



## **Know Your Strengths: Evaluating Your Skill Set**

“I’d love to be a Nichepreneur,” Michelle told me, “but I’m not sure I can. After all, I don’t have any unique skills. I’m just a regular old HR person.” She sighed. “Unless, of course,” Michelle added with a wry grin, “you count shopping as a special skill.”

It’s to be admitted that niches that revolve around shopping are far and few between. What’s not true, however, is that Michelle doesn’t have any unique skills. I firmly believe that there’s no such thing as a ‘regular old’ person. It’s just a matter of viewing yourself creatively and objectively.

Let’s take a look at how Michelle did exactly that -- and how you can do it too!

### **Step One: Grab Your Resume**

A resume seldom gives a complete picture of a person’s life, but it can serve as a good starting point. It’s a snapshot of your education and experience, which can help you look objectively at your skill set.

Michelle’s resume listed her years at junior college and university, along with two earlier stints as benefits administrator for mid sized corporations. Her current position as a HR executive was on the resume as well.

### **Step Two: Start Padding**

Most people don’t list every job they’ve ever held on their resume, especially if those jobs were outside their field of choice or were low-paying jobs taken out of need. However, for this exercise, we want to know about them. Additionally, list any volunteer or hobby experience you have.

“Well, I put myself through college by working at the pet store,” Michelle said, noting that carefully. “And then I worked weekends at the veterinarian’s office, cleaning cages and caring for the animals.” Volunteer experience included stints at the humane society, reading to children at the hospital, and organizing a regional pet-walk fundraiser.

### **Step Three: List Job Duties**

Going job by job, make a complete list of what you did while employed in that position. Go beyond your job title and write down what you actually did. More than one grocery clerk has been pressed into doing inventory and more than one human resource pro has spent time handling irate customers.

This step took Michelle quite a while. Each of her positions had multiple duties, and she wound up with two pages of notes. The duties listed ranged from administrative to customer service to basic animal care.



**Step Four: Determine skill sets**

For every job duty that you've listed, jot down the top three skills you need to complete that task. Don't worry if you have duplicates -- it's likely that similar duties will require similar skills.

Organization, counseling, and energy rated high on Michelle's skill set. Additionally, she listed computer knowledge, accessing resources, patience, compassion, active listening, and more.

**Step Five: Broaden your scope**

Repeat this process with your volunteer activities and hobbies. You will find a very different skill list emerging.

"Wow," Michelle said, pondering a list that included strength, animal knowledge, compassion, and empathy, among other traits. "You wouldn't think these lists belong to the same person!"

**Step Six: Take a Poll**

Get in touch with friends, family members, coworkers, and colleagues. Tell them you're doing a self-development exercise and ask them to list the top three things that come to mind when they think of you.

Michelle did this via e-mail. "I just couldn't imagine asking someone this face to face," she said, "and it's easier to read this type of thing than hear it in person." Expecting to hear responses that mirrored her own self image, Michelle was astonished by the answers she received: Ambitious, Cheerful, Charismatic, Strong, Passionate.

After completing these half-dozen steps, Michelle had a multi-page skill list. Some of the skills were things she considered universal: "Any successful person has to be organized," was one comment, while others were more unique. "I'm not sure how many people know how to counsel an upset employee or trim horse hooves"

The same will be true for you. Each person is unique, and brings their own unique experiences and education to the table. Examining this closely will yield up a different skill set for each and every person.

Matching this skill set with your passions is key to finding the proper niche for you. But before you do that, do what Michelle did. Spend the time to do a skills assessment and discover what the tools you've got to work with are!

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