

Use Your Weaknesses – Scott Anthony Barlow

JOSH MUNSON: Hey everyone, and welcome to tonight's webinar, Use Your Weaknesses, where we're going to discuss how to use your weaknesses, also known as anti-strength to grow your strengths and get your next job. My name is Josh Munson, and I'm the program coordinator for WSU Global Connections.

Before I introduce our guest speaker tonight, I want to let you know that this is meant to be conversational webinar. And you can join in from wherever you're watching from. If you look to the right of your video feed, you'll see a chat box. Go ahead let me know that you can hear me by typing and telling us where you're are joining from.

While you're doing that, let me introduce our guests speaker for the night. He used to be in HR leadership doing thousands of interviews with candidates looking for jobs, and hiring 100 of people over 10 years. Now he helps others make big career changes with his company, Happen to Your Career.

He's been found very he's been featured on places like Monster, Careerbuilder, The Huffington Post, and Yahoo Education as an expert in helping others find and do work they love. With that, let's welcome Scott Anthony Barlow.

SCOTT ANTHONY BARLOW: Josh, thank you so very much. I really appreciate it, appreciate the intro. And this is actually the third webinar-- I've realized just a few minutes ago-- the third webinar that I've had the pleasure of doing with WSU and Global Connections. And every single time, I've been able to do one of these, I've got to tell you, the folks that are on that team and put this thing on for you, they are truly world class. And I don't think a bunch of the people that have had the opportunity watch this know just how cool that is that WSU does this. So I'm a huge fan.

But we've got people jumping on here and joining us from all over. What I'd love for you to do is go ahead and as you're joining, let me know first of all that you can hear me. You can hear and see? OK, I got Leanne that says that she can hear us and see us.

And where you're joining from? Looks like we've got a few people popping in here. Kirkland, Washington, which is awesome. Not that far away from me. I'm about three hours away from there in Moses Lake is where I'm at. Moses Lake, Washington, the stop on the way between Kirkland and Spokane, in fact.

And we got, from Chicago, Hi, Andrea. Hi, Leanne. Hi-- I'm probably going to screw up your name-- Hasasat. And Laura from Vancouver.

So glad you could join us. I'm excited to be here. I get to talk about one of my favorite things. And I love this stuff. We have to talk about strengths here.

And specifically, actually tonight, we're going to focus on weaknesses. And I want to get right into it. But first, I want to let you know that as you're going along, if you've got questions, don't wait. Go ahead and type it in. And if I can't answer it right away, then what I'll do is I'll leave some time at the end to be able to answer your questions for you.

So anything that you want, everything is fair game. I may regret that later, but for the moment you've got full permission to anything that you want to know. And I'll make sure I'll do my best to hang around for 10 or so minutes at the, end 15 minutes at the end and answer as many questions as I possibly can.

But without further ado, I want to jump right in here and get started for you. So let me go ahead and pull up presentation here. We'll get going right about now.

All right so I want to start with a question. It's a question you've probably heard in a billion different interviews. What are your weaknesses and your strengths? And it's probably the second most popular question, only to tell me about yourself? Or I guess if you're going out on a limb, if you were a candy bar, what candy bar would you be? Haven't heard that one? No, well definitely the answer is not peanut butter Snickers. Let me tell you about that.

So what are your strengths and weaknesses? This is a common question that everybody has heard time and again, probably every interview or most every interview that you've participated in. So if you have a job right now and it you've had an interview to get, that job you've probably heard some variation of this question.

And everybody who typically has their standard answer, something equivalent to your elevator pitch prepared for this question or it keeps you completely off guard. But what most people don't understand is there's actually a much deeper process and level of understanding each person must go through before they can really answer this question, at least in a meaningful way, that will make you stand out to hiring managers.

And that is what people ask me all the time. How can I answer this question? And that's what I want to talk to you about today. And don't worry, I'm going to give you a script at the end of

this for how to answer that question. But in order to be able to use that script, you have to do some work before that to even be able to earn the right to use that script.

So let's talk about this. I've been in countless conversations with hiring managers where we've used this question. And people argue over this question, about how the person delivered it, or why this was a good answer versus not a good answer. And this candidate had a great answer and the other one-- or why if this was wrong. And what does it even mean? And they argue with each other about all the stuff.

And you know what I realized is everybody's got a different opinion on this. So the reality is it comes down to really just one thing, how much they like you, or how much of themselves they see in you, or are you relatable or likable or intelligent? It's all really subjective, and it's all really personal opinion.

So then if it's all really personal opinion, how can you answer so that it's a great answer every single time? Which again, you have to have a deeper level of understanding.

In order to do that, you probably have to first understand why half of this question is stupid. OK, so maybe that's a little bit harsh. But if you really understand strengths and weaknesses, you know that they are really just asking the same question twice.

Think about it. What's the hiring manager trying to get to you when they ask you this question? Well, yes, obviously, they want to understand what you're the strongest at and also what you're the weakest at. And if it's the stuff that you're the very strongest at, and the stuff that you're the very weakest at, then this means that really, truly it is the exact same thing. That's what I want to be able to help you get from this session today, how these are two sides of the same coin.

OK, so to help me at this point, I want you to meet Rhushi. Now, Rhushi's somebody who I worked with awhile back. And Rhushi came to me because he was trying to figure out what he should be doing for work, and what he was really passionate about, and what he was great at, what his strengths were. And he understood the basics of what he was good at, but he really didn't fully understand at a very deep level.

So as we started getting into his strengths and we started evaluating what he was really actually great at, here's some of the things that we did, we started looking at what are the things you can't help do? No matter where you are or what you are, you can't help but do

these things. What are those for you?

Another one was what causes you to lose track of time? And still another one is what comes easy or natural to you that doesn't come easy or natural to other people? And think of this as it's just when you think about these things for you, it's just not that big a deal, but for others, it might be, because it really is. You just don't realize it, because it comes so natural to you. So you actually undervalue it.

And from these questions, we started to peel back some of the layers. And we started to notice a few things with Rhushi. For example, we noticed that when he walks into a room, he can't help but notice are things in order or out of order? And as an example here, I was talking to him at one point in time where he was at a hotel. I think he was staying in Chicago or someplace like that, and he's in this hotel. And he told me that when he arrived earlier, he couldn't get any work done until he moved the lamp table back to the place where it was supposed to be, because it was just crazy, obviously out of order. And in order for him to be able to focus, he had to have that in place and in order.

Now, some people might write this off as obsessive compulsive. But when we looked quite a bit deeper, we realized that this sort of excessive compulsion is layered into absolutely everything that he does. It's everywhere.

So an example of this is when he's working with people-- and he's a consultant. He manages groups. And he works pretty collaboratively with groups of people. One of things he attempts to do every single time and that he's great at is he'll attempt to organize whatever problem they have or whatever problem they're working on project, he'll organize this stuff into order before he can begin to tackle it.

And he does this not necessarily in a tangible way, but the way he'll go about project managing and through some of these things is he will help other people move it into order. And he's just downright amazing at this. And he's done the same thing working on other projects too. Both in work and outside of work, this is all over the place for him.

Now, it's made him extremely efficient at doing this type of very collaborative work. And you see that in his project management. It made him an amazing project manager. And it made him a really great in a lot of other areas too. And we realize that almost everything that he does really well comes from putting things into some kind of order, tangibly or intangibly.

And the funny thing was, for years he trivialized it. He really made it kind of a joke. And his family and friends kind of gave him a bad time about it pretty regularly. He kind of accepted this as a weakness of his personality, and really kind of this negative in his life, that whole obsessive compulsive thing, and that he has to do this, and he kind of can't stop doing it. And he actually felt kind of bad about it.

What he didn't realize was that he was only paying attention to the weak side of that area. And when we started working together, he was actually disregarding the actual strength in itself. When in reality, what he considered a weakness was actually a strength.

Now, this other side of the coin to your strengths, I call this your anti-strength, because it's there because of your strength and you can't get rid of it because you can't stop doing it. Now once Rhushi started realizing that these are both two different sides of the same coin, now he actually embraces his perceived weakness as a strength. And he's able to understand it and look at it completely differently. And he now realizes that if it comes out in all of these different areas that we just talked about in project management and in collaboration and every place else.

But the truth is most people won't ever understand this. They won't ever understand it. But I want you to be able to understand it. How the things that you can't stop doing, these things that are likely right under your nose, and the things that you likely take for granted, and the things you might perceive as weaknesses might actually be linked to your biggest strengths.

So let's talk some more about that. Specifically, let's talk about those things that you can't stop doing even if you tried. And the funny thing about that is, of course these can be good or they can be bad, but we unfortunately mostly pay attention to the bad side of that.

And let me give you one more example. I can tell you about a situation that happens all of the time in my life because of my strengths. Now, first of all, let me give you a little bit of context. I'm an extremely visual person. Now, some people think in terms of conversations or words. I think in terms of pictures and images. And that means that if I want to communicate anything, I have to translate the images out of my mind to be able to verbally convey it to whoever I'm talking to at the time.

Now this is pretty cool for being able to visually imagine what something looks like. I can look at something and be able to have that picture in my mind as a reference. I can take a room and visually imagine what it's going to look like with different carpet and different paint on the

walls and a baby grand piano in the corner.

But man, is it a pain when I want to be able to make conversation with somebody, because it's almost like when you're learning a new language, if you've ever tried to learn a new language. For example, early on in that language, if you want to say something, you've got to think in your head what it is that you want to say and try to translate each word.

You know, for example, if I want to say something in Spanish like I work at home, so pants are optional. Then I have to think of each word in my mind and translate it. And it's like, oh, what's the word for pants? Ah, [SPANISH].

OK, so it's like that for me being an extreme visual. And now you're wondering about pants, right? Don't worry, I'm wearing pants. But it really truly is like that for me being an extreme visual. And the fortunate thing here is that even though it makes me slow to communicate with others when I'm in conversation with something that I haven't you know talked to them about before, fortunately, people just think that I'm thinking deeply about my answer and not frantically trying to translate these images into words.

So this is something that I literally cannot stop doing. I want to in a lot of cases, but I can't. And on one side, because I think in images, and with my combined tendency to be very conceptual and feature focused, it allows me to envision what my future and the future of others can look like.

But man, it annoys the crap out of my friends and family. We'll be on the phone and I constantly get asked, Scott, Scott, are you still there? Did I lose you? Because it takes me so flippin' long to be able to answer. And and I could absolutely look at this as a weakness. It makes me not very good on the fly. It really does. I have to prep for nearly everything to make it come off as well as what the average person can do much, much easier than myself.

But it's there because of my strengths. So therefore, it's not a weakness. It's actually my perceived weakness is an anti-strength, just like we were talking about. It's a linked perfectly to my strengths. It's the other side. It's the same thing, in fact.

So what are your anti-strengths? Now, to begin to even answer this, start with this question, have you ever realized that the thing that you do that's so annoying or so frustrating to yourself and to others might just be because you're great at something on the other side of that? Because I find that most people feel slightly ashamed or even guilty about your anti-

strengths, because you've been told all of your life that these things are bad. You've been told by well-meaning teachers, and parents, and bosses, and people who have fired you. Maybe that last one it's just me.

But once you understand what this is for you, and what these anti-strengths are for you, and that it's actually connected very deeply to something that is truly great about you, you often feel liberated. That's what happened for Rhushi too. He went through the exact same experience.

Now, when we first started working together, he really, truly didn't understand what his strengths were. And I want you to listen to a clip of him beforehand, even before we started working together. And I want you to even listen to the tone of his voice and just how he explains what he's looking for.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

-Um. Also what's been in my mind is just trying to figure out what my true strengths are, what I need to do either to figure those out. And it's like I mentioned, it's more so just me being good at different things, but not necessarily knowing what I think that I'm good at and enjoy doing.

-Yeah.

-And then what does that relate to in terms of career wise or the next step wise? I'm sort of stuck in that place right now.

[END PLAYBACK]

SCOTT ANTHONY OK, so that's him before. And then we went through and did a whole bunch of work. Rhushi **BARLOW:** had these amazing realizations that these are actually linked together. And the things that he considered to be bad about himself are actually not bad. They're actually these amazing strengths for him.

So I want you to take a listen to this. This is Rhushi describing what his day would look like or could look like after he discovered exactly what his strengths were, and after he discovered that these things are actually linked together in the same thing.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

-To me, is I have my own personality that's getting things done. And I feel like since I am that

organized, having the first meeting in the morning makes me feel like, OK, I'm on track. I'm getting my team on track. And everyone's set to do what they want to do. And just that I'm aware of everything.

And I think this ties back to the first thing we talk about. I like working with people with interesting, smart people at the same time, in a group so that we can solve our problems. That's how that came into picture.

-Yeah.

-If I talk to people, I get better ideas, right? Like that's my nature. That's why organization and the analytical thing comes side by side, I think. That's where that came from.

And then after that, followed by-- I always like it that after I've finished all the discussion, I have my personal time. I actually get work done. So that way I feel accomplished.

I just like to have things on track. If they're not, it's just sort of not the place that I would want to be. And so that sort of ends my day, and then begins my other multi-potential idea, where I can start my other interests and other activities.

And at the end of the day, of course, like family and things are important to me. So I want to be able to end the day with-- be able to have that sanity at the end of the day also, so that I get that full circle. So that's where I was coming from.

-Yeah, yeah. Man, you're like a whole different person than we started chatting.

-I know, right.

[LAUGHTER]

Very different. I'm going to go back and look at the videos you sent me.

[END PLAYBACK]

SCOTT ANTHONY OK, So I want you to be able to understand this too. I want you to be able to understand at such a deep level both your strengths and anti-strengths, and that they're caused by the exact same thing. Just like Rhushi, this is one of the critical pieces you're going to need to answer much more trivial things like that interview question that we started out with, what are your strengths and weaknesses?

Well, I also want to give you some steps to do exactly that, because that's what I promised at the beginning of this. Right? But to be able to even get here, we had to go through the other pieces first, because I'm going to actually give you three different parts to be able to answer this exact question of what are your weaknesses, the one that everybody feels uncomfortable with.

OK, step one, I want you to be able to learn what your signature strengths are. That's why I took you through all of this. And also, if you made the first session, then you can go back and you'll remember that we talked a lot about what your signature strengths are. We asked a couple of those questions the first time around. So I want you to learn and get very, very clear on what those signature strengths are. What are those things that you can't stop doing?

And then, OK, this is a really, really important step too. I don't want you to go after jobs unless they're going to use your strengths. It's critical, but so many people miss this really, really simple logic. If it needs the same thing, if that company and the hiring manager and that position need the things that you are amazing at, guess what? You have a massive competitive advantage. And it makes answering this question a whole bunch easier, trust me.

OK, so here's the thing number three. Thing number three is be honest. Be blatantly honest. But I also want you to already have done the research and already know what they actually need for it. So this is where this gets incredibly important. I'm actually going to give you a script on how to answer this particular question.

All right, here it is. This is the script for answering the question of what are your weaknesses. It is I-- well, when they ask you this question, here's what you need to do, I want you to gear up and say, I am absolutely terrible at-- and then this is where you're going to put your weakness. And you want this weakness, of course, to be 100% blatantly lately true.

But here's the catch, or not the catch but the ace up your sleeve I guess you could call it. It's probably more appropriate. You already know that they don't need this, because you have already done the initial harder work of one understanding your strengths, and two being able to apply and only pursue opportunities that are going to be good for those strengths. And then three really do your due diligence and research and even asking questions earlier in the interview or whatever it might be to understand what they actually need, what they want, and what's going to be useful and valuable in this role.

So those things combined, you can now with confidence say, hey, I'm absolutely terrible at detail work. And here's an example-- my personal example, in fact-- I really, truly am. I'm terrible at detail work. And that's one of the reasons why I work so hard in building a team around me. And you know if you are looking for somebody who's going to manage every little period and every little teeny tiny thing, and you need somebody with that scrutiny of detail, I am not your person.

Instead, I'm much better with being future focus. I can project future trends. I can look into the future. I can assess what's needed. I'm phenomenal at building teams around that. But if you're looking for somebody to just get way into the dirt and mine out the tiniest little of details, then I'm not your guy.

Now, here's why this works. Here's why this works this whole I'm absolutely terrible at then insert your weakness, just by saying you're terrible, they believe you're being honest, because who on Earth is going to say they're terrible at something if they're not being truthful?

So it sets you apart in a couple of different ways. One, they believe that you're being forthright, which gives you credibility, which then allows you to build additional trust, which that additional trust allows them to like you. And when they're like you, were right back at step one, right?

Remember how we started this off way back when? We said that hey, all of these hiring managers like they're arguing over every little thing. But in reality, they justify your answers about whether or not they're like you or not. See how this all comes together?

But just like I said at the very, very beginning, and again at the end, it's much, much more difficult than that, because in order to come up with an answer for this question that is going to allow you to stand out every single time and allow you to connect with hiring managers and the people who can put you in the position and make you job offers and negotiate salary and all of these other great things, you have to already have this clear understanding of what you're great at and your anti-strengths of way you're great at it.

So that's it. I'm absolutely terrible. Now, are you ready for that question? Are you ready to tackle that question? What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses?

Now, I want you to be able to ask me any questions that you have about this question, about strengths, about anti-strengths, about anything else. And I'm going to hang around for a little while. And when I hang around for a little while, I want to be able to be of value to you. So go

ahead and type in here on the right-hand side, type in any questions that you have whatsoever.

And while you're typing, I just want to say thank you again. And again, just go ahead and type those in on the right hand side. Anything that you want, type in. We can always get more information from you too. But while you're doing that, I really truly do want to thank again Global Connections. This has been awesome. Thank you for putting this on. Thank you for having me. This is phenomenal.

So yeah, without further ado, let's take a look at some of these questions.