Chapter 3
Finding the Right Job
It is all about self-assessment!

Chapter Overview

- Importance of self-assessment…key to landing a great job.
- Two powerful self assessment tools: The Seven Stories Exercise and Your 15 Year Vision.

“Accurate self-assessment lets a leader know when to ask for help and where to focus in cultivating new leadership strengths. Knowing their abilities with accuracy allows leaders to play to their strengths.” Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee

Self-Assessment Overview

Everyone knows that skills, interests, personality, management style, and values play a critical role in choosing a career. You heard this from high school guidance counselors, again in college and grad school. Perhaps you paid close attention, well, maybe not in high school. Unfortunately, for some of us, our school days were the last time we attempted serious self-assessment.

Now that you are considering making a job change this is the perfect time to do a serious self-assessment for a number of very practical reasons: you will interview better, and it greatly increases your odds of landing the right job with the right team.

Landing A Great Job

Jim Collins, in his book, “Good to Great” said, “Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.”

So here is your challenge: don’t settle for a just a “good job,” Plan for a great job! And to plan for a great job means you must seek work where and how you perform best.

The first step for landing a great job is self-assessment and for the Five O’Clock Club that means answering several key questions:

- Are you satisfied with where you are?
- Do you have a good handle on your strengths and weaknesses?
- Do you know where you want to be in 5, 10, 15 years? And a written plan to get you there?
We find many executives shy away from self-assessment when they begin their job search even though they would never think of tackling a major problem or opportunity at work without doing rigorous assessment.

The pros and cons of doing a “great” self-assessment:

The Pros

- Recruiters and employers expect you to fully understand yourself.
- Self-assessment confirms strengths, but more importantly it **uncovers strengths you maybe taking for granted** and may not be talking about in your interviews or have left off the resume.
- Assessment reminds us of our weaknesses and allows us to carefully prepare to deal with them in interviews.
- Remember recruiters and employers want leaders who have a clear sense of who they are, warts and all. They also expect you to have a clear vision of the business and your career.

The Cons

Here is what some of our clients have said about the “cons:”

- “This phase is too time consuming.”
- “I need to take advantage of this opportunity, fast.”
- “This phase might be good for new leaders but I am much too experienced.”

Does self-assessment take time? Of course it does, but we are talking hours, not days or weeks.

The Five O’Clock Club Assessment Process

The self assessment process is a series of exercises to help you better understand yourself and confirm your career plans.

While we use the word “job” we **always mean it in the context of the right career**. So every time you see the word “job,” think “career.” Your next move **should always** be evaluated based upon how it positions you toward your ultimate career goal.

Most of you, being experienced managers and executives already have an established career, but it is always good to step back and reflect.

We use several powerful assessment tools:

- **The Seven Stories Exercise.** In this assessment you focus on your proudest accomplishments. From these accomplishments will flow your strongest, most enjoyable, business and personal skill sets. You will assess the direction of your
career, focus on any accomplishments you have left off your resume and prepare compelling stories to use in interviews.

- **The 15 Year Vision.** This is very similar to the Long Range Plan (LRP) you use on the business side except you focus on where **you** want to be in fifteen years versus the business.

- **Your past.** The Five O’Clock Club does not believe it is healthy to spend too much time thinking about the past however you do need to review recent jobs from two perspectives. First, the environments where you excelled then the environments where you may have experienced some speed bumps. Second, a critical review of the peers and managers with whom you worked best and those you didn’t. This will begin building the foundation for making a good decisions as you evaluate potential opportunities.

**The Seven Stories Exercise**

“I have never felt so grounded about my strengths. I feel that I am able to better articulate them and match them to my client’s needs,” Dan, VP of Key Account Management commenting on The Seven Stories Exercise.

We like Dan’s quote because it represent the fundamental theme we hear from all our Five O’Clock Club clients.

**Here is how to begin self-assessment.** First, make a list of your 20-25 proudest and most enjoyable accomplishments, from all parts of your life, not just successes at work. Here are some areas to look at:

- Your early career.
- Your last few jobs.
- Community or religious work.
- Hobbies.
- Family events.
- Experiences in school, from your earliest school years through college and grad school. One client, for example, picked, as one of her proudest accomplishments that she landed the lead role in a Third Grade play. She went on to become a company spokeswoman and was outstanding on TV and in radio interviews. So our success roots are often very deep. They also make for great stories to tell in interviews.

As you do this think about those things that gave you a sense of accomplishment and pride. After you list of 20-25, select the seven that are most important to you and write a brief paragraph about each. Once you have completed the paragraph it is time to “peel the onion” using the following questions.

**Story #1:** Organized my parents 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party.
What was the main accomplishment for you?
What about it did you enjoy most?
What did you do best?
What was your key motivator?
What led up to your involvement? (Assigned to do it? Self initiated?)
What was your relationship with others? (Leader? Team member? Worked alone?)
What was the environment you performed like?
What was the subject matter? (Product launch? New market? Music? Conservation?)

Story #2: Opened the first sales office in Japan.

(Repeat the same questions for each story)

The time to complete the Seven Stories varies. Most take a few hours, others like to do it over several days focusing first on personal accomplishments then on their business accomplishments.

Case study: How Lauren Used The 7 Stories To Avoid A Career Road Block

When we started working with Lauren she was a successful VP at a major consulting firm. She realized her career path was blocked, at least on her timetable. There were several, equally successful, SVPs above her with no sign they would be moving for the next few years. So she began to think about other consulting opportunities but she wasn’t clear about the type or size of firm she should be targeting.

We suggested she begin to do some self-assessment, starting with the Seven Stories.

Here are four of Lauren’s Seven Stories, in her own words, and how she analyzed them. They mix her personal and professional experiences and they allowed her to focus on her strengths, key skills and preferred work environments.

Story 1:

I chose to do my graduate internship in Indonesia and was introduced to the president of a successful local manufacturing company. A few minutes into the conversation, the president told me: “You are a Western business woman and you sound smart, how could you help me? I have a marketing problem in my company.”

After 10 intense days of internal audit, I was able to clearly communicate their marketing problem. They had good products but they were not choosing the right kind of markets for growth. I came back with three major ideas to build growth. The president gave the go-ahead on two. I chose a team of English-speaking, entrepreneurial marketing employees and got to work. Four months later, the implementation plans were well under way and were starting to yield tangible results. The day I left, the team members and the president drove me to the airport and everybody cried.

After Lauren reflected on her first story she started to summarize the skills, values and environmental characteristics she saw in the story.
• My underlying skills: entrepreneurship, adaptability, creativity, autonomy, charisma, client orientation, analytics, team leadership
• My values: independence, adventure, risk taking, recognition, influence
• Right work environment: entrepreneurial, fast-paced

Story 2:

After graduation I spent 18 months working for Doctors without Borders, serving in Tanzania. At the time, I was unsure of my strengths and was searching for who I was. I had a good relationship with the team leader. He praised me for my intelligence, wit and fitness. He even tried to convince me to prepare for a Mt. Everest Climb! He helped me focus on my core strengths which led to my decision to start my career in consulting. In fact, he continues to be a strong mentor.

• My underlying skills: self-knowledge, humility, reaching out for help
• My values: personal growth and development, competition
• Right work environment: strong in mentoring relationships, open-minded

Story 3:

Later in my career I joined a consulting company. Three months into my employment I was asked to participate in a “company cabaret.” I’ve always been good at imitating politicians so I did my typical routine. Everyone thought it was very funny and my former colleagues still talk about it.

• My underlying skills: public speaking, charisma, visibility, humor
• My values: public visibility, risk-taking, humor
• Right work environment: creative, risk-taking

Story 4:

I love to cook but usually only get to cook a gourmet meal once or twice a month. Then I decided I would have a millennium party featuring a gourmet dinner for 20. I thought about every detail. What would please each guest? What would bring them together? How to arrange the table? How to match each course with a particular wine? It was a great success. People still talk about the event and say it was one of the best gourmet dinners they ever had.

• My underlying skills: project management, organization, creativity, visibility, client orientation
• My values: create lasting impact, family, trusted friends, cultural roots
• Right working environment: strong sense of belonging, warmth
Lauren then plotted each story against a list of leadership, management and selling skills (see details in appendix A). Then she ranked her skills according to the number of times they appeared in each story.

The skills that appeared in 4 stories or more were:

- Self management: initiative taking, personal risk taking and optimism
- Social awareness: recognizing other constituencies' needs like clients, and subcontractors.
- Leadership: source of inspiration for others, credibility with peers and management.
- Execution: ability to deliver on company vision
- Managerial skills: problem solving, planning, project management.

“The rest of the story.”

After reviewing her key strengths, skills and values (and also after she completed the other assessments described below) Lauren identified four possible jobs:

- Associate Partner in a large consulting firm.
- Partner in a niche consulting firm.
- Director of Corporate Strategy or Corporate Development in a large manufacturing company.
- VP Strategy in a small manufacturing company

She screened each job against her choice criteria and decided to contact 10 successful small specialized consulting companies in her geographic target area. She received three offers. She accepted one and is now a full Partner.

Don’t forget to review past self-assessments

The value of past self-assessments is they will remind you of important past themes. Anything that appears once should be of little concern.

Past assessments to consider:

- **Any 360° feedback** you have received in the last few years. The power of a 360° is that you are hearing from the people who determine your success, your peers and your subordinates. While the boss’s view is certainly important, experience has shown our real success is built based upon the relationship and perceptions of our peers and subordinates.

- **Past Performance Appraisals**. Well-written, balanced appraisals can contain real gold. Pay attention to what previous bosses have said about your strengths as well as your developmental challenges.

- **Peer Assessment** from Leadership Training programs. You have probably attended a number of Leadership Training programs over the past few years.
Check to see how many had a feedback component. This will be particularly valuable if it was an outside program where the participants carried no political agenda and no historical baggage.

- **Self Assessment.** Pull out old self-assessments and see how they match your Seven Stories and your current assessment.

### Fifteen Year Vision

There was a terrific article in the Harvard Business Review (September-October, 1996) called Building Your Company Vision by James Collins and Jerry Porras. What struck us about the article was the power of their questions and how well they apply to a career plan so we modified a few of them for you to consider as you do your 15 Year Vision.

- What are my core values?
- What are my guiding principles?
- What are my 10-to-30-year “Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BAHG)?”

The first step in developing your 15-Year Vision is to look at where you are today and then where you want to be in 5, 10 and 15 years. Yes the future is hard to predict but just say to yourself, if I could control the future, how would I like my life to look? Now go for it!

**The process:**

- First answer these questions for the present. It will give you a good base line.
- Then move to five years from now, answering the same questions.
- Do the same for 10 and 15 years, using the same questions.

**The questions:**

- What is your life like?
- Who is in your family, how old are they, what do they do? What is your relationship with your family members?
- Who are your friends? What do they do?
- Where are you living? What does it look like?
- How do you take care of your spiritual needs?
- How is your health? What do you do for exercise?
- What do you do for fun? What are your hobbies?
Identify your core values

Your core values are your compass to assess the culture of the companies you will investigate. “Value clashes” are one of the most frequent reasons our clients decide to leave a company. It is critical to understand the values of potential peers and key leaders. As one client said, “if you work for a company that supports your values, you will thrive.” We couldn’t agree more.

How do you identify your values? Here are some techniques that will help:

1. Analyze your seven stories the way Lauren did.
2. If you owned a company, what core values would you like your company to embody?
3. Think of some of the leaders you have worked with or for and admired. What were their core values?
4. On the flip side: think of some the “value clashes” you have had.
5. Check the mission statements of companies and charitable organizations you admire.
6. Talk about these values with family and friends.

Your Past

It is important to understand the past so history does or doesn't repeat itself. This is the classic “lessons learned” exercise.

We want you to quickly review the jobs you found exciting, rewarding and challenging. Thinks about your best two or three bosses and why were they the best? Remember those who were not and why. Armed with this information you will make much better career decisions going forward.

Satisfiers and dissatisfiers

1. Make a list of the bosses, peers and board members with whom you worked in the last few jobs.
2. Make three columns. The first column will be those with whom you had **no serious problems**, the second column will be those with whom you had **some problems** and the last column are those with whom you had **serious problems**.

3. For the first column, ask yourself **why** you never had any serious problems? This step can lead to real insights.

4. Then look at the next two columns where there were challenges: What were the patterns? Consider the following:

   ✓ Was it a clash of styles?
   ✓ Was it a clash of values?
   ✓ Was it an ethical issue?
   ✓ Were there issues you could have avoided?
   ✓ If you could turn back the clock, is there anything you would do differently?

### Putting Balance In Your Career Plan

It’s very easy to slip into a life that gets out of balance where work takes over and your health, personal life and spiritual life take hits. So use your career transition to step back and look at what you want to achieve, not just in business but in your personal life.

The CEO of Pepsi, Steve Reinemund, described his model for working towards balanced life:

"*My success model is like a chair with four legs, the center (seat) is God. My family, friends, community and work are the four legs.*"

Some of our clients start the process of finding the “right job” by defining what the right life will look like. They pay attention to all aspects of their lives including family, health, fitness, fun, and spiritual needs not just the job.

**How do you use your self-assessment?**

Here is some feedback from a few Five O’Clock Club clients about how they used their self-assessment.

**Identify and demonstrate your strengths.**

“I leveraged my Seven Stories to improve the quality and texture of my accomplishments in the resume, and cover letter.”

“I kept reviewing my strengths before every interview as well as before writing my cover and follow-up letters and believe it or not before salary negotiation.”

“I use to re-read my strengths on the days I was down.”

**Know your weaknesses because, sooner rather than later, someone will ask!**
“Having made a list of my weaker areas, I carefully prepared for "all those questions you hope they won’t ask."

**Know your core values. The odds of surviving a culture or boss that don’t share your values are, in a word, lousy.**

“I was fortunate and had three offers to consider. I chose the one that was the closest to my value system even though it ended up being 15% below my other offers."

**Remember the environments where you thrived and those you didn’t.**

“I knew I couldn’t survive another micro-manager. I needed a company that was strong on accountability and believed in giving the senior managers considerable leeway. Even though I knew this new position would stretch my leadership skills I accepted it, based upon my criteria.”

“On paper, this was my best offer but after some in-depth discussions with the Director of IT, I realized we had very different management styles, as well as a different view about the company’s IT strategy. It was the best offer I have ever turned down!”

Careful assessments are vital for determining your strengths, weaknesses, and goals in life in order to make the best choices, especially during a transition. You want to land and succeed in a great job but enjoy life too.

**Define your possible jobs**

Let’s go back to Lauren’s story. How did she actually select niche consulting companies as her primary target? Remember that at the end of his assessment Lauren has a list of criteria that will be important to her in her new job.

As you can see the Partner, Niche Consulting Firm and the COO, small industrial company in a small corporation have the most “++”. Using her Fifteen-Year vision and brainstorming with her Advisory Board, Lauren decides to focus on the Niche Consulting Firm target first (discussed in detail in Chapter 4).

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<th>VP of Strategy or Development in a small manufacturing company</th>
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- etc.
Her core values:
- independence
- risk taking
- recognition
- etc.
The right working environment:
- small, close team
- max. of 3 days of travel per week
- etc.
Her long-term career vision
- General Manager of a mid-size, independent company

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Chapter Summary

- Use The Five O’Clock Club assessment tools to get an accurate snapshot of your abilities and where you want to go.
- Include others in your quest. Ask for feedback from your former bosses, colleagues, best friends, and your significant other.
- Develop a specific roadmap. This process is all about **what is best for you** based on your strengths, your values, the environments where you have not only performed the best but had the most fun.