



Discovering Your Natural Strengths... Focusing on Your Unique Ability

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Are you aware of your natural strengths? Your Unique Ability? If so, are you harnessing this talent in synergistic ways to maximize your performance?

A number of years ago, I had the good fortune of being introduced to Dan Sullivan, Founder & President of The Strategic Coach (www.strategiccoach.com) – an organization focused on helping entrepreneurs reach new levels of success and happiness. The Strategic Coach Program has played an important role in the way I think, act and feel about my business and personal life as well as how I mentor others. A key principle of Dan's teachings is the concept of Unique Ability – a way of describing a powerful force that is at the very core of who you are as an individual. Every person who has ever lived has a Unique Ability, though most people are not conscious of it. Because of this lack of awareness, these people have not experienced the infinite rewards that come from being able to harness and develop their natural talents and pursue their passions wholeheartedly. The more you are able to recognize your Unique Ability and shape your life around it, the more freedom, success and happiness you will experience.

Your Unique Ability has four characteristics:

1. A superior ability that other people notice and value
2. Love doing it and want to do it as much as possible
3. Energizing for you and others around you
4. You keep getting better, never running out of possibilities for further improvement

Most individuals are not able to identify their Unique Ability, let alone concentrate on it, because they are trapped by childhood training. We learn at a young age that the secret to success in life is working on our weaknesses. Unfortunately, it is the focus on weaknesses that results in a sense of deficiency, failure and guilt. As a result, our lives are filled with frustration, wasted potential and missed opportunity. Letting go of these “lack of abilities” to focus on the things you love is the secret to maximizing your performance.

Through Dan Sullivan’s teaching, we learn that all people spend their lives in four zones of activity – incompetence, competence, excellence and Unique Ability.

Incompetent Activities: These represent tasks that make you feel frustrated and stressed because you are just not good at them. What incompetent activities would you be happy to get rid of? What incompetent tasks drain your confidence?

Competent Activities: These are activities you are merely adequate at conducting. There are a lot of other people who could do these tasks with greater success and less effort than you. It is competent activities that create boredom in your life.

Excellent Activities: You have superior skill in conducting these activities. People can count on you to accomplish these tasks. You may have even developed a reputation for your capability in these areas. However, deep down, you do not have a burning passion for these activities. Even with all of the external positive reinforcement, these activities do not fuel your passion.

Unique Ability Activities: These are the activities that create energy and enthusiasm. When you engage in them, you bubble over with excitement. You could do these activities all day long and keep going. They give you endless possibilities for improvement, no matter how skilled you are at them.

Your success or failure in life depends upon how much time you spend in each of the zones. Unsuccessful people spend most of their time in the incompetent zone. Successful people spend most of their time in zones of competence and excellence. And, “geniuses” – those who achieve extraordinary results during their lives – spend almost all of their lives in the Unique Ability Zone.

Discovering Your Unique Ability

How do you discover your Unique Ability? How do you systematically identify activities that consume your life and drain your energy? How do you identify tasks that fill your bucket with excitement, passion and purpose? I would like to suggest that you begin with the Kolbe A Index™ (www.kolbe.com). Developed by Kathy Kolbe, the Index is a proven and reliable tool to assess your instinctive and natural approach to creative problem solving. It is unique from any other mental measurement tool because there are no right or wrong or good or bad answers.

Kolbe's definition of success is the freedom to be yourself – to appreciate your instinctive talents and harness these talents in synergistic ways to drive productivity. The ability to understand your natural talents – especially your Unique Ability – will allow you to be highly motivated, creative and focused. Research substantiates that human instinct is the power behind actions. It is the source of mental or conative energy. Historically, assessment tools have measured cognitive (IQ) and the affective (personality) parts of the mind. While these tools are helpful in selecting, training and managing people, they miss instinctive talents. Understanding instincts, combined with intelligence and personality, will dramatically help you as you move forward in your career.

Cognitive	Conative	Affective
<i>Thinking</i>	<i>Doing</i>	<i>Feeling</i>
IQ	Drive	Desires
Skills	Instinct	Motivation
Reason	Necessity	Attitudes
Knowledge	Mental Energy	Preferences
Experience	Innate Force	Emotions
Education	Talents	Values

The Kolbe A Index™ is focused on your natural advantage – the degree of intensity in each of the following action modes.

- **Fact Finder** The way one gathers and shares information
- **Follow Through** The way one sorts or stores information
- **Quick Start** The way one deals with risk and uncertainty
- **Implementer** The way we handle space and tangible solutions

You have 100% of your mental energy and creativity distributed across the action modes listed above. A corresponding number from 1 to 10 in the Kolbe A Index™ determines your mode of operation or *modus operandi* (MO). As you discover your unique MO, you begin to understand and appreciate your instinctive or natural ways in taking action. The first, and most important, step is discovering your Unique Ability. Abraham Maslow, the guru of self actualization discovered that each person seeks “to be true to his or her own nature, to trust him or herself, to be authentic, spontaneous, honestly expressive, to look for sources in his or her actions”.

I would like to suggest a six step process in helping you discover your Unique Ability:

1. **Unique Ability Question:** Begin by asking yourself what activities give you energy, purpose and passion? You may also wish to consider asking other people who know you the same question.
2. **The Kolbe A Index™:** It will allow you to understand your natural and instinctive talents.
3. **Unique Ability Habits:** These are the things that you do automatically to produce your best results. You develop these habits over the course of your lifetime. Begin by listing the habits. Pick the ones that reflect your core values.
4. **Unique Ability Statement:** Consider expressing your Unique Ability in one sentence. Begin with words such as “My Unique Ability is characterized by my superior ability to ...”
5. **Unique Ability Future:** Envision yourself at some point in the future spending 100% of your time on your Unique Ability. This skill of visioning is a powerful process of becoming clear about your ideal future. Visioning is understood and appreciated by top athletes, entertainers and successful people in all walks of life. Visioning your Unique Ability will give you a sense of clarity, confidence, purpose and passion.
6. **Unique Ability Goal Setting:** Goal setting is a powerful process of becoming clear about your ideal future, designing an action plan to get there, launching into action and persisting until you reach your destination. This final step of the Unique Ability process is crucial.

Focus on Your Uniqueness – Delegate Everything Else.

Through The Strategic Coach program, I learned that successful entrepreneurs remain focused totally on their Unique Ability and delegate everything else. These individuals delegate work to others who possess a Unique Ability in those areas. There are people sitting around you today whose Unique Abilities differ from yours. Tasks that drain your energy, fill the bucket for them.

If you are frustrated, bored and losing energy, it is imperative that you discover your natural strengths...your Unique Ability. Socrates once said “Know thyself.” Good luck!

About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America." Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.