

By Tom Bengtson, Publisher

Know your strengths

If you work in a small shop like I do, you know you spend most of your time putting out fires – that is, handling day-to-day obligations. It is very difficult for leaders in smaller enterprises to make time for visioning. But instinctively we know it is important. The leader of every company, whether large or small, must set aside time for contemplation. If you don't take time to visualize the future, you may never see it at all. If you can't see where you are going, you will never get anywhere.

The most important thing for any leader to know is self. If you don't know who you are, you will never be able to significantly help anyone, including employees and customers.

A leader doesn't have to be good at everything but it sure helps if he or she knows his/her strengths and weaknesses. That way, strengths can be leveraged and compensation can be made for weaknesses.

I recently came across a book published by the Gallup organization in 2008 called "Strengths Based Leadership: Great leaders, teams and why people follow," by Tom Rath and Barry Conchie. Using results from thousands of interviews, the authors explain why it makes sense to invest in your strengths. The book is 266 pages but you only need to read the first 95 pages to get the message.

Each copy of Strengths Based Leadership provides a unique code that gives the reader access to a test-taking web site where your strengths can be identified. The test poses nearly 200 questions, allowing 20 seconds for each response. Questions typically pose two ideas and require the respondent to choose one over the other on a sliding scale.

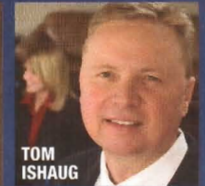
When you are done, the computer summarizes your responses. My own test results gave me something to think about. Results identified strengths that I expected but they also identified areas where I need to work, some in areas that surprised me. Hmmmm. Maybe that's why I

seem stuck on some projects I have been working on for a long time! These results give me another way to think about these projects.

It's the middle of February so if you made any New Year's resolutions, you've surely blown them already. But it's still early enough in the year to set new goals and see results by Christmas. No matter what goals you have for you or your bank, you will have a better chance of arriving at your desired destination if you have a solid understanding of where you are starting from. ❖



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