

## -chapter 1-

# Sweet Spot Analysis

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*“Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors  
where there were only walls.”*

Joseph Campbell

*“To love what you do and feel that it matters...  
how could anything be more fun?”*

Katherine Graham

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**I**t was my first meeting with a new client. She was a manager at a big consulting firm and she was very successful. She had been moved to a new job where she was in charge of strategic planning. It was quite a promotion.

I asked her, “How do you feel about your new job?”

She said, “I really hate it. I’m doing all this administrative work, and I am far away from the clients.”

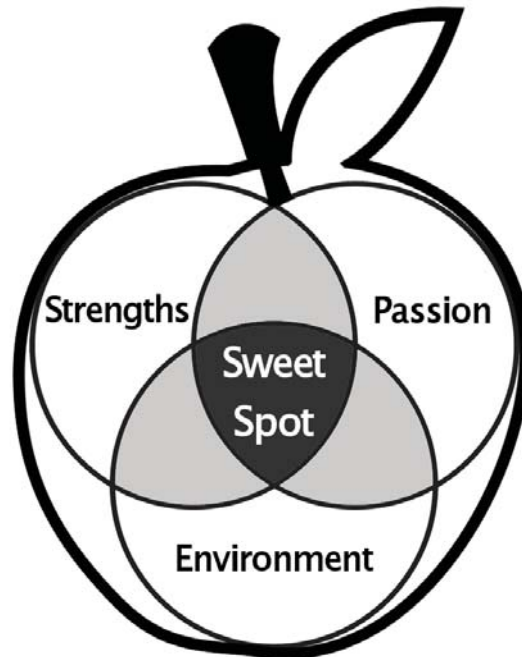
I raised my eyebrows, “What *do* you want to do?”

She burst into tears and said, “I want to bake pies, and arrange flowers, and do something creative with my life.”

You will see where her story goes at the end of this chapter!

Not every coaching story is so dramatic, but I see a lot of people in my work who are either doing something they do not want to do or doing it in the wrong place. That is when a Sweet Spot Analysis is called for.

## Juicy Work



There is a sweet spot where your passions, strengths and the ideal environment overlap, as shown in the Venn diagram above, where the three circles intersect. For example, I am pretty passionate about singing; I really enjoy it but I am not a very skilled singer. On the other hand, I am very skilled as a programmer, but my juices do not get flowing doing that work. In fact, if anything, programming makes me feel drained at the end of the day. I enjoy doing craft projects, but if I am being honest, I would have to admit that the world does not really need my feeble craft skills, and I know there are plenty of people who are much better at it than I. But, I am also reminded that sometimes great artists such as Vincent Van Gogh are not fully appreciated until after their time—the world just did not know right away that it needed their art. This is not to say that my current craft projects will one day hang in a hushed museum. It does remind me, however, that there are geniuses all around us who are unknown even to themselves. I am passionate about leadership and I am skilled at coaching and teaching it. The environment where I will thrive also has to care about leadership. Bringing my sweet spot to life means finding people and organizations where leadership matters. When my skills, passion and

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environment converge, my work is juicy!

### Recognizing Strengths

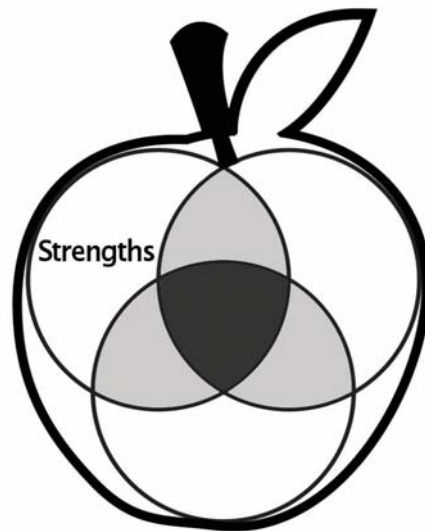
The first step to finding your juicy work is to recognize your strengths and unique skills. I was working with a woman in the intelligence community who was frustrated that she could not teach her staff how to look at data and see the patterns she saw. We worked for a couple of sessions on how she could break down her process and teach it. Still they did not get it. So I asked her, “Could it be that you’re just more gifted in this area, maybe smarter?”

“No, I’m just average,” she replied.  
“Everybody we hire here is smart.”

Later she took an IQ test and found out she was in the 99th percentile in pattern recognition. No wonder her staff could not understand data as quickly as she could.

Realizing her true abilities, she made two course corrections in her work. One, she became more appreciative of why her staff could not perform at her skill level and no longer disparaged them. They were not slackers or slow learners after all. Two, she started looking for roles within the organization where her special ability was the core of what was needed on the job. She asked herself, “In which positions is it essential to be able to discern more complex patterns?” She found a group that had long been struggling with the complexity of their data. In short order, she was able to focus on the problem and develop a workable solution. She ended up doing what she loved to do, every day, with people who valued her skill and her contributions to the team.

There is another woman who reads through her email every day; she clears over 300 emails from her inbox! She was dismissive of staff



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that did not get back to her. When she learned she was in the 99th percentile in organizational skills, she realized she could go into an organization where there were massive amounts of data, structure it, clean it, and in general bring order to chaos in a way that no one else could. And she loved to do it. She had discovered the perfect combination of her skills, passion and the right environment. She is now working as an executive administrator for the number-three person in her organization and never is a meeting missed or a detail dropped.

To find your sweet spot, you have to look at what you already know about yourself. Start with an assessment of your skills. There are several different approaches I recommend. One is to ask five to seven people you work with what they consider your greatest skills, skills that set you apart from others. Another is to go back over any 360-degree feedback you have received and see where you have consistently scored highest. The book *StrengthsFinder 2.0* by Tom Rath has a useful online assessment that lists your strengths and how they are used in your day-to-day work.

For example: According to *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, one of my strengths is “positivity,” which is not something you normally see on an assessment tool. What that competency or strength means is that I look for the good in people, organizations and situations. I see glass three-quarters full and recognize how to leverage the strengths of those I am with.

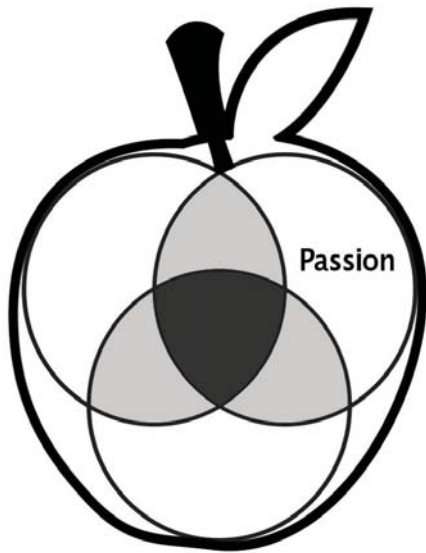
## **Evoking Passions**

The next step in the Sweet Spot Analysis is to figure out what you are passionate about. I generally find that usually the things we did as children are the things we are passionate about. When I was a little kid, what I loved to do the most was get the other kids together and organize games and fun. A lot of my favorite work today is around teambuilding, which involves organizing people around games and fun, with a purpose of bringing their work to the next level.

Another way to determine passions is to look at the things that you cannot help but do. You walk into a hotel room and you cannot

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help but move things around to be more aesthetically pleasing. Or you go to a friend's house and you see where they should put their chairs, knickknacks and pillows because you have a passion for pulling things together. Or when you go out for a nice meal, you think, "This would be much better with thyme," or, "I wish they'd made this



with butternut squash instead of asparagus." Passions are things that are so satisfying within themselves that it does not matter whether anyone else appreciates what you do in your pursuit of them.

If you are looking for a full-time job, ask yourself, "What can I do for eight hours, all day long, tirelessly and joyfully?" For me, the answer was coaching, and even a stay at a luxury resort can leave me cranky when I cannot practice my passion. One of my

worst vacations was ten days in Cozumel, Mexico. I read all the books I brought with me and even went to a movie in Spanish. What I really longed to do was talk to people about their dreams and what they loved to do. Because I was not fluent in the language, I could not talk to anyone. I was miserable on the beach after three days!

You know you are not passionate about your work when the salary has to be a certain amount for you to even consider the job; or when you wake up dreading going to work. Or when eight hours feels like a week. Or when you hope you get sick so you do not have to go to work. Or when everybody says you have got a really good job, and yet you feel empty doing it.

Computer programming was awful for me. I can remember saying to myself, "I'm not even thirty, and I can barely get through the day." I expected to love my work, but when it turned out I did not, I went to business school to find the work I was meant to do, to find juicy work. For the seven years I worked in the information technology industry, I

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succeeded because I was good at helping people adapt to change, but I was bored by the technology. Then I discovered there was a job where I could work in change management, minus the technology. Perfect!

In helping people discover their passions, I ask them to reflect on three significant experiences. As they tell those stories, I tease out their passions. One senior executive told me about working to win a bid on a proposal. Contracts with the government usually do not extend beyond five years and her firm was re-competing for the contract. She was assessing staff and putting them where they related best with the client. Her particular gift was in finding the combination of technical and interpersonal skills that gelled for staff and client, resulting in low staff turnover and high client retention. By recalling that episode, she realized that she was gifted at turning around projects where the staff was not happy and was not serving the client effectively.

A book called *The Passion Test* by Janet and Chris Attwood can help you sort out what you are passionate about. You begin by answering the question, “If I were doing what I loved, I’d be ...” You make a list of ten to fifteen items, then compare each to the other until you reduce the list to your top five. You put actions around the top five to make them a reality. The authors posit that if what you are doing currently is not aligned with your passion, then you are probably pursuing a “should do” rather than a “want to do.” Furthermore, being sidetracked by the “should do’s” may indicate that you do not have the skills right now that are necessary to pursue your passion. So go get them!

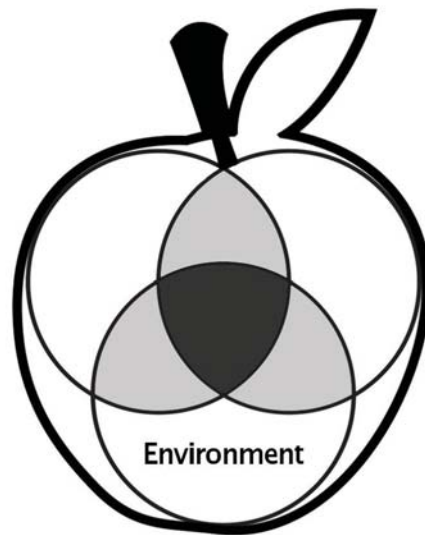
## **Getting the Environment Right**

The third part of the Sweet Spot Analysis is integrating your skills and passions into an environment where you will thrive and your gifts will be valued. Finding this intersection is tricky because it is not a linear process. It is more like repeatedly deconstructing a stew to understand the ingredients that create a sum that is greater than the parts. In addition to “positivity,” my particular stew also includes visionary skills. I am great at coming up with options and thinking fast on my feet, but

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I also I have a wealth of experience in private and public sector organizations. My passion is to help people learn and grow, and to help organizations become places where I would like to work. Despite my degree in mathematics and years in the computer industry, the intersection of my skills and passion turned out to be in the field of leadership development and career coaching. If you have trouble analyzing your own personal stew, it can be very helpful to consult a coach, someone who will help you think through the union of your skills and passions in creative and new ways and suggest areas about which you may not even be aware for further exploration.

Conducting informational interviewing in various fields can also help you identify the right environment. If you think you might like an engineering position in an information technology environment, call a company that sounds interesting and ask to speak with someone who might be willing to volunteer for an informational telephone interview. Limit each interview to only 20 minutes, so you do not impose on people's time. Target your questions so you can be clear about what you are seeking to understand. Informational interviews also can be conducted in a networking situation or even an informal social gathering. When you find yourself surrounded by people you know little about, break the ice with a question that can help your quest. You can ask: What's the best job you ever had and what did you like about it?



As you start to close in on an option, look for ways to test drive it through volunteer work or internships. If you are considering teaching, you could volunteer at a literacy program or offer a seminar through an organization like the Learning Annex. These days, internships are not just for young people. With the Internet changing so many com-



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panies and job descriptions, it is not unusual to see mid-career people picking up new skills through unpaid work.

### **Exploring Options**

The client I described at the beginning of this chapter wanted to arrange flowers, or do something more creative, but she worked in information technology management, which offers few (as in no) flower-arranging opportunities. My first suggestion was that she apprentice with a floral company, which she did for a day or so a month. In exchange for her help, the owner agreed to tell her about the struggles and joys of the work—what the job required beyond an appreciation for flora, color and balance. Karen quickly developed a sense of the risks before she took the leap into becoming a florist. As she worked for the florist, she realized that the fun part of the job for her, making flower arrangements, was only about ten percent of what was needed to be successful. Her skill in information technology and strategy allowed her to help the business owner put in some technology and processes to help her manage her business and track her finances. Karen found that her experience at the big consulting firm was like taking a boot camp for business management. The business owner had a friend in the catering business and asked Karen if she would help her with the business side of things. Karen readily agreed, since catering was another career she had considered. Once again, she traded her business expertise to learn more about the catering business. Karen loved to decorate for parties, plan the menus, and put the guests at ease. Cooking under pressure was harder for her than she had imagined. So now, Karen had real life experience in two of the areas she was considering—becoming a florist and running a catering company.

Neither option gave Karen all that she was looking for, but she found that setting up business processes for small businesses was fun for her. She loved working with entrepreneurs—especially women who did creative work—and she found she was able to help these small companies become more profitable, with little work on her part.



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I asked her to consider setting up business operations for small businesses. She agreed that it used her skills in a more creative way than at the large consulting firm and she was passionate about the companies she had worked with so far. She was not sure she could get enough business to pay for her daughter's college tuition. I asked her how her consulting firm knew if it had enough resources. She showed me how she did business planning for the organization. Then the light bulb went off—of course, she could do a business plan for herself!

Karen found that she needed ten to twelve small companies who would let her set up the business operations and run them for her to equal her current salary. She already had two, so over the next six months, she found four more companies. She asked to work part-time for the consulting firm and they agreed. Six months later she had enough business to quit her job at the big consulting firm and go full-time on her own. Two years later, Karen's company was so successful that she hired two other employees. I asked her how she felt about not arranging flowers or baking pies? She said she realized that those were creative outlets that she only enjoyed occasionally but they really did not use all of her strengths. She felt that the creativity of helping small businesses succeed was constantly challenging and more rewarding than she could have imagined.

One company, Vocation Vacation, has taken this idea of exploring dream occupations and mixed it with a vacation. If you have always dreamed of being a chef, for example, for a week you will get to work in a restaurant and try it out for size. What would it be like to be an emcee on a game show, or an extra on a movie set? With Vocation Vacation, you can find out!

The key is to collect a lot of information and a lot of experiences to help you understand where you are going before you make a big career change. For example, you may have always thought that being a flight attendant would be wonderful—they get to travel the world and meet interesting people. Speak with some flight attendants and they will tell you the other half of the story—spending one day in a city before turning around and flying somewhere else, dealing with

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unruly passengers, and having little control over your schedule. Often we glamorize other people's work, ignoring the not-so-glamorous aspects they confront every day.

In my work I usually find it is not that someone is simply looking for greener pastures (as in more money), but that at a fundamental level, their job does not rock their world. They have a longing for something with greater meaning. Since many people trade security for satisfaction, they do not even consider other options.

It is a dog-eat-dog world, we tell ourselves. So we lower our expectations and lose sight of our dreams. We live by the bumper sticker "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go." Work no longer feeds our energies, rather, it saps them. It is a means to an end: food on the table, a roof over our heads, and a few weeks of vacation a year. It does not have to be that way if you are willing to take a hard look at what you really want.

Once people find a job that is closer in alignment to their skills and interests, I encourage them not to stop there but to use it as a steppingstone to continue to explore what they are looking for. Like Karen, the florist and catering jobs were steps toward success, but it was not until she started doing business operations for small businesses that she really found her juicy work. When I left business school and went into training for Hewlett Packard, it was a good job, but it was not until I was doing leadership training that I felt like I was on the right path. Then, when I found coaching, I was even closer. Each step took me closer to my juicy work. Now I am moving from coaching to somatic coaching. I am always adding more to my skillset. Juicy work is truly a journey, not a destination. That is good news, because the work just keeps getting more interesting!

### **People Who Made the Shift**

Tom, a Quality Manager for a major computer company, was already on his journey to juicy work when I met him. His Sweet Spot Analysis indicated he definitely had the skillset for his dream job. He had an engineering background and was very process-oriented. He loved

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to research ways to improve processes and quality and he enjoyed teaching others. The environment was a good fit, working with smart people who cared about quality. There were two aspects of his job that he did not like; he managed about forty people and hated it. He felt overwhelmed by the administrative responsibilities. In addition, he dreaded going to conference after conference and making presentations about his company's innovations in quality. For many people, presenting at conferences is an honor, but not to Tom.

With his skills and environment aligned in his job, Tom realized that the passion was missing, and that he had no sense, despite the conference presentations, that his work made a difference. As a result, he found himself getting angry at work. He had put on 30 extra pounds. He was aggravated by the travel, and overall he was just very unhappy. By examining those two areas—his unfulfilled passion and not doing something that mattered in the world—he realized that what he loved the most was research, writing and teaching about quality. Going to conferences, being a manager, and being a senior leader in his organization did not fulfill him in the least. So, he went to the head of the organization and asked if they would create a new unit, Quality Publications and Training, and let him lead it. They agreed!

After helping the company find his replacement, he was able to focus on what he did best and what made him happiest. Now Tom has written several books on quality and has created a training unit that certifies people in quality techniques. His people present at conferences while Tom stays home and conducts research that makes his training the gold standard in the industry.

His quality of life improved, as did his health. He has time to exercise and to enjoy his family, and, he feels he is making an even bigger contribution to his company than he could have in his old role.

During our first ten to fifteen years in the business world, we measure ourselves by our promotions and do not question them. Sooner or later, most of us reach our own internal ceiling. It is then that we have to get creative to keep our work juicy.

Tom had to let go of the belief that he could do it all and even

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more onerously, that he should be able to do it all. He was being a good corporate citizen, taking on more and more responsibilities in which he had no interest or great skill. He got promoted past his point of satisfaction, and it took a toll on his daily existence. In his new role, Tom adds tremendous value to the organization by writing books and designing training in quality methods. More satisfied and more valuable to the company, Tom achieved his own juicy work.

Another client asked me to help him plot a course to become a partner with his accounting firm. I asked him what he hoped to gain from being partner. "To choose the work I do and have more free time," he responded. Now, in my experience, I have not met many partners in any profession who could choose their work or who had more free time than when they were associates. I asked him what kind of accounting work he was happiest doing. He explained that he really enjoyed working on mergers and acquisitions, bringing together balance sheets to create a better organization. When it came to M&As, people even said he was a miracle worker, he told me with not a little pride in his voice. But in April, when individual and corporate tax returns are due, he said he wanted to shoot himself he hated it so much. That gave me a clear picture of his passions.

Next, I wanted to know why more free time was so important to him. "I have a small plane and I love to fly," he replied. "There's nothing that makes me feel freer or more alive than flying. In order to keep my license, I have to fly a certain number of hours per month. During tax time, I often don't get to fly. With more free time, I can fly my plane, and take my kids up too." Flying with his family obviously gave him immense satisfaction.

Throughout our discussions, he had a clear understanding of what mattered most to him, and he presented a plan to his firm where he would work three days a week exclusively on M&As. The partners at his firm knew they only had about three days' worth of M&A work a week and that because he was their top talent in that area, they could not afford to let him go. He never did become partner, but he is flying more and enjoying work on those days when he is not in the air.

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As this story shows, many times we do not ask for what we want. We do not permit ourselves to imagine the possibilities. We settle for what is available, not what we really want. We may think our jobs or our companies are designed to do things certain, set ways, and we have no other options. If this is the way it has always been done, why would they change it for me?

Do not give up. Be courageous. Ask for what you want or look at things differently. Do not deny your dreams just because no one else has restructured a job, declined a partnership or created a new department— or because whatever you are considering seems hard. If you can dream it, you can achieve it, but if you never dream it, you can never realize it. Bringing about your dream requires a mix of persistence and surrender—constant striving yet acceptance that even if you do fall short, you will continue the journey. Remember this: it is better to have a big dream and only achieve part of it than a small dream and achieve it all.

So, what dream have you not allowed to surface? If you could re-design your work, how would you do it?

Perhaps you have a clear vision of what you want, but something is keeping you from getting it. In the next chapters we will explore what may be keeping you from having juicy work. Sara's story will help you see how the process works to find your own juicy work.

### **How it Looks: Sara's Story**

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When Sara came to me for coaching, she was a sous chef at an expensive five star restaurant that seated 100 in the main area and another 30 at the bar. She had learned a lot from the executive chef and felt ready for something new. Many skills are needed to prepare fabulous meals. There is an art and science to consistent food preparation and presentation that includes

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a thorough knowledge of all of the food groups and where to procure the best ingredients while maintaining appropriate food costs. In addition, she understands the unique blending of flavors and proportions and when to use herbs and spices to enhance a dish. She knows the best cuts of meat and whether to sauté, roast or braise and the freshness and proper handling of fish that will contribute to the dish being its own signature. Being artful in the timing is important so that the finished dish is perfectly cooked and presented at the right temperature. Finally, being an artist so that the plate becomes the canvas for a beautiful presentation like a work of art is equally important.

She is skilled at creating delicious, healthful meals with fresh ingredients. She knows how to make vegetables sing by delicately preparing them with herbs. She is equally skilled in creating meat and fish dishes that are flavorful. Feeling passionate about meal preparation involves all of her – caring deeply for the process and the result of a delicious meal that satisfies the chef as well as her guests. She knows that it is possible to walk into the kitchen and let her creativity reign, feeling joy with the unique tastes that she is able to create. Sara is enthusiastic in the final presentation and plates in a way that displays her artistic talent as well. It is more than the food to her; it is the ambiance, table decoration, presentation, timing, and style that reflect the desire of the guests. She also understands the economics of the business and knows what to pay attention to in order to turn a profit.

She did not, however, feel the restaurant provided exactly the right environment for her. She found that working in a restaurant was not personal enough because she did not have contact with the people for whom she was cooking. She also felt hampered from being as creative as she wanted to be because the executive chef did not like to have much variation in the meals.

For the next several months she and I explored options that

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would satisfy her desires and make her work even juicier. She explored becoming the executive chef for other restaurants where she could have more say over the menu, and while she liked that idea, it still did not get her the customer interaction for which she was looking. She considered starting her own restaurant where she could be more visible to customers and realized it would either have to be small or she would have to have a large staff to support her. She even considered starting a catering business and focusing on high-end dinner parties. That was the idea that seemed most exciting, but she realized that catering was different from what she had been doing and she might need more information before she made the change.

### Blind Spots

When Sara decided to consider catering, she wanted to learn more about the business before giving up her current job. She went to work for a well-known catering firm on her days off to learn the business. She was given a party to design and cater and was thrilled at being able to let her creativity flourish. Hearing the client talk about her goals for the party and brainstorming with her was fun and satisfying; however, she had difficulty translating her vision to the other catering staff. She made an amazing soup, but her staff could not replicate it. She had not realized how much she improvised when she cooked. In the restaurant, her executive chef had clearly defined each menu item with limited variation.

When she told the staff how to decorate for the party, she was too “big picture” and they missed the mark by a mile. The client wanted the guests to each feel special so Sara suggested individual picture frames for place cards, which could later hold a photo from the party. The client loved the idea, but when Sara’s staff brought in the frames, they lacked the uniqueness that Sara had expected. She ended up having to shop for the frames her-



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self. The staff also did not understand her vision for the movie theme and ended up picking movie figures from *Toy Story* and *Madagascar* (animated movies), when Sara and her client had envisioned elegant and dramatic movies featuring Bette Davis and Humphrey Bogart. Again, Sara ended up shopping for posters and other theme elements that she could not seem to translate to the staff.

Difficulty in taking a vision and translating it into specifics was a big blind spot and a huge hurdle for Sara, if she intended to have others implementing her visions. As she reflected with me about the party, she was frustrated that the staff could not “get” her ideas. I asked her if she had ever struggled with this before. She said that in the restaurant there had been some mishaps when she delegated new tasks like ordering vegetables, or setting up for a big party, or implementing a new credit card system. She said she thought she was giving clear directions and when things did not come back as she expected she was stumped about what to do differently. I asked Sara if she had ever asked staff for feedback on how to work with her better. She said the idea had never occurred to her and she was open to it. I gave her some techniques for asking for feedback so she would not sound either defensive or critical. We role-played until she could ask in an open and curious manner. She practiced staying centered and worked on her breathing, realizing that deep breaths helped her stay calm, but she said she only remembered to center when we were together. I realized that I needed to help Sara to do more breathing practices to embody the ability to center.

### Feedback

Now that Sara realized her staff had not understood her vision for the party, she asked for feedback on how she could have communicated better. She had the three staff members review the

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party, what worked and what did not, and how she could have worked more effectively with them. She worked hard to not be defensive or blaming and they gave her specific suggestions for clearer communication. Their ideas helped her see how she could have communicated the movie theme better, but she was at a loss in learning how to replicate her recipes. Sara did not realize how gifted she was at tasting something and adding just the right amount of spice or an herb to make a difference in the flavor. She did it intuitively and never measured. How was she going to create consistent recipes when the flavor of the food varied and different amounts of spice were needed? When she thought about what went wrong, she had a hard time feeling like it was her fault and more that the staff was inexperienced. She was somewhat put out at the idea of having to be so specific with the staff.

### Knowing-Doing Gap

Sara tried to be more specific with the staff, sitting down with them to describe her vision and brainstorming with them about decorations, themes, music, etc. When they did not get what was obvious to her, even after repeated descriptions, her body language showed her frustration. She spoke louder and faster with a critical, angry tone. This made the staff more uncomfortable and afraid to ask follow-up questions, so they continued to miss the mark. Sara knew that when she could center—physically and emotionally—she could slow down enough to communicate effectively, and, she could reduce the stress she was feeling and passing on to others. To help Sara make centering a more natural response, I asked her to set her watch to beep on the hour every hour. Each time the watch beeped, she was to take a deep breath, feel her feet connected to the earth, and do a quick body check to see where she was holding tension. I asked her to do this for a week and then see if it was happening naturally the next week.

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She said she did well until Wednesday, and then got stressed again, so she went back to the hourly beep to remind her to center. Anytime we try new behaviors, it takes many repetitions to become automatic.

While describing and collaborating on the vision became easier, Sara found that as much as she wanted to be more specific, she struggled. She just could not understand what her staff was missing. We talked about personality instruments that define preferences for how we behave and to what we pay attention. I asked if I could do a workshop for her and the staff on personality preferences. They readily agreed. As we went through the different areas of the model there was a good blend in all areas except one. Sara realized that she was a big picture thinker and that her staff was detail oriented. This could be good because the staff paid attention to things she might have missed, like making sure the silverware and glassware was spotless. It really made things hard for Sara when she tried to communicate details that were so obvious to her that she thought they would be obvious to the staff. This led her to realize that she had to hire people who were able to get her vision without so many specifics. What a relief she felt at this realization! Trying to translate what was obvious to her was sapping her energy and taking all the juice out of the catering job.

Her other struggle was in staying open to feedback. When clients complained about the food or anything that she had created, she got defensive and started telling them about her cooking expertise and why she was right and they were wrong—not a good approach for retaining clients. I had worked with Sara to be centered from the start of the engagement so that she could be present in our coaching sessions. She was good at centering and recognizing when she was off-center and bringing herself back to center. I asked her if all chefs agreed on well-prepared food.

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She acknowledged that there was a wide margin of acceptability among chefs. We worked on her being able to hear feedback about her food as the client's preference, not as criticism of her ability. We practiced by my telling her that I did not like her food, until she could hear it with curiosity and openness instead of defensiveness. While she never liked hearing that she had disappointed the client, she became better at staying open to what she could do to improve the next time. Her behavior left the clients feeling that she was open to doing her best to meet their expectations.

### **Drama and Trauma**

Sara was an only child so she had not grown up having to negotiate for toys or the last piece of pie. Her parents had been similar to Sara in their approach, so Sara had not realized how other people might be very different from her. She struggled with all the negotiation needed as staff, customers and suppliers brought their needs and drama to her workplace. In her restaurant, the executive chef had handled those issues, so she had not needed to develop this skill. In fact, she had often been unaware of the drama going on as she focused on running the restaurant.

Her strategy had been to ignore the issues, but she found that when she did that they tended to blow up. By maintaining her ability to stay centered and seeing her staff in a positive light, she was able to hear their issues. I asked her to get to know each staff member and what they cared about. I especially wanted her to ask what they hoped to learn or gain from working for her. When she had a better sense of their goals and values, and recognized their values were often different from her own, she could respond to them more effectively. We worked on developing her negotiation skills with practice exercises and that helped her with staff and suppliers as well.

### Learning Mindset

Sara thought of herself as having a growth mindset as a chef. She had so many menu options and methods for food preparation that it was hard for her staff to replicate her dishes. She realized that she needed to limit her options if she was going to delegate the preparation. In the area of creating ambiance, table decorations, and theme parties, she was a performer. She had a dozen themes that she could easily implement. At times, when none appealed to the client, she was challenged to stay in learning mode and create new possibilities. I asked her what kept her learning about food preparation and she said it was by reading cookbooks and dining at different restaurants; the new ideas just flowed. I suggested she find a similar strategy around the theme parties to engage her creativity.

After working part-time for the catering company, Sara had a better idea of what the work really entailed. It became clear that catering was a much better fit for her than working in a restaurant. Working in a restaurant was not personal enough and she did not have the contact with the people for whom she was cooking. She started her own business, *Catering to You*, which allows her to do what she enjoys: make memorable experiences for clients, hire other chefs with similar skills and passions, and create food that stretches her endless creativity to make unforgettable meals.

## Sweet Spot Analysis

### Exercises to identify your sweet spot

#### *Identify Strengths*

1. Read your old performance appraisals and note what strengths are consistently recognized. As I looked back, I was surprised how often my ability to sift through large amounts of data and find the root of the issue was mentioned.
2. Ask friends and colleagues to identify your top 3–5 strengths.
3. Take the *StrengthsFinder* assessment.
4. Take the *Strong–Campbell Interest Inventory* or other occupational instruments.

#### *Recognize Passions*

1. Remember what you did as a child and think about how that applies to what you are doing today. For example, in elementary school two things I loved to do were to teach the younger kids and to help kids solve problems with other kids. Today my most satisfying work is teaching and coaching leaders, especially on communication and interpersonal issues.
2. Take *The Passion Test* at [www.thepassiontest.com](http://www.thepassiontest.com)
3. Write down all the things you feel passionate about without regard for how it applies to a job. After making your list, think about how that could apply to a job.

#### *What's Your Nurturing Environment?*

1. Keep a journal and once a day write down the best part of your day and what made it satisfying.
2. Make a list of all of the things that you like at work (some ideas follow, but are not exhaustive)
  - a. Characteristics of the best boss
  - b. Characteristics of best co-workers – just like me, diverse, combination
  - c. Pace of work – slow and steady, fast and energetic, etc.
  - d. Amount of interaction with people – frequent, rare, when you choose, etc.
  - e. Quality orientation of company – exceptional, perfectionistic, good enough, does not matter, etc.
  - f. Product or service based – we make something or we provide services
  - g. Reputation of company
  - h. Size of company
  - i. Entrepreneurial or bureaucratic
  - j. Mission of company
  - k. Leadership of the organization