

***WALL STREET JOURNAL***  
bestselling author

**Success Factors**

# THE TWO STEVES

Comes  
With a **7-DAY**

**CORE COMPETENCIES  
CHALLENGE**

**WES BERRY**

keynote speaker | wordsmith

***Business  
Quick  
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Series Volume 7



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# **THE TWO STEVES CORE COMPETENCIES**

**By: Wes Berry**



# Part 1

## Core Competencies: Your Strategic Advantage in Business

*“Know your core competencies and focus  
on being great at them.”*

—Mark Cuban



# **Chapter 1**

## **Understanding Core Competencies**

When it comes to American success stories, the Steves at Apple probably rank pretty high on your list. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak started Apple, Inc. in a garage in 1976, selling computer kits to hobbyists for \$50 apiece. By 1980, Apple went public, and Jobs and Wozniak became millionaires. Today, 45 years after Apple began, Jobs and Wozniak are considered pioneers of personal computing.

If you find yourself asking how Jobs and Wozniak were able to turn Apple into such a huge success so quickly, you're not alone. People all over the world have been studying these two, trying to unlock the secret of their success. But in

reality, it's not all that complicated. They just knew what their strengths were, and they played to them. They understood their core competencies. Leveraging core competencies is about playing to your strengths. The problem is sometimes we fail to recognize our own strengths.

Wozniak was the engineering genius who designed the systems and the programs that moved personal computing from a dream into a reality. Jobs was the visionary, who saw the potential in Wozniak's technical doodads, securing the funding and directing product development with the customer in mind. Wozniak was the man who made home computers possible; Jobs was the man who created a product that we didn't even know we needed.

You can argue over who was smarter, who was more charismatic, or who contributed more to Apple's success. But when it comes down to it,

what really matters is that both men understood where they excelled, and they maintained their focus on that particular core competency. Some people can code, some can sell.

### **What Is Core Competency?**

Core competencies refer to the unique set of capabilities and resources that enable a company to create sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace.

In 1990, strategists C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel wrote an article called “The Core Competence of the Corporation” for the *Harvard Business Review*. In this article, the pair wrote that we should stop thinking of businesses as collections of different business units, but rather as a set of core competencies, “the collective learning in the organization, especially how to

coordinate diverse productive skills and integrate multiple streams of technologies.”

In a nutshell, these two strategists were saying that companies find sustained success by acknowledging *the specialized skills their employees possess* that add significant value to their product. These competencies include knowledge, technology, and infrastructure, and allow a company to deliver superior value to customers and achieve long-term success.

It's important to differentiate between core competencies and competitive strengths. Core competencies refer to the employees' specialized skills, while competitive strengths refer specifically to the business itself. One competitive strength might be the location of the business. Another competitive strength could be a company's line of credit. These are advantages that the business has, which is different from an



individual's skill set at accounting which he or she can take with them as they move around.

Core competencies are important because they allow a company to differentiate itself from competitors and create a sustainable competitive advantage. By leveraging their unique set of skills, knowledge, and resources of their employees, companies can offer products or services that are superior to those of their competitors.

According to a study by McKinsey & Company, companies that focus on developing and leveraging their core competencies outperform their peers by a factor of three. These companies also achieve higher profit margins and are more likely to succeed in the long term.

Core competencies are also important because they enable companies to innovate and adapt to changing market conditions. By leveraging the unique capabilities of their

employees, companies can develop new products or services that meet the changing needs of customers and stay ahead of competitors.

Basically, core competencies boil down to three things:

1. Does it apply over a broad range of industries?
2. Does it make the end product more desirable to the consumer?
3. Is it hard to imitate or replicate?

Since these three definitions are fundamental to understanding core competencies, it's worth taking a moment to think about them a little more. Let's dig into them more deeply.

### **Does It Apply Over a Broad Range of Industries?**

One of the hallmarks of a core competency is that it isn't tied to a highly specific area. Sure, it may be a specialized tool or skill, like high-level accounting or well-developed writing skills, but ideally, these core competencies can be applied to a number of different situations, regardless of the specific industry.

Take accounting, for instance. While the numbers and processes may differ from industry to industry, by and large, the fundamental elements of accounting are the same across all industries, with the specifics of each business adding flavor, rather than changing the entire recipe. The same can be said for writing, research, teamwork, and so on.

In essence, core competencies are skills that are readily transferable from industry to industry, allowing you to apply your skills in a

variety of fields after a relatively short period of adjustment.

The key word here is flexible.

### **Does It Make the End Product More Desirable to the Consumer?**

This definition can be a little harder to identify in some ways. Some core competencies are obvious, especially for manufactured goods. Engineering, mathematics, and design skills all provide clear benefits when it comes to manufacturing a TV or developing software.

But do accounting practices make a TV more desirable? What about problem solving? Or communication?

As you probably suspect, the answer is yes—just not in a straightforward, one-to-one way. Yes, engineering a TV can make it sleeker and more powerful and can create a clearer

picture. But accounting helps to keep costs low, making the TV more affordable. Problem-solving can help efficiency from design through distribution. And communication lets consumers know why they need this particular TV.

When it comes to core competencies, it's actually pretty rare that you'll find a clear path from your skill to a product. Instead, when you consider a product from all angles, you'll start to see the invisible threads that connect it to all aspects of the business. That will reveal which skills will be most useful in making a product more desirable.

The key word here is useful.

### **Is It Hard to Imitate or Replicate?**

There are some skills that everyone is expected to have a solid grasp on. Everyone is expected to know how to read and write, the

basics of how to use a computer, and the ability to communicate with others. These are basic skills, not core competencies.

What makes a core competency special is that it goes beyond basic skills, giving you abilities that are more difficult to find. The more specialized the skill is, the more difficult it is to replicate or replace. In other words, core competencies are the things that separate you from others.

Take coding skills, for example. Someone who has just graduated from college with a computer science degree will probably have a solid grounding in coding. However, the more experience they gain and the more training they receive in specific languages and processes, the more highly developed their coding core competency becomes. They may even begin to

develop new processes or use coding languages in new ways.

At high levels, core competencies are virtually irreplaceable skills, either because there aren't enough highly trained individuals around to fill the missing space or because the employee has made the skill their own, adding an individual flair that can't be captured or recreated by someone else.

The key word here is unique.

If you ask yourself, then, if a skill is flexible, useful, and unique, then you've found yourself a core competency

Core competencies are an increasingly important part of your professional life—and that's a good thing. Chris Lennon, a senior HR executive, has said that a lot of bad hires come from not understanding the core competencies required for a position: "It can become impossible

to find the right person for the job if you don't first identify what the ideal candidate needs to succeed."

Core competencies aren't just opinions. They stem from observable patterns of behavior and performance, and they must be defined from within. For companies, that means identifying areas where they provide services or attributes that separate them from the competition. For you, it's about identifying the areas where you excel.

You can think of it as playing to your strengths: you know what you're awesome at, and you know where you kinda stink. Maybe you're really good at coming up with concepts and knowing how to market ideas, but you don't have the first clue how to handle the technical elements. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as you're honest with yourself about your limitations.



In fact, knowing your limits is actually a strength. As William Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, “This above all: to thine own self be true, / And it must follow, as the night to the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man.” In other words, when you take the time to really understand who you are, and when you remain true to that person, you’ll avoid positioning yourself for failure, and give yourself the opportunity to succeed instead.

“But wait!” I hear you say, “I don’t know what my core competencies are! How am I supposed to know what I’m good at? And what if I’m not good at anything? What do I do then?”

Relax! Identifying your core competencies isn’t something that happens overnight. You’re not going to wake up tomorrow, turn off your alarm clock, look in the mirror, and say, “Hey! I know where my strengths and weaknesses really

lie! Let's go!" Getting to know yourself is a longer process, and it involves taking the time and effort to really think about who you are, what you're good at doing, and most importantly, what you enjoy doing.

And don't worry about not being good at anything. I promise, you have a ton of things you excel at—you just haven't thought about yourself that way before, at least not in any organized way. With a little time and introspection, you'll find you've already got a bunch of core competencies, and you'll be able to prove it.

Plus, you should develop core competencies—both the skills you want to learn and those you already have. Just like with professional athletes, when you don't use a skill, it can start to fade away, and the longer you don't use it, the longer it takes to get it back. That's why it's important to make sure you continue to

develop your existing core competencies as you explore new areas of personal development, so you can ensure you're not losing skills you already possess.

When it comes to core competencies, the thing to remember is that it's all about personal growth. When Jobs and Wozniak first started working together, do you think they knew they were going to end up millionaires in only a few years? Well, Steve Jobs probably did.

What made it possible was that both Steves were willing to grow, to develop their skills and look for new ways to put them into practice. You have the chance to identify your own core competencies, then develop and deploy them. It's all about being willing to grow and improve yourself. Trust me, you have it in you!

And it's not all about work. You can have core competencies in your personal life as well.

Perhaps you are a green thumb at gardening. Or an excellent chef and have a knack for creating new recipes. Whether you are at work or at home, it's important to know what your core competencies are.

In the next chapter, let's take a look at identifying and assessing your core competencies.

The Two Steves  
Core Competencies

Wes Berry

## **Chapter 2**

# **Identifying and Assessing Core Competencies**

In 1958, Steven Spielberg made his first movie. Only twelve-years old, he used his father's video camera to film a train "wreck," using his toy train set. While the movie didn't make Spielberg any money, it did start him on a path to stardom as one of the most famous directors of all time.

But success didn't come overnight. Spielberg watched and made movies all through his teens, wanting only to direct films for the big screen. But he was rejected from USC's film school for bad grades and ended up at California State University, Long Beach.

By 1968, though, Universal Studios gave Spielberg the chance to make his first theatrical film, and he wound up with a contract. For the next several years, Spielberg was stuck directing television shows, and while he was frustrated with his limited opportunities, he continued to develop his directorial vision with each episode.

Although his first theatrical film was *The Sugarland Express*, his breakthrough was 1975's *Jaws*, the first summer blockbuster. From that point on, Spielberg was a household name, and his reputation as one of America's greatest filmmakers only continues to grow.

What Spielberg was lucky enough to discover early in his life wasn't just his vision—his ability to see what he wanted to create in his mind's eye was a huge factor, sure. But what really sets Spielberg apart is his ability to communicate that vision to actors,

cinematographers, editors, musicians, and producers. From the very beginning, Spielberg identified his core competencies and honed them with persistence and practice.

Unfortunately, no matter how many movies we see, most of us aren't Steven Spielberg. Few of us have known since we were twelve what we wanted to do with our lives. But that doesn't mean we haven't been developing our own core competencies since we were kids.

Core competencies aren't just about accumulating technical skills, like coding or engineering. Many competencies are so-called "soft skills," such as communication, teamwork, and professionalism, which—unlike measurable skills like math or language fluency—are more difficult to quantify.

While hard skills are valuable, it's the combination of hard and soft skills that can really



make an employee a valuable contributor to the team. When you can combine technical capacity with leadership abilities and a commitment to producing high quality work, you end up with a sum that's greater than its parts.

But first things first. Let's think about identifying your core competencies. While you might be able to come up with a couple ideas while just sitting there and thinking about it for a few minutes, it's going to take more effort than that to really do the job right. So, clear your schedule, get a cup of coffee or tea, and get ready to think hard about who you really are.

### **Step 1: Brainstorming**

Yeah, I know. Is there a project that doesn't start out with brainstorming? But the reason brainstorming is such a common way to start projects is because it works. According to Anne

Converse Willkomm at Drexel University, brainstorming is “intended to bring a wide range of ideas to the table, some of which fall to the wayside, while others get pulled and shaped into something concrete . . . What I find most exciting is when a new idea emerges, something no one entered the room with.”

When you’re brainstorming, the key is to keep judgment off the table. Even when you’re brainstorming by yourself, you may be tempted to not write something down because you think it’s stupid or not related. But that’s the value of brainstorming. We can flush out the bad ideas, get the junk out of the way, and let the gold shine. And you never know—sometimes the junk ideas might lead to something you never would have suspected.

Start with a clear sheet of paper, preferably a new notebook or legal pad. Find a quiet place

free from distraction—no phones!—and give yourself enough time to work. If you feel like you're pressed for time, then you might as well put off brainstorming until later, when you won't feel pressured. Grab a pen or pencil, take a deep breath, and start writing.

You're making a list of potential core competencies, and while you're probably coming into this process with some idea of what you're good at, you shouldn't be afraid to write down things you'd like to be good at. Or things you may never get a chance to practice. Or even things you don't like. Just get words down on paper. It's free association, baby—let the writing flow!

If you're struggling for some potential core competencies, here are some common competencies HR folks like to look for:

- Communication
- Coding

- Spreadsheets
- Teamwork
- Engineering
- Project management
- Personal development
- Responsibility
- Mathematics
- Ambition
- Problem-solving

These are just a very few potential possibilities. You can start with these, or you can just use them to prime your brain to come up with competencies on your own. You should expect to spend at least five minutes on this process, but if you need more time, feel free to continue working. If five minutes feels like too long, then you probably need to keep digging.

## **Step 2: Evaluation**

Now that the brainstorming is over, you should take a few minutes to breathe. Shake out your hands, unclench your jaw, stand up and stretch . . . whatever you do to relax. Take five minutes and step away from the list you just made. It's pretty fresh right now, and you need a little time away from it to be able to fairly evaluate your list of competencies.

Feel relaxed now? Good!

The next step is going through your list and identifying which of the things you wrote down are the strongest core competencies. The total number isn't important. You may find you have a broad range of interests and abilities, or you might be most focused in only a few areas. There's nothing wrong in either case.

The question, then, is how to evaluate your list. What are the factors that you should use to

determine how important each competency is? Well, the answer is pretty straightforward. Do you remember that list I mentioned earlier about how companies determine their core competencies? It's basically the same here. This is what you should ask yourself when you're considering each core competency:

1. Does the competency apply across a broad range of industries or applications?
2. Does the competency make me a more relevant or attractive employee? Does it make me stand out in a competitive position?
3. Is the competency something that's unique, uncommon, or requires training and experience?

When you're looking at your list of competencies, really try and think about each one of these factors. For some, you won't have to spend very long—in fact, some of the things you wrote down you can pretty much cross off right away, since they were the junk you were clearing out to make way for the good stuff.

But for the other competencies, really dig down and ask yourself each of these three questions. As you make your way through your list, you can start to cross more and more things off of your list, until you're left with a good set of skills. But there's still one more step.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

When it comes to identifying your core competencies, you have to remember that the focus is on you. You may have a list of several very good skills that an HR manager would kill to

have on their staff. And while the goal of the brainstorming process was to come up with skills for you, the resulting list can sometimes stray pretty far from that goal.

That's where reflection comes into play. Once you have your carefully curated list of potential personal core competencies, you should go through each skill and ask yourself how much each skill resonates with you.

What skills do you feel you already possess? What skills would you like to develop further? Are there skills on the list where you have evidence of past success?

Using past evidence can really help this process, especially when it comes to soft skills. Without quantitative data to indicate success or mastery, you need to be able to summon performance reviews, recommendations,



customer comments, and other anecdotal evidence to support your claims of competency.

Identifying your core competencies isn't an easy process. And honestly, you don't want it to be. When you're doing this kind of deeper self-examination, easy is the enemy of the good. You should embrace the challenge—the more energy you expend in an earnest effort, the higher the reward will be once you finish the process.

## **Developing Your Core Competencies**

In 1987, a man named Paul O'Neill took the reins of the Aluminum Company of America. Better known as Alcoa, the company had manufactured aluminum products for more than 100 years, becoming the go-to producer of aluminum goods, including soda and beer cans, aluminum foil, and other commodities.

While the company had always produced decent returns for investors, those profits had started to tail off in the face of mismanagement, and Alcoa felt they needed fresh blood to reinvigorate their operations. They decided on Paul O'Neill, who had previously worked in the United States Office of Management and Budget and as vice-president and president of International Paper.

O'Neill came onboard as chairman and CEO of Alcoa and immediately met resistance from his board. The heart of the problem? O'Neill was singularly focused on improving worker safety. While the board of directors wasn't against improving Alcoa's safety record (which was actually among the leaders in the industry), they were concerned about O'Neill's apparent disinterest in improving the one thing they cared about most: profit.

But while O'Neill was mocked by board members, investors, and the press for his emphasis on safety over profit, he stood firm on his principles, and insisted Alcoa plants become the safest workplaces in America. The end result? By the time O'Neill left Alcoa in 2000, the company's market value increased more than nine times the original value, rising from \$3 billion to more than \$27 billion.

Author Charles Duhigg suggests that O'Neill was able to create change at Alcoa by focusing on “keystone habits,” which “say that success doesn't depend on getting every single thing right, but instead relies on identifying a few key priorities and then fashioning them into powerful levers.” In this case, O'Neill used an emphasis on worker safety to disrupt the old order of business and instill a new workplace culture, which led to increases in safety—and profit.

If you read this and thought to yourself, “Hm, that sounds familiar,” then you’re in good company. What Duhigg calls keystone habits sounds an awful lot like how we’ve been describing core competencies.

Like keystone habits, core competencies aren’t about becoming some kind of mega-powered superman. Instead, knowing your competencies allows you to focus on your strengths, and while you’ll still make mistakes, you’ll have a better chance of not only overcoming those mistakes, but incorporating the lessons you learn, and further developing your core competencies.

O’Neill understood that you can’t simply decide to be someone or something different overnight. The only way to enact meaningful change is to break your problem down into

smaller portions, then strategically focus your efforts to bring the most efficient returns.

The same is true when it comes to developing your core competencies. You can't just decide that you possess certain skills without taking the time to develop them. The good news is that you've already been developing a bunch of those competencies your entire life. But to really excel, you have to commit to continually honing your abilities.

If that sounds like a lot of work . . . well . . . it is. But believe me, it's totally worth the effort. And the best part is that because you're working on developing yourself, you have ultimate control. You decide what competencies you want to develop and how you're going to strategically approach your development.

One key thing to remember is flexibility. No one gets everything right the first time, and no

solution works for every person. If you work on a certain approach for a while and don't feel like you're making progress, take a moment to evaluate the effectiveness of your strategy. You might find a few tweaks could make all the difference—or you might decide on an entirely new approach altogether.

What is the best way to develop your core competencies? I've outlined a few strategies for you to try out, but the best advice I can give you is to be self-aware. The person who knows you best is you. Look over the approaches I suggest here, and tailor your approach to your specific skills and personality. Take ownership of your development.

## **1. Education**

Not everyone is a model student. Some people can't wait for the end of college, believing

they'll never have to take a class again and they can just get on with the business of business. Of course, we all know that's not the case—most companies today insist on their employees taking on professional development, and as an employee, you should take full advantage of any development opportunities you encounter.

One of the most effective ways to develop your core competencies is to earn a degree. When I say this, most people think, “Oh, he means an MBA.” Yes, an MBA degree can be helpful to you if you're looking to move up the business ladder. But it's also not the only option.

There are a number of other degree programs you can pursue, including PhDs for those in specialized fields. Or you can investigate earning another undergraduate degree in a major that's closely related to your field.

Of course, not all classes need to be degree-seeking. You should keep an eye out for courses that offer you training in a specific skill, many of which are available at local universities or, now more than ever, online.

## **2. Work Opportunities**

One of the most important aspects of finding business success is being willing to work hard to achieve your goals. That's especially true in the workplace, where your effort doesn't just help produce higher returns, but helps you stand out to managers and other important figures as someone who's committed to the company's goals.

But working hard doesn't mean you can't be working for yourself. Every project, even every task, offers an opportunity for you to develop your core competencies, especially in areas where you



may not be as comfortable. When you take on work projects, for instance, think about how that project helps contribute to you gaining further mastery over your core competencies.

Taking on new work projects is a great way to build those skills. Not only will you help participate in building the business, but you'll also develop relationships with others who have their own sets of core competencies, and you can learn from each other in surprisingly rewarding ways.

You also shouldn't overlook the value of employee development opportunities. Training classes, online testing, and other forms of development aren't just a bonus, but they actually make up an important part of your employer's commitment to you as an employee. Think of this training as part of your compensation package: development opportunities give you the chance to move forward in the company.

Another valuable tool for personal development is finding a mentor at your workplace. Find someone at your workplace who has more experience and see if they'd be willing to share that experience with you. Sit them down, buy them a coffee, and pick their brain. Most of the time, people are happy to help out; someone probably did the same thing for them when they were younger, and they appreciate the opportunity to give back.

### **3. Networking**

For some people, networking comes naturally. For others, it's pure torture. But being able and willing to network with others in and around your profession is a critical part of building your core competencies (I'd even say networking is a core competency).

Building your personal network is about more than finding a job. It's about establishing yourself within the ecosystem of your profession and building your reputation based on your set of skills. You can find a mentor outside the workplace through networking or even become a mentor to someone else.

Networking can take place just about anywhere. One ideal location is within professional organizations. While most organizations have annual conferences, which is basically a weekend-long networking fest, membership in a professional organization connects you year-round to a vast network of people across the country (and maybe even the globe).

#### **4. Establish Yourself**

Many people think that establishing yourself within your profession only happens once you become a master. That couldn't be further from the truth. How do you think established professionals became masters?

You should take whatever opportunity presents itself to establish your reputation within your field. Write blogs and articles for professional publications, make presentations at conferences, and volunteer to teach others the skills you've acquired.

There's a longstanding tradition in education called Learn One, Do One, Teach One. You learn a skill, practice a skill, then teach that skill to someone else. When you can effectively teach that skill to another person to the point that they can acquire the skill themselves, then you've

come this much closer to mastering that core competency.

## **5. Dealing with Doubt**

With all this talk about identifying, developing, and nurturing your core competencies, it can be easy to overlook the feeling of self-doubt that can start to creep in during moments of self-reflection. “Do I really have these skills,” you might think, “or have I just gotten by because of luck?”

This is imposter syndrome, and it can be a pain in the neck.

Self-doubt is a relatively common feeling, especially when you’re setting new goals for yourself. It’s only natural to ask yourself whether you’re really up for the challenge, or if you have the time, the talent, and the dedication to be able to reach those goals. In fact, if you’re not a little

uncomfortable, you're probably setting your sights too low.

But imposter syndrome takes that self-doubt to a new level. Many people who experience success have trouble accepting that they've earned their achievements based on their abilities. These people often feel a sense of fear or dread, as though they're just waiting for everyone else to find out that they're a fraud and that they don't have the skills or capacity to handle their job at a high level.

First described in 1978, imposter syndrome isn't considered to be a mental illness by the medical community. Instead, it's viewed more as a mindset, one that can create feelings of anxiety and depression in more serious cases.

It can manifest in many ways. Many people describe feeling like they have an invisible person watching over their shoulder, watching their every

move. You may begin to feel like any mistake, no matter how small, could bring the whole house of cards tumbling down, leaving you exposed for the imitator that you are.

But no matter how ominous and dreadful this all sounds, there's one important thing to remember: You're okay!

People have been feeling the effects of imposter syndrome for years, and even some of the most significant, impressive people have felt the same way. Take Albert Einstein, whose work in physics changed the entire world. Shortly before his death in 1955, he admitted that he felt the sting of imposter syndrome—although he didn't call it that: “the exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an involuntary swindler.”

Wow, right? If even the famed genius Albert Einstein feels like an imposter, shouldn't we feel a little more comfortable with our own sense of self-doubt? Political leaders, actors, musicians, entrepreneurs, tech titans, you name it. In just about every walk of life, you can find someone who has, at some point or another, felt like they weren't good enough, that they had somehow lucked into a position they didn't deserve, and that it was only a matter of time before everyone figured it out.

Of course, it's easy to say that imposter syndrome is no big deal. It's another thing entirely to have to actually cope with it. How do you find a way past these feelings of self-doubt and accept that you have not only earned everything you've received, but that you have even more value to contribute and deserve even more?



This is another area in which focusing on your core competencies pays off. Overcoming imposter syndrome can actually happen organically as you identify and develop your core competencies. For the most part, imposter syndrome is a product of unfamiliarity. You've reached a level of success and achievement that is new to you, and now you're expected to rise to new heights—but how?

On your way up, it's possible—for many people, it's likely—that you've found success without necessarily identifying the specific skills that make you who you are. You simply make the best choices that you can based on your mindset and your available skills, and it usually works out in your favor.

But at some point, you have to be able to identify those personal strengths and weaknesses, not only so you can shore up any weak points, but

so that you have a firm grasp on what has enabled you to succeed.

Imposter syndrome arises when you don't make that connection between your abilities and your current position. That's what can lead to feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, where you may feel that someone saw something in you that wasn't actually there.

As I said earlier, imposter syndrome is a mindset, and that means it can be changed. Talk to mentors, many of whom have probably felt the same way at some point. Don't focus so much on your mistakes, and remember instead that every failure is a chance to learn. Spend less time reflecting on the past, and spend more time thinking about how you can perform your best in the future.

Most of all, though, you should remember that it was your core competencies, your central

set of hard and soft skills, that helped you get to this point in the first place. For the most part, when you get promoted or you experience a new level of personal or professional success, it's because you worked your butt off to get there. You displayed levels of expertise, good judgment, and superior commitment that allowed you to rise to your level of success.

Doubt is only natural. Yes, some people go through life never doubting themselves, but for the most part, being unsure of ourselves is just a part of life. The key to dealing with it is to remember who you are and focus on the core competencies that make up the fundamental parts of your character.

# Part 2

## Using Core Competencies For Success

*“Knowing the edge of your competency is important. If you think you know more than you do, you will get into trouble.”*

—Warren Buffett

The Two Steves  
Core Competencies

Wes Berry

## **Chapter 3**

### **Developing Core Competencies**

Let's move from the individual and take a look at companies. For companies, developing core competencies requires a strategic and focused approach, just like with individuals. Companies need to identify the skills, knowledge, and resources that are unique to their organization and that can be leveraged to create a competitive advantage.

Consider the case of Microsoft, a tech giant that has consistently invested in upskilling its workforce. In June of 2022, when the COVID pandemic was causing chaos, Microsoft Pledged to upskill 25 million people worldwide by the end of that year, helping them to improve their

digital skills, so they could make better use of the workforce during the pandemic. By providing employees and others with opportunities to enhance their technical expertise and fostering a culture of continuous learning, Microsoft fortified its core competency in software development.

Let's take a look at ways to Develop Core Competencies within your organization to keep your company at the competitive edge of its industry.

### **1. Invest in Employee Skills**

At the heart of every successful organization lies a workforce equipped with the skills and knowledge that form the nucleus of core competencies. One way to develop core competencies is through investment in research and development (R&D). Companies that invest in R&D are able to develop new technologies and

products that are superior to those of their competitors. Investment in employee skills extends beyond technical proficiency to include soft skills, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the organization's strategic goals.

## **2. Encourage Innovation and Adaptability**

Organizations that champion innovation create an environment where new ideas are not only welcomed but also encouraged. This innovation-centric culture becomes a breeding ground for the development of novel core competencies. Whether it's streamlining processes, introducing new products, or enhancing customer experiences, innovation becomes the driving force.

Consider the example of Tesla, an automotive industry disruptor. Tesla's core competency in electric vehicle technology and



energy solutions stems from a culture of innovation led by its maverick CEO, Elon Musk. The company's ability to continuously innovate has not only shaped its core competencies but has also positioned it as a leader in the electric vehicle market.

Adaptability complements innovation by ensuring that core competencies remain relevant in the face of changing market dynamics. Organizations must be agile, willing to pivot, and adept at embracing change. This adaptability is crucial for sustaining and evolving core competencies over time.

### **3. Build Strategic Partnerships to Synergize Strengths**

Another way to develop core competencies is through strategic partnerships and acquisitions.

By partnering with other companies or acquiring companies with complementary capabilities, companies can expand their core competencies and create a more diversified and competitive organization. No organization exists in isolation, and strategic partnerships play a pivotal role in enhancing and expanding core competencies. Strategic partnerships can take various forms, including collaborations with other businesses, academic institutions, or industry experts. By aligning with entities that possess complementary strengths, organizations can tap into a broader pool of capabilities, accelerating the development of core competencies.

Consider the partnership between IBM and The Weather Company. IBM, with its expertise in data analytics and cloud computing (no pun intended), formed a strategic alliance with The Weather Company to leverage its vast data

resources. This collaboration not only enhanced IBM's core competency in data analytics but also opened new avenues for innovation.

Strategic partnerships also serve as a mechanism for risk-sharing and accessing resources that may be challenging to develop internally. By establishing relationships that align with strategic goals, organizations create a network of support that bolsters the development and sustainability of core competencies.

#### **4. Integrate Technology for a Cutting-Edge Advantage**

In the digital age, the integration of cutting-edge technologies can itself become a core competency. From artificial intelligence and machine learning to the Internet of Things,

organizations must assess and adopt technologies that align with their strategic objectives. The effective integration of these technologies not only enhances operational efficiency but can also spawn entirely new core competencies.

Consider Amazon's foray into artificial intelligence with its Alexa-powered devices. What started as a voice-activated assistant has evolved into natural language processing and smart home technology. Amazon's strategic integration of AI technologies has not only improved its existing core competencies but has also created new revenue streams, thanks to some talented tech folks.

However, technology integration must be approached strategically. Organizations should conduct thorough assessments to ensure that adopted technologies align with their business objectives and contribute to the development of

core competencies. Additionally, a robust IT infrastructure and a culture that embraces technological innovation are essential for successful integration.

### **5. Add Feedback Loops**

The development of core competencies is an iterative process, and feedback loops play a crucial role in fine-tuning and enhancing existing capabilities.

Feedback loops involve systematically collecting input from various stakeholders, including customers, employees, and partners. Organizations can leverage surveys, focus groups, and performance metrics to assess the impact and efficiency of their core competencies. This iterative feedback loop allows for continuous improvement and adaptation.

Consider the example of Google's search algorithm, a core competency that constantly evolves based on user feedback and changing internet trends. Through a continuous feedback loop, Google refines its search algorithms to deliver more accurate and relevant results, ensuring that its core competency remains at the forefront of the industry.

Feedback loops also serve as an early warning system, helping organizations identify shifts in market dynamics or emerging opportunities. By staying attuned to external and internal feedback, organizations can proactively adjust their core competencies to align with evolving business landscapes.

Then how do companies leverage these core competencies to their advantage? Let's take a look.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Leveraging Core Competencies for Growth**

Leveraging core competencies requires a deep understanding of the market and customer needs. Companies need to identify the areas where their core competencies can be applied to create value for customers and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Product differentiation is a great way to do this. By using their employees' unique capabilities, companies can create products or services that are superior to those of their competitors and meet the specific needs of customers.

Another way to leverage core competencies is through operational excellence, finding employees who can help streamline processes and reduce costs to achieve higher levels of efficiency and profitability.

Let's take a look at three companies who have done this well.

### **1. Market Expansion Strategies: Pioneering New Horizons**

Starbucks was able to successfully expand globally by leveraging its core competency in creating a unique and immersive coffee shop experience. They're not just selling coffee—they are selling an *experience*. Therefore, they take great care in adapting their products, marketing, and operations to local preferences in each market they enter. The company's ability to maintain its



brand essence while adapting to local preferences showcases the power of leveraging core competencies for successful market expansion.

But how did they do this?

Starbucks opened their first coffee shop in 1971 in Seattle's Pike Place Marketplace. Then, the excitement really revved up in 1982, when they brought Howard Schultz on board as director of retail operations and marketing. He began providing Starbucks coffee to fine restaurants and espresso bars. In 1983, he went to Italy, where he was impressed with the popularity of their espresso bars in Milan. He came home and worked to convince Starbucks owners to start up a trial coffeehouse here in Seattle. In 1985, they opened up a coffeehouse, where the first Starbucks Caffee Latte was served.

And the rest is history.

Strategies for aligning core competencies with the specific needs and nuances of the target market ensured a seamless and successful expansion.

### **1. Diversification                      Opportunities: Expanding the Portfolio**

Diversification, the art of venturing into new products or services, becomes a viable growth strategy when anchored in core competencies. Diversification based on core competencies involves a careful examination of the inherent capabilities of your employees that can be applied to create new offerings.

Take Apple, Inc., for example. Apple is known for their ability to design and develop innovative products that meet the changing needs

of customers. The company's focus on design and innovation has enabled it to create products such as the iPhone and iPad, which have become iconic in the tech industry. Steve Jobs partnered with German-American industrial designer and inventor Hartmut Esslinger in the 1980s and then with British and American designer Jony Ive starting in 1997 to create an engineering and design aesthetic that set Apple apart from other technology companies. Jobs found people with core competencies capable of helping him reach his dream, and his company expansion exploded. Beyond its strength in personal computing, Apple successfully diversified into music with the iPod, smartphones with the iPhone, and wearables with the Apple Watch. The seamless integration of its design and user experience strengths became the cornerstone of

Apple's diversification success. Apple's ability to leverage the core competencies of its employees has enabled it to achieve high levels of profitability and success in the marketplace.

## **2. Brand Positioning: Crafting a Unique Identity**

Core competencies are not just operational strengths; they become the DNA of a brand. A brand's identity is intricately linked to its core competencies. Organizations must communicate and align their competencies with the values and aspirations of their target audience.

Consider the brand positioning of Nike, which revolves around its strength in innovation and design. In 1971, they hired Carolyn Davidson, a student at Portland State University with a competency in graphic design, to create the

swoosh symbol that has become so iconic. This symbol was more than just a checkmark. It symbolized a wing of the Greek god Nike, representing speed, movement, power, and motivation—all things Nike wished to represent. Then, their sports marketing executive Sonny Vaccaro's competency in finding talent led him to convince Nike to take a chance on a kid named Michael Jordan.

And again, the rest is history.

Nike has established itself as a symbol of performance, athleticism, and cutting-edge style. For most of us, when we see their “swish” symbol, we automatically think of Nike and their “Just do it” slogan.

Crafting a unique brand positioning involves a strategic alignment of core competencies with the brand's narrative. You need to find the right people who have the competencies

to create a brand story that resonates with consumers, and leverages the unique strengths that set a brand apart.

### **3. Customer Value Proposition: Elevating the Experience**

The alignment of core competencies with customer needs forms the bedrock of a compelling value proposition. Understanding customer needs and preferences is paramount. Organizations must identify which core competencies directly contribute to fulfilling these needs and tailor their value proposition accordingly.

Toyota's strengths lie in its ability to develop and implement lean manufacturing processes that enable it to produce high-quality cars at a lower cost than its competitors. The company's focus on operational excellence has

enabled it to achieve high levels of efficiency and profitability, while also delivering high-quality products to customers.

Core competencies are crucial for companies that want to create sustainable competitive advantage and achieve long-term success. Toyota has been able to differentiate themselves from competitors and create sustainable competitive advantage by leveraging their unique set of skills, knowledge, and resources.

## **Conclusion**

As you can see, developing your core competencies in your organization is critical to its continued success. Companies that can do so and to implement ongoing learning opportunities, will find themselves far ahead of their competition, and able to outperform their peers.

Next, let's look at how we can use core competencies to sustain competitive advantage over the long haul.



The Two Steves  
Core Competencies

Wes Berry

## **Chapter 5**

# **Sustaining Competitive Advantage Through Core Competencies**

In the ever-evolving landscape of business, sustaining a competitive advantage hinges on the adept management and continuous enhancement of core competencies. Here are a few ways you can thrive:

### **1. Focus on Continuous Improvement**

Sustaining competitive advantage is contingent upon a commitment to perpetual enhancement. We've talked before about a growth mindset, where people believe that their basic abilities can be developed through hard work and

training. Brains and talent are what we start with – where we go from there depends on our dedication, right? So it goes without saying that organizations that instill a mindset of continuous improvement ensure that their core competencies remain dynamic and responsive to market dynamics. To do this:

- *Clarify the goal.* What is it your company or department wants to reach? What skill sets do you need in order to do that?
- *Brainstorm.* What ideas can your employees come up with to reach the goal?
- *Create a new process.* Do we need more training to reach our goal? To bring in new team members? What can we do differently or better that we are not doing now?

- *Assess.* Is the new plan working? Did it reach our goal? What do we need to do differently this time?

An important concept in Japanese business is the concept of Kaizen. Kaizen is a business philosophy that creates a setting to encourage continuous growth to employees and operations. Instead of a quick fix, Kaizen is *an ongoing, gradual process* that makes small changes over a period of time., with the belief that small changes now can have a big impact over time. Toyota, a pioneer in implementing Kaizen, continually refines its production processes, ensuring that its core competency skills in lean manufacturing stays at the forefront.

## **2. Protect Your Intellectual Property**

When you have creative individuals coming up with unique intellectual property you must formulate a comprehensive strategy for safeguarding these assets. Apple, renowned for its design-centric core competency, strategically employs patents to protect the unique features of its products, such as the distinctive iPhone design. Another example is Heinz ketchup, which safeguards their unique recipe.

There are four main types of intellectual property rights that can be used to protect your creative endeavors:

- Copyrights
- Trademarks
- Patents
- Trade secrets

You can use these and other ways to protect your property. Here are some great places to start.

- *Implement a strong technological barrier.*  
Hacking, phishing, trolling – people are after your goods all the time. Ensure that your technology (computers, website, email, social media) is up to date and well secured with passwords and firewalls. Update it regularly.
- *Register copyrights, trademarks, and patents.*
- *Register business, product, or domain names.*
- *Create confidentiality, non-disclosure, or licensing contracts for employees and partners.*

### **3. Be Agile When it Comes to Change**

Change is inevitable, and sustaining competitive advantage demands an agile response to evolving market conditions. Agility involves the ability to pivot swiftly, whether in response to technological advancements, shifts in consumer behavior, or emerging market trends. Netflix, initially a DVD rental service, saw the writing on the wall and transitioned early on to a streaming model. This adaptive strategy allowed Netflix to leverage its core competency in content delivery amidst changing viewer preferences. To be agile in the face of change, your organization should already have these things set in place:

- *Flexible structure.* When the COVID pandemic hit, the businesses who survived were the ones who were able to change. Restaurants set up outside dining and businesses learned how to work remotely.

- *Cross-functional collaboration.* By encouraging employees to work outside of their own expertise, they not only learn another part of the company, but they bring a fresh mindset into the mix.
- *A willingness to experiment.* The cultivation of agility becomes a strategic imperative for organizations seeking to sustain competitive advantage through the evolution of their core competencies.

#### **4. Anticipate Future Industry Trends**

Beyond adaptability, sustaining competitive advantage demands a proactive approach to anticipate and capitalize on future industry trends. Strategic foresight involves scanning the horizon for emerging trends, potential disruptions, and shifts in the competitive landscape. Organizations must go beyond reacting to change and embrace a



strategic approach that positions them ahead of the curve. Amazon, foreseeing the growth of e-commerce, strategically leveraged its core competencies in logistics and customer-centricity to become an industry giant.

### **5. Encourage Employee Engagement**

The human element is intrinsic to sustaining competitive advantage through core competencies. Engaged employees play a pivotal role in not only preserving but also evolving these competencies. You want folks on board who are passionate contributors to the organization's success. Google, renowned for its innovative culture, attributes much of its success to the engagement of its workforce, fostering an environment where employees are encouraged to contribute ideas and experiment with new projects. Here are some ways to do that:

- *Clear communication.* Make sure your team members know what's going on. Share with them as much as you can about the project. Transparency is vital to trust, and a catalyst for creativity.
- *Opportunities for skill development.* Workshops, online courses, cross-functional collaboration and mentors are great places for employees to engage and learn.
- *Give them a sense of purpose.* Be sure they know your "why". Your mission statement is a great place to start with them. It's also important to recognize employees for jobs well done, encouraging them that their work has meaning.

Recognizing employees as active participants in the journey of sustaining competitive advantage ensures that core competencies remain vibrant and adaptable.

## **Conclusion**

Core competencies are often based on internal factors. Remember our discussion about the Steves? Steve Wozniak was good at designing, and Steve Jobs was good at figuring out what the customer wants and offering it to them. Because all people are different, some of the core competencies that you have at your organization will be far different and unique than other companies have at their place. Your core competences help sustain you to long-term advantage by providing the talent and expertise necessary to develop new and innovative products, services, and business models. Know your

strengths, focus on the areas where you are strongest, and use these to your advantage. Your employees will thank you that they get to work within their passions and your customers will thank you for offering them a product that goes above and beyond the competition.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Core Competencies in Leadership and Management**

Leadership is important to the success of any endeavor, and knowing your core competencies as a leader can make or break you and the company. It's also important to know your weaknesses, and to find someone to fill in the gaps, putting the right people into place. Let's take the President of the United States for example. The President has a cabinet of people he picks that are experts in their fields. (In theory, if it works as it's supposed to work!) The Department of Education Secretary, for example, should know about teaching and the best practices for educating America's kids. The Department of Transportation

Secretary should have a good handle on infrastructure and probably city planning. Their core competencies should align with their abilities to hold those positions. My point here is that the president only has so much time and so many core competencies of his own, so he selects people to handle the areas he is weaker in.

The same goes for leadership in business. If you're good at something, put it into practice. If you need assistance in an area, say technology and firewalls for example, hire an expert. The strategic integration of core competencies into leadership and management is important. Here is how you, as a leader, can learn, grow, and help your organization to thrive.

# **1. Make Leadership Development a Priority**

Leadership development is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor; it must align with an organization's unique set of core competencies. Leadership development programs should reinforce and augment existing core competencies.

- *Tap into the Transformational Leadership Model.* This management philosophy encourages and inspires employees to be creative. Executives give trusted employees the freedom to make decisions and be innovative, embracing new problem-solving skills. This growth will pave the way to the company's future successes. The transformational leadership model emphasizes the development of competencies that inspire and motivate

teams, aligning with an organization's people-centric core competencies.

- *Practice Discipline.* Most of us have heard of the 10,000 hours rule. For example, you need to play the violin 10,000 hours to become an expert. Did you know the Beatles got their start playing regularly in a pub? They were required to do many, many shows and come up with new material regularly in order to remain fresh to the same audience. This intense “training period” is often credited to their success as a band. Discipline is not only important for musicians. Employees and leaders who are dedicated to their work will become better and better over time. Having the discipline to pursue learning will pay off in due time.



- *Inspire Others.* Like it or not, leaders are role models. Becoming the person you were meant to be not only boosts your confidence, but the confidence of your followers. Be positive. Share inspiring real-life stories about other organizations' successes and how they got there. Show your vulnerability in the midst of turmoil, while at the same time overcoming. Do your best to be your best.
- *Continue Learning.* It's a must if you're going to keep up with the competition. Our world seems to be changing faster than ever, but a dedicated leader will find ways to keep up without burning out.
- *Avoid Burnout.* I feel like I need to throw this one in here for good measure. While it's important to develop your leadership skills and core competencies, it's also

critical to find balance. A leader who never stops working is setting a bad example for the other employees. A good work-life balance is essential if you and your employees are going to be at your best.

## **2. Align Your Team**

Individual competencies within a team must harmonize to amplify the organization's core strengths. It's then important to align team competencies with the organization. Team alignment involves strategically assembling individuals with diverse competencies that collectively enhance the organization's capabilities. Southwest Airlines, renowned for its operational excellence, strategically aligns team competencies with its organizational goals in efficient and customer-centric operations.

How do you get people with different skills to work well together? Here are some ideas for fostering team alignment:

- *Team-building exercises.* You've probably heard of the ropes course or the trust fall? Forget that! Southwest Airlines offers the epitome of fun in one of their team building exercises. They celebrate Halloween in a big way. Employees invite their families in for the day, and the hallways of the headquarters are packed with people. Some are roaming to see what they can see, but many are standing in line to get in to see a skit. These "skits" are put on by teams. One example is the "musical revue" that hits anything from rap to Broadway and is put on by the executive office. Events like these bring people together, and as in the

example of the skits, offer them a fun way to work on team building skills outside of their office duties as they prepare their musical. Who knows what new core competencies they will discover from this?

- *Skills assessments.* There are many different skills assessments. These might be a coding test for software developers, a written project for copy writers, or a management assessment for potential team leaders. These tests help you find the strengths—and weaknesses—of the people on your teams. You never know what you might find. Your solid, reserved tech guy just might play the bassoon in his spare time, sparking a creative side that you never thought of. Might he also be good at marketing your latest software?

- *Cross-functional collaboration.* As I mentioned before, this is a great way to mix core competencies up. People share what they are good at and learn from each other.

By aligning team projects with core competencies, organizations create a synergistic environment where collective excellence flourishes.

### **3. Be Adept at Crisis Management**

Crisis management is a litmus test for organizational resilience, and core competencies serve as the bedrock for navigating turbulent times. Organizations with a robust set of core competencies are better equipped to weather crises. The ability to adapt, innovate, and swiftly respond to unforeseen challenges reflects the organization's resilience. How you handle a crisis

can determine whether you come out on top or end up in bankruptcy.

Johnson & Johnson's handling of the Tylenol poisoning crisis exemplifies crisis management aligned with its core competency of prioritizing customer safety. In the fall of 1982, 12-year-old Mary Kellerman and six other individuals died suddenly. The connecting factor was that all of the people had taken Tylenol just before they died. An investigation revealed that the tablets had been laced with cyanide, a deadly poison. Johnson & Johnson, Tylenol's parent company, responded quickly. Putting customer safety above all else, they pulled all Tylenol products from off the shelves. This was 31 million bottles worth over \$100 million dollars. They stopped all production. They stopped all advertising. Their swift action was a customer-centric approach. It not only showed their commitment to customer safety, but

they had put in place competent people who responded well in a crisis. It cost them millions, but it saved lives. And it is a move that very well saved their company.

Hopefully you will never have to undergo anything as awful as the Tylenol poisonings, but is your company ready for crisis? Do you have the right people at the helm? It's not *if*, but *when* a crisis will come. It may be small, or it could be something very big. In order to be sure you are ready, leaders should take their organization members through scenario-based training, risk assessments, and communication protocols. The proactive infusion of core competencies into crisis response ensures that organizations not only survive but emerge stronger from adversity.

#### **4. Employ Strategic Decision-Making**

Strategic decisions aligned with core competencies amplify an organization's competitive advantage. Apple's foray into the music streaming industry, leveraging its core competency in user-friendly technology, exemplifies strategic decision-making that aligns with existing strengths.

How do you integrate core competencies into your workforce?

- *SWOT analysis*: SWOT is an acronym that stands for: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It's good to run a SWOT regularly. You can do this simply by teams throwing ideas onto a white board, or more complexly by building a SWOT matrix. Either way, here are some ideas to get you started.



- *Strengths:* What do we do well? What is unique about our organization and our individuals? What do we bring to the field that nobody else offers? For example, our tomato sauce outsells all other brands on the market.
- *Weaknesses:* What do we need to work on? How do we rank against our competition? For example, maybe we need to improve our social media marketing campaign.
- *Opportunities:* Are there marketing gaps in our plan? Can we sell our tomato sauce online as well as in stores? What about Whole Foods?

- *Threats:* Are new market trends going to hurt us? Do we need to sell a sugar-free version of our sauce due to dietary changes in the culture? Is there a competitor that might outsell us?
- *Scenario Planning:* This is a framework that creates several different situations and what you might do about them. This planning ahead project is great for everything from putting the right people into place to knowing what to do when a crisis strikes. Run through all of the “what-ifs” and let your team help you plan the actions and outcomes.

## **5. Communicate Well**

Effectively communicating core competencies throughout the organization is imperative for their integration into daily operations. Through storytelling, visual communication tools, and targeted messaging, leaders can instill a sense of purpose and understanding regarding core competencies.

Leaders must be able to convey their ideas clearly, listen actively, and foster open and transparent communication within the team and the customers. Consider Steve Jobs, whose Apple keynotes were legendary. He knew that his product announcements weren't just about showing people the new offerings from his company. The real focus of his keynotes was to build momentum for his products, focusing less on the technical capabilities and more on how they would fundamentally transform a customer's life. While the iPhone might have been a success regardless,

there's no denying the impact Jobs made during his speeches on iPhone sales.

Whether you are communicating to your team or your customer base, you need to be able to convey the core competencies that are going to propel your organization forward.

## **Conclusion**

Strong leadership is essential to the success of your organization. Focus on developing leadership skills in yourself and others, align team competencies with the organizations' core competencies, prepare for crisis, learn how to make decisions strategically, and communicate well. Embracing these leadership qualities will help you steer your ship on the right course through both frantic waters and calm.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Integrating Core Competencies into Organizational Culture**

Todd Jones, President and CEO of the Publix Super Market chain, began his career at Publix as a part-time bagger. He is a prime example of how the company nurtures the careers of their employees, finding their strengths, offering them changes for growth, and applying these core competencies to make their organization a success.

When Jones began working as a bagger in 1980, at the Smyrna Beach store, he hoped to become store manager. He took on different positions, working his way up, and by 1988 he was store manager. He then continued his climb up the

corporate ladder, becoming regional director and eventually CEO.

Publix believes their employees are the reason for their success, and the corporate culture shows this is true. They try to hire from within (as in the case of Jones), and they offer their employees of opportunities to learn. Their hiring department has a “job match” system, which helps employees and future hires figure out which skills areas they are strongest in, matching then with jobs they can succeed in. The company then encourages employees to seek learning that can make them better in their chosen paths.

Employees feel ownership in the company, because they’re allowed to purchase stock, making Publix the largest employee-owned grocery chain in the United States, employing over 225,000 employees. Once they own part of the company, they have incentive to make it a success.

Publix has won numerous awards for their origination, including a spot on Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" list for the last twenty-three consecutive years.

One of the main challenges that organizations face today is how to align their core competencies with their organizational culture. Achieving this integration is not easy and requires continued and intentional effort from both the leaders and the employees of the organization, as we read in the Publix example.

Let's look at some strategies for creating a cohesive organizational identity that seamlessly integrates with core competencies.

## **1. Employee Recognition: Cultivating a Culture of Appreciation**

Recognizing and rewarding employees who contribute using their core competencies is paramount to their integration into organizational culture. Employee recognition serves as a powerful motivator.

- *Tangible and intangible rewards.* These can be bonuses, extra vacation days, employee-of-the-week parking spaces, or even small things like movie tickets or gift cards.
- *Public acknowledgment.* Some companies have an employee recognition board with the employee's photo and a blurb about a job well done. Calling out employees in team meetings is another good way to recognize them. Posting their photo and a



blurb on social media and the company website is another great example.

- *Personalized appreciation.* Sometimes, simply calling your employee into your office for a positive word and handshake is appropriate. And it's always appropriate to thank someone for doing a good job, no matter if it's the janitor mopping the floor or the executive leading your biggest project.

## **2. Training and Onboarding: Weaving Competencies into the Fabric of Talent Development**

The integration of core competencies into employee training and onboarding processes is foundational to their assimilation within the

organizational culture. There are many different ways to do this.

Microsoft has a great onboarding process. First of all, being a software company, they have created an onboarding software. This sends the new hire paperwork, helps schedule onboarding meetings, tracks his or her onboarding progress, and introduces the new employee to company culture. Then, Microsoft provides personal training. You can do this through mentorships, shadowing, or any number of ways. Personal training helps the employee learn how the company works and offers hands-on experience at the job they were hired to do, before they are left on their own. Many companies offer videos for the employee to watch before they start their hands-on training.

Microsoft emphasizes career development opportunities early and often. Ask new hires what

their company goals are, and then figure out ways you can help them reach their goals. This is a great way to keep employees, figure out their core competencies, and have an organization full of “lifers”.

### **3. Communication Channels: Amplifying the Core Competency Message**

Effective communication is the linchpin in reinforcing the significance of core competencies throughout the organization. Use diverse communication channels, including town hall meetings, intranet platforms, and newsletters, to consistently communicate the importance of core competencies. When creating messages, think of your different audiences. Some people are visual learners, some do better with auditory or hands-on. Communication styles that will reach different

audiences include creating visual aids and utilizing storytelling techniques. Integrate core competencies into everyday communication, making them a central theme in discussions about organizational goals, achievements, and challenges. By harnessing various communication channels, leaders ensure that core competencies become embedded in the organizational narrative. This also helps employees to be on the lookout for and recognize their own core competencies. I can attest that not all employees have heard of the term “core competencies.”

## **Conclusion**

When an organization makes an effort to align organizational culture with core competencies, they are setting themselves up for long-term success. Finding the talents you need and then nurturing them is a win-win for both the

The Two Steves  
Core Competencies

Wes Berry

company and the employees and leave everybody  
happy.



## **Chapter 8**

# **Core Competencies and Innovation**

While figuring out your core competencies and learning how to develop them into tools for success are essential, the real value of all of this work is learning how to deploy them. Here, I'm afraid there are no simple steps or straightforward answers.

Success is not as simple as telling you to apply this skill to that situation, and then voila, you've done it. A hundred people with the same skill set could look at the same problem and come up with 200 different solutions—and perhaps none of them work. Or maybe all of them do. Having a well-rounded, highly developed set of

core competencies is one thing, but it takes creativity and vision to turn those competencies into something really remarkable. So how do you figure out the right way to use your core competencies to your advantage?

The answer, my friends, is creativity. Innovation. Risk-taking.

And I don't just mean creativity from you; the most successful individuals manage to secure buy-in from others, especially those in a position to give you an opportunity that others might refuse you.

Take the case of Gerard van Grinsven, former CEO of Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital just outside of Detroit. When van Grinsven took the job in 2006, he wasn't the typical choice for a hospital CEO. Far from it, in fact, since van Grinsven had absolutely zero experience in the health care industry.



Before joining as the leader of the hospital, van Grinsven had spent more than 20 years in the hotel business, most recently as a vice-president for Ritz-Carlton. During his time there, van Grinsven moved from VP of food and beverage to the Area General Manager in Dearborn, where he caught the attention of the Henry Ford Medical Group (HFMG).

At first glance, it seemed like an odd choice. What could van Grinsven, whose whole career theretofore was focused on the hotel business, possibly bring to the health care field? What experiences, what skills, what points of view could he offer West Bloomfield that made him a better choice than the multitude of others with a background in health care?

These questions were especially pressing since the West Bloomfield hospital would be the first new hospital the HFMG had built since 1915,

the year the group was founded. The stakes were high, and their CEO hire was a critical part of making this new hospital a success.

What helped van Grinsven win the position was his confidence in how he could transform the way patients, doctors, and the community view health care. With his hotelier background, van Grinsven may not have known much about medicine and health care, but he knew an awful lot about customer service—especially high-end, luxury service.

The Ritz-Carlton has long been known for its stylistic opulence and the luxurious service available to its guests. As an executive with the chain, van Grinsven saw first-hand how luxury put guests at ease, and he focused his efforts on making those services as easy and stress-free as possible for those guests.

Now, in his role as hospital CEO, he transferred his core competencies centered on customer service to a new industry, believing that he could transform the hospital experience by emphasizing wellness over sickness.

Before the hospital opened in 2009, van Grinsven worked with the HFMG at all stages of design. Instead of shared patient rooms, the hospital would have only private rooms, which not only reduced the risk of disease transmission but reduced patient stress and encouraged recovery and healing.

He also insisted on the building's striking atrium, which houses more than 2,000 live plants arranged along curved pathways, creating a tranquil, inviting environment. Throughout this atrium are several retail stores selling items intended to help patients, families, and anyone

else who comes into the building to improve their healthy lifestyle.

More than services like acupuncture, a patient concierge, cooking classes, and a therapeutic organic greenhouse, the biggest change van Grinsven made was food quality.

Historically, hospital food has been right up there with airline food and TV dinners on the list of foods no one would voluntarily eat. But under van Grinsven, the hospital began cooking made-to-order meals composed of fresh ingredients, with 24-hour room service, meaning that patients could get healthy, fresh, delicious food at any time of the day. In fact, the food is so good, they regularly cater for businesses in the West Bloomfield area.

For van Grinsven, these amenities are not luxury services but are instead wellness services, aimed at helping patients get healthy faster and

hopefully remain healthy longer. While he acknowledges that his vastly improved food is partially a marketing device, it's also an earnest way to help improve the health of everyone who eats in the hospital, including patients, families, doctors, nurses, staff members, and others.

Of course, it also took a lot of chutzpah for the HFMG to decide to hire van Grinsven. When he was originally brought on board, reactions were largely negative. In fact, one writer said his menu plans were actively harming the hospital—since hospital food should be terrible.

Luckily, the group gave van Grinsven a chance, and he rewarded them by leading the hospital to be profitable nearly a year ahead of schedule. Even more impressively, the hospital won the 2011 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, recognizing the improvements the

hospital was offering the community and its willingness to innovate in the healthcare field.<sup>6,7</sup>

Looking at van Grinsven's core competencies during his time at Ritz-Carlton, it's easy to see why some would have doubted his abilities to transition to a new field. But for him, it was less a transition than it was a way to deploy the same skills from a slightly different angle. His distance from health care became a strength, allowing him to deploy his core competencies in a new and exceptionally effective way.

In short, thanks to the creativity of van Grinsven and the members of the HFMG, they created a new way of thinking about healthcare, one that was radically different not just for its own sake, but because a radical change was what was needed.

The synergy between core competencies and innovation is a driving force behind

organizational success. While you may not have a Van Grison—or a rocket scientist!—in your organization, there is no reason that you can't harness the core competencies that you do have and create more to further the success of any endeavor.

Here's how.

### **1. Nurture Growth and Innovation Through Core Competencies**

First of all, you need the right environment. I like to call these innovation ecosystems. Innovation ecosystems are dynamic environments that nurture creativity and breakthrough thinking. Google is an organization with a stellar innovation ecosystem. This company has gained success so rapidly, and sustained it so well, that it's worth a look inside. Since their mission is so big: "to

organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (Wow!) they need to have structure in their work environment. And yet—they give their employees a lot of freedom, which is the backbone behind their innovation.

Google hires the top talent from around the world. To further their technological successes, they make sure that the core competencies of their hires match the mission of the organization. And then they get out of the way to let those employees create. They allow their team members to be creative, and even offer incentives and rewards for innovation. Here are some things that Google offers their employees to foster innovation:

- *Flexibility.* Employees get 20% of their workweek to focus on areas of interest. This offers the freedom to experiment and



keeps them from getting bored or burnt out. If project one isn't working, you can go over and fiddle with some things on project two.

- *Free perks.* Google offers several ingenious things to their employees, such as free meals. They have a “no farther than 150 feet from food” rule, which offers snacks and meals for workers when they are hungry. They also offer them free gym memberships, and even free haircuts.
- *Health and happiness.* Google offers their employees free health insurance, and some Google offices even have on-site nurses or doctors. They feel that a healthy employee will lead to more energy in the workplace, and it appears they are right.

## **2. Embrace Cross-Functional Collaboration**

Organizations that successfully break down silos and encourage collaboration across departments are better positioned to unlock new dimensions of innovation. These ideas will get you started:

- *Innovation hubs.* These are dedicated spaces in your organization where researchers, designers, and others can gather to discuss ideas and strategies.
- *Cross-functional teams.* Employees who work outside of their area of expertise, learning from colleagues or mentors, are able to better see the bigger picture and perhaps offer new insights. Bringing together people from different departments can yield high success rates as they

leverage diverse core competencies to drive innovation. Have the software developers work with the marketing team, and the sales force. See what they come up with together.

### **3. Intrapreneurship: Link Entrepreneurial Spirit with Core Competencies**

Intrapreneurship is the practice of fostering entrepreneurial initiatives within an organization. The organization's strengths provide a fertile ground for employees to explore innovative ideas. By fostering an intrapreneurial spirit, organizations can harness the full potential of their core competencies.

- *Have dedicated spaces for experimentation.* Create a goal that can be broken into testable hypotheses and key performance metrics.
- *Provide resources for idea incubation.* Then, put in place systems, resources, and organizational designs that allow your employees to experiment on a large scale.
- *Recognize and reward intrapreneurial efforts.* Have a growth mindset, in that we can learn from our mistakes and failure is only another step towards achieving the goal.

#### **4. Cultivate a Culture of Innovation**

A culture that encourages calculated risk-taking and experimentation is crucial for driving innovative core competencies. The practical

strategies for creating a culture that embraces experimentation are much the same as the above for Intrapreneurship, including establishing a safe environment for risk-taking, celebrating learning from failures, and providing resources for experimentation.

Organizations such as SpaceX, driven by its core competencies in space exploration, are unafraid to take calculated risks to push the boundaries of innovation. Share inspirational stories with your employees and encourage them to take risks. Failure isn't failure if you learn something. Failure, instead, is a steppingstone to success and risk-taking is an intrinsic part of the innovation journey.

## **5. Measure Innovation Impact**

What are your Metrics for Success? Effective measurement is essential for understanding the value that innovation brings to the organization and ensuring that it aligns with core competencies.

Elon Musk is a good example of someone who measures success in big ways. When he was talking about SpaceX, he parked one of his rockets in front of the National Air and Space Museum. When he was talking about his fast and furious Cybertruck, he built a model to show people. He unveiled the truck in Los Angeles, in the same month, year, and location that the movie Blade Runner was set. Musk doesn't just talk. He *acts*. And his actions get attention, judging by the number of followers on social media, as well as all the news headlines he makes.

So how do you measure the success of your innovations? Here are a few practical tips for establishing a measurement framework.

- *Watch Key Performance Indicators.* Key performance indicators (KPIs) measure the success of an employee, a product, an advertising campaign, etc. Your KPIs should reflect the success of innovative initiatives.
- *Conduct regular assessments.* Checking measurable indicators often will help you stay on track and catch things that need to be fixed before it's too late.
- *Adapt strategies.* Make changes as needed based on performance metrics.

## **Conclusion**

Henry Ford Health System made a great choice in putting Gerard van Grinsven in charge of

creating a hospital people would want to come to. Bringing in a hotel manager and focusing on food might not have seemed like the most practical decision, but the idea worked, and the innovation led to something spectacular.

Hiring the right people (or training them) to reach the goals you set for your company will have far-reaching impacts on your success. Give these creative individuals room to play, offer them the resources they need, and let them innovate. Then, measure the results. I think you'll find that when you invest in the innovation of your business, you'll be happy with the rewards.



## **Chapter 9**

# **Core Competencies in Marketing and Branding**

The question isn't "Do you want to buy my product?" but rather, "What can this product do for you?"

Let's take book marketing for example. If an author walks up to a customer and says, "Do you want to buy my book," the customer is probably thinking, "No, not really," while avoiding eye contact. But if instead, the author walks up to the customer and says, "Wouldn't you love to be sitting on a beach on a tropical island right now, fancy drink in hand, while the man (or woman) of your dreams suddenly walks by and

you know, just *know*, that they are the one? That's what this book is about."

Or perhaps, "With the interest rates so high, I've found a way for young people to purchase their first house without breaking the bank. It's all in this book."

Obviously, the author needs to know his audience. Are they looking for a fictional escape? A self-help book? A parenting guide? And then, that author needs to tap into it.

Having a platform will help. If the author has already made a bestseller list, for example, or done some speaking on the topic or big author events, that will help. If their website matches what they are selling, (say, romance, for example) and their social media caters to romantics, they are way ahead of the game when they try to hand-sell that person in the elevator a book. The person, if interested, may not buy the book, but they will

probably look up the author to see what he or she is about.

Welcome to the world of marketing and branding.

What core competencies are helpful in this area of your business? Some that come to mind are creativity, analytics and good communication skills. What about someone who is savvy at creating social media posts?

Let's look at how core competencies play a unique role in both marketing and branding.

## **1. Brand Differentiation**

Brand differentiation is a cornerstone of successful marketing, and core competencies play a pivotal role in shaping a brand's unique identity. Pull on the individual strengths of your people to shape your brand.

Let's take Nike for example, a company we looked at briefly earlier. Nike sells an "identity" not a product. The company's core values are to bring out the best in people, offering hope and inspiration. These values drive what they do, and they have hired employees with this goal in mind. Their famous swoosh symbol and slogan "Just do it!" were created with movement in mind, propelling people forward to their goals. Here are some things to consider when branding:

- *Identify key differentiators:* What makes your organization different? What makes you stand out from the competitors? Who do you have on board that can run with those differences?
- *Understand market position:* Where do you stand? You need to spend money to make money. Set aside a portion of your

spending for advertising. You can't sell something if people don't know you're out there. In 2021 alone, Nike spent \$3.11 billion on advertising and promotional materials. Make sure you have people on board whose core competencies align with your marketing goals.

- *Communicate Core Competencies Effectively*: Make sure your team knows your goals. Nike understands their audience, their market positioning, and communicating core competencies effectively. When you think of Nike, you think of athletes overcoming, winning, producing. To propel that imagine forward, they've used a lot of celebrities in their advertising, which aligns with their core values of offering us hope and inspiration.

That moves us to point number 2, below.  
Storytelling.

## **2. Storytelling Strategies**

Storytelling is a powerful tool for selling and every company should have a good storyteller. I'm not saying you need to hire John Grisham, the bestselling author. I'm just saying to be sure that someone on your team can create the narrative you want customers to know. Effective storytelling can humanize company strengths, making them relatable and memorable. Nike uses famous athletes—people doing what they love to do—to not only inspire us that we can do that too, but to show us real people doing real things while wearing Nike shoes. This makes their athletic apparel relatable (Okay, so maybe we're not all Tiger Woods) but the more your customers see

people using your product, the more confidence they will have in it.

- *Find your target audience.* Are you reaching out to teenagers? Stay-at-home moms? Business executives? Handy-man husbands? All of these audiences have different ways to reach them. They look at different social media. They shop in different stores and in different ways. Know your audience and then learn the best way to reach them. If “athletes as your audience” is what your employees do best, stick with that. Nike made the mistake of trying to move into making casual shoes, and they didn’t take off. Know your core competencies and don’t stray into areas where you aren’t strong.

- *Emphasize authenticity.* Be real. As I mentioned before, show real people using your product in real life. Get referrals and ratings from happy customers.
- *Make an emotional connection.* People want to use your product because it makes their life easier, or better. Reaching them emotionally is a strong component for winning them as a customer. Think of feel-good Hallmark commercials, or Nike's powerful commercials of people, even special needs athletes, overcoming and winning. These types of ads move a person. Find people on your team who's core competencies match ways to emotionally reach your target audience.

You can learn how to translate complex core competencies into engaging stories that capture the imagination of customers and



stakeholders. By mastering the art of storytelling, organizations can transform their core competencies into a powerful brand narrative that leaves a lasting impression.

### **3. Brand Consistency**

Maintaining consistency with your brand messaging is crucial for building trust and credibility. It's important to align your internal strengths with external brand communication.

Consistent messaging reinforces brand identity. Nike had focused most of their efforts on getting famous athletes to wear their shoes in public. In 1987 after their sales dipped some \$200 million, they realized they needed to make a different approach. They realized that it wasn't mostly athletes wearing their shoes, but 60% of sales were to regular folks who wore their shoes

out to the post office or to work. These practical insights helped them develop a cohesive brand strategy that reflects the organization's unique capabilities. They stopped focusing on their products and started focusing on their customers.

#### **4. Customer Engagement**

Customer engagement is a key driver of business success. Customer-centric core competencies contribute to a positive and impactful brand experience. Some great core competencies to look at for customer engagement include employees who show empathy, who understand the customer's well from the customer viewpoint, and who possess problem-solving skills. Here are a few practical strategies to help with customer engagement once you have the right employees in place.

- *Identify customer pain points.* Use customer feedback and market research to determine what you need to change. Is your product too expensive to reach the audience you desire? Someone strong in analytics might be appropriate for this.
- *Align core competencies with solution.* Find a way to bring your cost down to reach your audience you're your company's values are to make the average person feel successful or look better or whatever, then you need to reach the average person with your price point.
- *Create a seamless customer journey.* Make it easy to find your product. If this means both brick and mortar store and online shopping, so be it.

## 5. Digital Presence

In the digital age, a compelling online presence is essential for reaching and engaging the target audience. Look for people with graphic art talents, communication skills and creativity.

Then, here are some ways to reach your audience:

- *Your website.* This is your “sales pitch” to the world. Once people hear about you, whether you are an author, a florist or an athletic apparel company, they will most likely google you. Make sure your URL is easy to remember, and then, once they reach your page, the content should grab

them. Your “sales pitch” or mission should be right on the front page. Let them know who you are, what you do, and how they can help them, the customer. Your information architecture should be easy to navigate, so they can find menu items to click on that answer any questions they might have.

- *Content Marketing.* Decide what your message is. Are you selling romance novels? Are you selling shoes? Then align your content with your message. Airbnb has great content marketing. They tell compelling stories of travelers, have neighborhood guides that let travelers know of attractions, restaurants, or experiences in the area.
- *Social Media Marketing.* Facebook, Instagram, X (formally Twitter).

LinkedIn, YouTube and TikTok are other popular platforms. You need to be “out there”. Post regularly, and make sure your content targets your audience.

- *Influencer Marketing.* If you can partner with influencers on social media to help sell your product. Celebrity speaks loudly. And most influencers have a very large audience, so any post mentioning your product could potentially be seen by millions.
- *Email Marketing.* Do you want to start up a newsletter? Have you ever gotten a notice to sign up for an email? You can use newsletters or email marketing to send your customers coupons, updates on your product, and information about any sales that might be coming up.

- *Search Engine Optimization (SEO)*  
Keywords are everything. When customer's go online to look for "florists in their area" make sure your flower shop comes up. There are many tools out there to help you learn SEO.
- *Mobile App Marketing.* I recently downloaded the Dairy Queen app. When I purchase an ice cream, it tracks my points from sales, and offers free treats after I get so many points. Not only that, it sends me notifications when a new blizzard flavor is out. While this may not be great for my waistline, it's a perfect way to reach their audience and provides me with incentives to return.
- *Partnerships and Collaborations.* Like Nike and athletes. Look for partnership that can benefit both of you. When I first

got started in the florist business, I offered to loan out plants for television sets, and gave out plants to radio stations when they had events. In return, they gave me free advertising spots. This benefited them (they got free plants) and me (I received free advertising) and helped me to reach my audience on a very limited budget.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to help organizations seeking to harness the power of core competencies in marketing and branding. By integrating core strengths into brand differentiation, storytelling, consistency, customer engagement, and digital presence, businesses can create a compelling and authentic brand narrative that resonates with their audience and sets the



stage for sustained success. Like Nike, Airbnb, or others, by tapping into your strengths and competencies, while keeping true to your company values, you can build a sustainable and lucrative business in any industry.

# Part 3

## Keeping it Going

*“To thrive in this new age of hyper-change and growing uncertainty, it is now an imperative to learn a new competency - how to accurately anticipate the future.”*

—Daniel Burrus

The Two Steves  
Core Competencies

Wes Berry

## **Chapter 10**

### **Challenges and Future Trends in Core Competencies**

Procter & Gamble has a plan for the future. This giant company, which makes many of the products we use in our daily lives (Pampers diapers, Crest toothpaste, Bounce fabric softener towels) has a mission to “find small but meaningful ways to improve lives—now and for generations to come.”

In 1988, a consumer said she liked their Mr. Clean product, but it didn't make cleaning any easier. She opened up her closet full of brooms and mops buckets and asked them to fix it. And they did. They put their most competent people to work

on the project, and thus was born the Swiffer Wet Jet and the Quick Clean category.

Procter & Gamble (P&G) combined the highly absorbent material from their Always and Pampers products with their cleaner solutions expertise, and created a product that still thrives today.

But they started earlier than that. Ever hear of Vick's VapoRub? If you're closer to my age, and you had a cold as a child, chances are your mother rubbed some of this strong menthol product on your chest to help your cough and stuffy nose.

While continuously creating products to make our lives better and easier, P&G also gives back in other ways. P&G reaches out to provide safe drinking water to people, to empower girls, such as with their popular 2015 slogan "like a girl" to show women's strengths in sports, and to save

baby ducks. (We're all familiar with the Dawn Dishwashing Liquid that they use to wash up baby ducks after an oil spill, right?)

P&G has worked hard to become a company that consumers feel they can trust and count on to make the world a little better. That, and their continuing creativity have helped them to last for not just decades, but into new centuries.

We've learned a lot about core competencies in this book. We know that both leaders and employees need to be adaptable as new trends continually emerge, especially in the area of technology.

As we conclude our exploration in core competencies, let's take a look at how a final few factors shape the landscape of core competencies, and what organizations must do to sustain and evolve their competitive advantage.

## **1. Think About Globalization Impact**

Globalization in business is “the growth around the world,” as people, products, services, and economy become interconnected.

With the use of the Internet and social media, our world has become so much smaller and our reach so much bigger. We can now sell to an individual standing on a street corner in India, instead of only the person standing on the street corner on our actual street.

Globalization is how I grew my small florist shop into a \$750 million worldwide business enterprise. When the Internet became a thing in the 1990s, I jumped on the bandwagon and started offering products to people around the world. It was an amazing experience for us, and now has become the norm for most businesses. Globalization has transformed the business landscape, presenting both challenges and

opportunities for organizations managing core competencies.

So which core competencies should employees have to tackle this area? This could include those who are good with people, those who pay attention to detail, and people who have a knack for working with others from different cultures. What about someone who is good with languages? The list goes on.

Then how *do* you manage core competencies across diverse markets around the world? Here are some ideas to get you started.

- *Develop cultural competence.* This is the sensitivity of other cultures and how to develop your brand to other cultural environments. For example, you wouldn't want to sell pork or beef products to practicing Jewish or Islamic cultures, as



these meats can be forbidden in their religions. Likewise, watch how you advertise. Our products, symbols, speech and dress can all have both positive and negative impacts on other cultures we are trying to reach. Study your audience and be careful not to offend anyone. Tap into what is important to them and offer products that can better serve them and their culture. Individuals who travel a lot and easily pick up some words or the habits of other cultures might be good at this job.

- *Foster cross-cultural collaboration.* Choose individuals representative of the culture you are trying to reach to portray the product you are trying to sell. Potential customers need relatable advertising. This also shows respect for their culture, as you

aren't trying to push your own ideals into their lives.

- *Adapt competencies to local nuances.* Not all businesses practices are the same around the world. For example, different countries have different ways of negotiating. Likewise, in many cultures, gift-giving is an important part of business, however the type of gift and the timing can matter a lot. Dress code is another important thing to consider. Study up on these local nuances so as not to make a gaff.
- *Be aware of communication barriers.* If they can't understand you, all the customer reach in the world won't help. Be aware of non-verbal cues and public rituals as well. For example, the handshake isn't always

appropriate in all cultures; some prefer to bow in greeting, or to kiss on the cheek.

## **2. Prepare for Technological Disruption and Adapt to the Pace of Change**

The relentless pace of technological change has a profound impact on how organizations identify and leverage core competencies. We've talked about how to harness tech in your business, using core competencies to keep it dynamic. But the constant change can leave you behind in a nano-beat. As you update, keep global impact in mind when you are managing your website and social media interactions, sending out newsletters, or writing blogs.

Technological advancements can redefine core competencies. It's important to embrace helpful, emerging technologies, fostering a culture of

innovation, and strategically integrate technology into core competency frameworks. Keep training your employees. The tech world changes rapidly.

### **3. Focus on Talent Acquisition and Retention that Align with Your Core Competencies**

In the competitive business environment, attracting and retaining top talent is crucial for organizations.

- *Align individual skills with organizational strengths.* When searching for new talent, know which core competencies you are looking for before you begin. Then, craft your “help wanted” ad to highlight those competencies. If your company does marketing for dog food products, look for someone with strong marketing skills as

well as a solid knowledge of dog ownership.

- *Foster a culture of continuous learning to attract and retain a high-performing workforce.* Make sure future talent knows that you offer various workshops, classes, or continual learning practices so that they have opportunities to grow in their job responsibilities.
- *Strengthen teams through hiring a diverse and inclusive workforce.* Different perspectives bring in different ideas, as well as expand your relatability and reach to your audience.

#### **4. Strategic Forecasting: Anticipate Future Challenges**

Strategic forecasting is paramount for organizations seeking to anticipate future challenges and ensure their core competencies remain relevant. Companies need to watch the market and be sensitive to the changes, even the small ones. By being proactive in your role of strategic planning, you can more easily navigate uncertainties and maintain a competitive edge.

- *Scenario planning.* We talked about this a little earlier in the book. Think ahead at what could go wrong (or right) in your business. If you are aware of what *could* happen, you are more likely be able to handle it if it *does* happen. There are a variety of different scenario planning software tools available for this.
- *Trend analysis.* This is a technical analysis that uses historical data such as price

movement and trade volume to predict long term market forecasts. There are many tools on the Internet that you can use for this, such as Google Trends, TalkWalker and BuzzSumo.

- *Foresight methodologies.* These are frameworks that companies can use to analyze data and thus think more clearly about future events and trends.

By embracing a forward-thinking mindset and integrating strategic forecasting into core competency management, organizations can navigate uncertainties with confidence and position themselves as industry leaders.

## **5. Be Patient**

You may have noticed that I keep talking about how developing core competencies takes

time. It takes time to figure out your strengths and weaknesses. It takes time to come up with plans for how to develop your core competencies. And it takes time to build your core competencies to new levels, enabling you to reach new heights.

Time is a funny thing. It's the one resource you can never get back—once it's gone, you can't recover it. But you also can't hurry time along. Making progress in developing your core competencies requires you to spend time and effort working on them—and no amount of wishing is going to make that time pass any faster.

That means that another key factor in developing your core competencies is patience. You have to have the patience to know that you won't see results immediately, and to have the fortitude to stick with your development plans to persevere even when the going gets tough and you feel like you might be stuck.



Your core competencies are never going to be entirely fixed—and that’s a good thing. But it also means you need to have the patience to take the long view and to see your core competencies as part of your life-long professional journey. There will be times when progress comes fast, and there will be times when time seems to drag like a thousand-pound weight. Patience means finding value in both cases.

Of course, having patience doesn’t mean you have to like moving slowly. Like I said, you should be flexible too, looking for ways to reduce inefficiency and speed up the development process. If your approach isn’t working, don’t be afraid to change it. But by the same token, you shouldn’t be too quick to abandon your approach, either.

## **Conclusion**

Despite what you might think, core competency isn't just a corporate buzzword. Learning to understand, identify, and develop your core competencies allows you to focus your efforts on your strengths without wasting time trying to be someone you're not. Core competencies aren't about transformation; they're about reinforcement.

Finally, you should remember that you're not alone in this. Everyone, from CEOs and presidents, to mail clerks and administrative assistants, has goals and aspirations, as well as fears and doubts. And each person has their own set of core competencies, those that have been honed with years of practice and potential skills that are simply waiting to be developed.

There's a lot more that connects us than separates us, and the more we embrace that connection, the better we will be able to serve

each other. Networking, mentorship, and other ways of developing your core competencies rely on building relationships, and those relationships can—and often do—extend far beyond the initial interaction. Many times, these people become life-long friends.

Just like with Spielberg, O'Neill, and the Steves, you have several areas where you're already an expert. The trick is to be able to identify those skills and center your attention on how you can best develop those competencies and deploy them to your benefit. Once you do, I think you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish, and what levels of success you can attain.

**ALMOST THE END! YOU STILL NEED TO  
COMPLETE THE 7-DAY CHALLENGE!**

# 7-Day Core Competencies Challenge

## **Why Accept this Challenge?**

If you're seeking personal growth and development, you need to commit to consistent effort. One way to jumpstart this journey is by taking the 7-Day Challenge. To succeed in this challenge, you must dedicate a little time each day to contemplation and reflection on the given topic.

The questions provided are only a starting

point. If they don't resonate with your personal experiences, modify them to better suit your situation. This flexibility allows for a more meaningful and authentic exploration of the subject matter.

When you commit to this challenge, you're making a decision to actively engage with your thoughts and emotions. Writing down your reflections is a powerful tool to solidify your insights and gain clarity on your internal landscape. This daily practice can have a profound impact on your overall well-being.

Approach this 7-Day Challenge with an open mind and willingness to explore. You may uncover aspects of yourself that you weren't previously aware of or gain a deeper understanding of your values and priorities. This challenge's benefits extend beyond the initial 7 days, and the

act of carving out time for introspection and self-reflection can become a habit.

Ultimately, this challenge is a powerful tool for anyone seeking to enhance their self-awareness and personal growth. By dedicating a small amount of time each day to contemplation and reflection, you are taking an important step towards a more fulfilling and meaningful life. Upon completion, commit to re-reading and updating this challenge when you find yourself challenged by this concept in the future.

A 7-Day Challenge provides a roadmap for achieving your goals by breaking them down into smaller, achievable tasks. By having a clear challenge, you can stay motivated and focused on your goals. Each day's challenge builds upon the previous day's, creating momentum towards the desired outcome. Additionally, having a plan can

help you stay organized and prioritize tasks based on their importance and urgency.

A challenge can help you overcome procrastination and stay accountable. By having a clear outline of what needs to be done, you can avoid feeling overwhelmed and take action towards your goals. Furthermore, having a plan can help you track your progress and make adjustments as needed.

Overall, a 7-Day Challenge is a powerful tool to focus on a particular issue and provide greater insight, bringing an area of concern into your comfort zone.

**Day 1: Identify your core competencies.**

Take time to identify your company's unique set of skills, knowledge, and resources. Analyze your company's strengths and weaknesses and identify the areas where you can excel and differentiate yourself from competitors.

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**Day 2: Invest in research and development.**

Invest in research and development to enhance your core competencies. Stay up to date with industry trends and new technologies that can help you improve your products and services.

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**Day 3: Develop strategic partnerships.**

Develop strategic partnerships with companies that complement your core competencies. This will allow you to leverage their strengths and enhance your own capabilities.

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**Day 4: Pursue acquisitions.**

Pursue acquisitions that align with your core competencies. This can help you acquire new skills and resources that can be used to create value for customers and differentiate yourself from competitors.

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**Day 5: Focus on operational excellence.**

Focus on operational excellence to enhance your core competencies. Streamline your processes and optimize your operations to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

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**Day 6: Leverage your core competencies.**

Identify the areas where you can leverage your core competencies to create value for customers and differentiate yourself from competitors.

Focus on these areas and develop strategies to capitalize on your strengths.

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### **Day 7: Contemplation**

Take time to reflect on your company's core competencies and the strategies you have developed to leverage them. Consider how you can continue to enhance your core competencies and maintain your competitive advantage in the long term.

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The Two Steves  
Core Competencies

Wes Berry

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## About the Author

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Wes Berry is a Keynote Speaker and Workshop Facilitator with the professional skills and real-life experience to deliver on any stage. He works with Fortune 500 companies like Johnson & Johnson to smaller businesses and associations of all sizes that are seeking a breakthrough experience. Wes changes lives and transforms organizations by delivering a Paradigm Shift. He has written sixteen business and success books and is a *Wall Street Journal* best-selling author and TEDx speaker. As an entrepreneur, he built a \$750 million international company that operated in 130 countries.

His business knowledge and communications skills have made him an expert media contributor on many topics, from

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commercial drone applications to the downsizing of Sears, resulting in appearances with various media outlets. His many media appearances include NPR, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The London Times*, *Entrepreneur* and *Time* magazines, Fox News, Neil Cavuto, Geraldo Rivera, and John Stossel, to name just a few.

