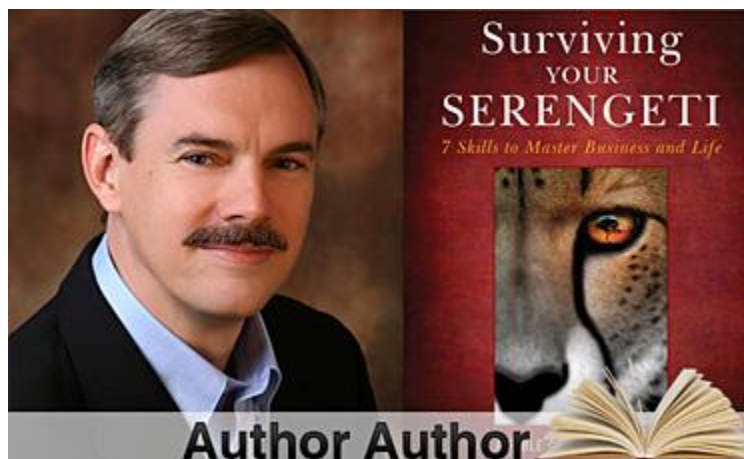


Channel Your Inner Wildebeest

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More and more, business success comes down to survival of the fittest. So why shouldn't entrepreneurs take a few cues from the Serengeti plains of East Africa, where two million animals migrate 1,000 miles every year?



Stefan Swanepoel is the author of the New York Times bestselling book *Surviving Your Serengeti: 7 Skills to Master Business and Life*. Image: Photo illustration, photos courtesy of BenBella Books

Despite the economy being on the upswing, the repercussions of the recession are still creating tremors across the business landscape.

Competition for top projects is steep, and entrepreneurs looking to break away from their competition face a new standard of efficiency as companies that have been trimmed down by the recession are doing more work with fewer people. Recognizing and tapping into your innate survival skills, and those of your team, has never been more critical.

To do so, consider a place where survival tactics really are a matter of life or death: the Serengeti plains of East Africa, where each year, two million animals must migrate 1,000 miles.

It's a journey that requires animals to rely on their innate skills simply to stay alive. Just as the wildebeest relies on endurance to push forward to a distant goal and the lions rely on strategy to collectively hunt for a meal, we each possess a dominant skill, as part of a suite of skills that we naturally turn to for survival in business—whether we're trying to land a major project, meet a deadline, or salvage a damaged client relationship.

Below are the seven skills seen in the Serengeti that are also essential for success in business.

Strategy

For the strategist, outlining a blueprint for execution and organizing his or her thoughts, experiences, and expectations are critical. The strategist's impact on a team cannot be overstated;

this person is the goal setter, the one with the plan to bring a project to fruition. Strategists are tasked with identifying resources, developing information, and embarking on the decision processes that are necessary to put the strategy into motion. They are also charged with instituting controls that monitor progress toward achieving the organizational goals.

Endurance

Endurance, in its simplest form, is our ability to apply ourselves for relatively long periods of time. This quality keeps our mind going when our body wants to quit and gives us the mental capacity to continue moving forward, despite the obstacles in our path. Those who possess endurance are most often encouragers as well; they are the ones pushing the team forward when others want to give up. They maintain a positive attitude by focusing on the broader context and the long-term perspective.

Gracefulness

Grace is a skill often overlooked in business today. Graceful individuals develop interdependent relationships that are fostered through patience, self-discipline, dignity, and respect. They accomplish this by recognizing others' strengths and weaknesses and attempting to build them up by changing the focus from style to spirit, where everyone involved doesn't *work* for the team; they *are* the team.

Efficiency

Those whose primary skill is efficiency finish the job in the shortest possible time with the least amount of wasted resources. They have the ability to overcome interruptions and distractions, along with the ability to focus on being effective and producing the desired results. They are champions of the change process, recognizing, identifying, and addressing the things that prevent progress and replacing inefficient practices with practices that better accomplish the objective.

Risk Takers

Risk takers evaluate all the options in regards to the opportunity before them before making a decision. They frequently review goals and determine the various routes to get to the destination. Often, they choose the path with the highest risk in order to gain the maximum reward. Being a risk taker means thinking outside of the box and considering options others might have discarded too early.

Communicating

Effective communicators are essential to a successful team. In addition to needing a skilled communicator within the team who can express expectations, responsibilities, and goals, it is also critical to have a spokesperson who can present ideas and objectives to those outside the team, such as leadership and clients. Skilled communicators understand the importance of truly hearing and understanding the message as well as how to best utilize different channels to deliver a message successfully.

Enterprising

Enterprising people possess the energy, creativity, and ambition required to see the possibilities in the future that others cannot. The enterprising individual recognizes opportunity and will often push a team to transform ideas into successful ventures. In our do-more-with-less environment, this skill is invaluable.

We each possess one of these skills, and in many cases, we tap into several of them. Survival in today's tough economy requires that we understand and capitalize on our innate skill [or skills] and make appropriate adjustments to supplement our weaknesses. What's more, it's critical that business leaders understand which skills his or her team members possess and then work to ensure that they are being utilized effectively to increase the potential of the team.

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