



PETRA PROCESS

**3 WAYS TO DISCOVER HIDDEN STRENGTHS IN
YOUR ORGANIZATION**



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LIFE LESSONS for BUSINESS OWNERS

Recently, I had the opportunity to work with the leadership team at Kinco in Portland, Oregon, to help them begin strengthening their long-term business strategy. Kinco is a leading supplier of premium work and sport gloves in North America, and the team members there are passionate about their products. Their unique line of gloves are made of the highest quality materials and construction available, and certain glove models have a true cult following in the world of ski lift operators.

As a step in building their strategy, we reviewed a list of what they considered to be their organization's top five strengths—the outcome of a previously completed SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

The list of strengths included some attributes common to many companies, such as “client relationships” and “supplier network.” I knew there had to be more specific strengths to be found—ones that are unique to Kinco—and decided to press the group for some deeper examples.

It's not unusual for a company to gloss over its strengths. After all, most of us take for granted the things we do well and focus on the areas we need to “fix.” I've found in business that habit becomes a missed opportunity. Every business has hidden strengths yet to be uncovered, and it's always worth taking the time to identify and capitalize on them.

Here are three lessons I learned working with Kinco and how you can apply them to your organization:

1. DON'T LET THE STRENGTH OR OPPORTUNITY BECOME MUNDANE

While a company's strengths might not be sexy, make sure they get the attention they deserve. Don't let such an important attribute of an organization's strategy get overlooked due to familiarity or distractions from other “shiny objects.”

As Kinco's leadership and I worked through the list of strengths together, we asked questions like, “Does this strength truly provide us a competitive advantage, or would our direct competitors claim it as well?” and “Are there any attributes that could be even better strengths than those listed?” It took a bit for the team to warm up to the exercise, but little by little the wheels began to turn.

Several minutes into the discussion, Travis, the CEO, made an offhanded remark about the multitude of trademarks his company owns and defends—with one of them being a stripe fabric mark that is on the back of several of their most popular glove styles. He explained, “We hold 24 trademarks including one in multiple countries for a striped material used in several popular styles. We have successfully defended against competitors infringing on our trademarks in at least 10 instances.”

This brings us to the second way to discover hidden strengths in your organization:

2. MAKE SURE YOU COMMUNICATE ABOUT THESE STRENGTHS WITH EACH OTHER

There is no shortage of ineffective communication in many organizations. In fact, it is the number one issue we see at Petra Coach when we survey teams before working with them.

And this is a classic case. When the mechanisms for robust communication are not in place, opportunities often get missed. Had the rest of the group at Kinco known about those differentiating factors, like the trademarks, they might have changed their focus or strategy a long time ago. Without any intention to do so, leaders can handicap their most significant resource—their people—from being able to truly grow and thrive.

At this point in the exercise, the team was fully engaged—excited even. Several of the senior leadership team members, many of whom have been with the organization for some time, exclaimed they had no idea these trademarks existed or mattered!

Twenty-four trademarks. And with almost a dozen successful defenses against competitors who had ripped off the design, we agreed this was, in fact, a strength that should be on the list. From there we continued to discover other “hidden” strengths and, ultimately, brainstormed actions the organization could take to protect or exploit these strengths strategically.

This brings us to the third way to discover hidden strengths in your organization:

3. CONDUCT AN EXERCISE INTENT ON THEIR DISCOVERY

Set aside dedicated time to delve deeply into identifying strengths and enter the process with an open mind and a desire to learn. It can be helpful to have a third party involved who, not being mired in the day-to-day details and armed with the intention to find the hidden gems, is tasked with asking “dumb” questions and can facilitate a robust conversation.

Once you have done discovery and found “hidden” strengths in your organization, don't just leave them on a list or on the whiteboard! The real power in these strengths is finding actions to take so that you can both place value in these strengths and benefit from them to a greater degree.

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