

First, Get Good. Then, Get Better!

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Is that a recipe for success? What do you think? A lot of people follow this approach.

First, get good. Then, get better. Many organizations put time, energy, and dollars into “professional development.” Employees are encouraged to build skills in whatever generates the product or service offered to the organization’s customers. Architects and engineers study construction methods. Pizza makers study dietary preferences. Sales people are taught closing techniques.

First, get good. This alone is quite a challenge. However, being good, according to Marcus Buckingham, is not The One Thing You Need to Know About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success.

Hard work, education, and taking risks may help, but none of those are the “one thing” either. Your age, gender, race, or religion won’t sustain your success. Neither will personality, deep interest, or sheer talent!

Buckingham defines “sustained success” as “making the greatest possible impact over the longest period of time.” Simply put, are you able to make a significant contribution and sustain it?

To do that, you’ve definitely got to be good. Using your natural talents, you’ve got to discipline yourself to learn the necessary role-specific skills. But that’s not enough.

Since ours is a competitive world, “good” is always relative. You’ve got to maintain a comparative advantage over everyone else. That means if you just stay good, the competition passes you!

So, you’ve no choice but to continually get better. You’ve got to push the limits of what the best contributors in your field are able to provide. And with the rapid change typical of today’s society, that’s not easy. As Buckingham states, surviving in these times requires “that you be resilient, flexible, open to learning, innovative, confident, optimistic, and, all the while, sufficiently devoid of stress to maintain your energy for the long haul!” Whew!

How does one keep winning when the rules and standards are constantly changing? Even if you seek out the best mentors, read the latest self-help books, and use only the right tactics, you may not stand out from the crowd. The “one thing” has to focus your energies on your unique interests, experiences, and strengths that differentiate you from all the rest.

So how about finding your flaws and fixing them? For thirty years, I’ve found this approach to be pretty typical thinking. Do you presume that your greatest room for growth is in your weakest areas? Buckingham refutes this contention in his previous book, Now, Discover Your Strengths.

Please realize that there’s nothing damaging about any of the above strategies. They just haven’t yet hit on the “one thing” that Buckingham claims will both assure success and sustain it.

Maybe you should focus on your strengths and work to enhance them. You’ll feel energized and challenged, setting high goals and achieving them. You’ll be in great demand! You’ll find more opportunities to serve than there is time in a day. You’ll attract all kinds of potential activities, more than you could ever fulfill. That sounds pretty intriguing, doesn’t it? Sure, but....

You’ll soon feel burdened and resentful at the growing demands on your time. You’ll quickly regret the constant clamor for more of your attention, accompanied by reduced levels of satisfaction!

Okay, Dennis, so what’s the solution? What is Buckingham’s “one thing” for sustained individual success?

Come back next week and I’ll tell you!

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