan of action? What resources could be brought to use for bringing about the desired results? Your key task here would be setting specific timetables and deadlines for getting your *planned strategy* translated into *plan of action* and thus attaining determined objective in a stipulated time period.