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Stop Overdoing Your Strengths

Key ideas from the [Harvard Business Review](#) article By Robert E. Kaplan, Robert B. Kaiser

The Idea in Brief

Taken too far, your strengths can become weaknesses.

Consider two leadership strengths: forcefulness (driving your team hard) and consensus-building (getting everyone's agreement on decisions). Overdo forcefulness, and your team's productivity may improve but its morale will weaken, eventually undercutting productivity. Overdo consensus-building, and morale may rise but productivity might ultimately suffer (for instance, decisions take too long), eventually eroding morale.

How to strike a balance? First, seek evidence that you're overusing particular strengths. Extremely high ratings on a 360-degree feedback report may offer clues. Then, redirect your strengths. For example, one executive who was seen by his colleagues as overly aggressive applied his inherent determination to himself--to stop coming on so strong.

The Idea in Practice

Kaplan and Kaiser offer these suggestions for rebalancing your strengths:

Acknowledge Your Overused Strengths

It's hard to spot strengths you're overdoing. The following practices can help:

- When coworkers give you the highest rating on a leadership behavior, this may indicate you're taking the behavior too far. 360-degree feedback doesn't capture overkill. Review the highest ratings on your most recent 360-degree report and ask yourself, "Is this *too* much of a good thing?"
- Ask coworkers three questions: "What should I do more? What should I do less? What should I continue unchanged?"
- Ask yourself, "Do I privately pride myself on being superior to other leaders in any way?" If so, this is precisely the attribute you're at risk of overdoing.
- If you're still not sure, ask your spouse or partner whether you're overdoing any strengths.

Redirect Your Strengths

Try to balance the strengths you're overdoing by doing a bit more of their opposite.

A manager's strong preference for consensus building made for overly long meetings that tried her team's patience. Beyond a certain point, they wanted her to step in and decide. When she stopped shooting for agreement among the entire team and began settling for eight out of ten instead, her meetings became much more productive. The people who didn't agree accepted the majority's opinion and appreciated that their views had been considered. The entire team was glad that meetings no longer took so much time from their day.

- [Purchase the full-length Harvard Business Review article here.](#)
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HBR Article Collection

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When top executives stumble, they risk taking their companies down with them. How can you stay steady on your feet, so you keep delivering high-quality leadership? Feedback. But getting feedback on your own performance isn't easy. The higher you climb on the corporate ladder, the harder it is to get candid input from colleagues uneasy about criticizing a peer. Few direct reports feel safe telling the boss uncomfortable truths about his performance. And members of the board often focus exclusively on executives' ability to deliver financial results, so directors may ignore additional essential skills of leadership, such as strategy execution and talent management. For all these reasons, you'll have to proactively generate the information you need to spot and address weak areas. For example, set up a formal process for board members to evaluate you on all the skills crucial to exceptional leadership. And learn how to identify problematic behaviors in yourself--so you can take action immediately. Take charge in these ways, and you tackle your weaknesses before they can tackle you.

[Fear of Feedback](#)

Harvard Business Review

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by Jay M. Jackman, Myra H. Strober

Nobody likes performance reviews. Subordinates are terrified they'll hear nothing but criticism. Bosses, for their part, think their direct reports will respond to even the mildest criticism with

stonewalling, anger, or tears. The result? Everyone keeps quiet and says as little as possible. That's unfortunate, because most people need help figuring out how they can improve their performance and advance their careers. This fear of feedback doesn't come into play just during annual reviews. At least half the executives with whom the authors have worked never ask for feedback. People avoid the truth and instead try to guess what their bosses are thinking. Fears and assumptions about feedback often manifest themselves in psychologically maladaptive behaviors such as procrastination, denial, brooding, jealousy, and self-sabotage. But there's hope, say the authors. Those who learn adaptive techniques can free themselves from these destructive responses. They'll be able to deal with feedback better if they acknowledge negative emotions, reframe fear and criticism constructively, develop realistic goals, create support systems, and reward themselves for achievements along the way. The authors take you through four manageable steps for doing just that: self-assessment, external assessment, absorbing the feedback, and taking action toward change.

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Robert B. Kaiser, based in Greensboro, North Carolina, are partners at the leadership-consulting firm Kaplan DeVries. They are the authors of *The Versatile Leader: Make the Most of Your Strengths--Without Overdoing It* (Pfeiffer, 2006) and have recently been awarded a patent for their 360 tool, the Leadership Versatility Index.

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