

# SWOT Stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

This article is excerpted from *Love, Honor, & Value: A Family Caregiver Speaks Out About the Choices and Challenges of Caregiving* by Suzanne Mintz.

Have you ever heard of a SWOT analysis? It is something that is done in the work world to assess a company or organization's ability to change, or move forward. It is often one of the first steps in strategic planning. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. To get a handle on your life as a family caregiver, to begin to take charge, to find ways to cope with your fears, to determine what choices you have, you might consider conducting your own personal SWOT analysis.

We all have strengths and weaknesses. These are characteristics that are intrinsic to who we are. Some of them may be physical, some intellectual, some an innate part of our personality. They may change over time, or a perceived strength may be an asset in one situation and a liability in another.

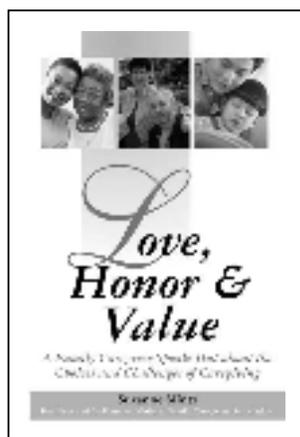
Have you ever thought about your strengths and weakness in terms of your caregiving situation? If you haven't done it yet, you might consider making two lists. List number one can enumerate what you see as your strengths and what impact each one has, or could have, on your ability to be a successful family caregiver. List number two includes your perceived weaknesses and the consequences they have, or could have, on your caregiving. These lists can help you sort out in which areas you could really use some assistance or advice. For instance, your strengths might consist of good oral

and written communication skills. You might have the patience of Job, and a generally upbeat attitude, all of which might be very helpful when finding the resources you need to improve your loved one's care and making your own life a little bit easier. Your weaknesses could include poor organizational skills, difficulty making new friends, and a bad back. These would surely impact your ability to be prepared for new healthcare encounters, find support in the community, and to provide personal care services for your care recipient.

**Have you ever thought about your strengths and weakness in terms of your caregiving situation?**

Opportunities and threats come from the outside. A retirement community is being built two miles from your house, or your husband's employer will let him work from home two days a week. These are obviously opportunities that, in the right circumstances, could be the answer to your prayers. Threats can range from a potential loss of health insurance to the fact that you live in an old two-story house that would require extensive, and expensive, renovation to make it handicap accessible.

Can you think of what opportunities you currently can take advantage of, or what threats you need to find ways to work around? A personal SWOT analysis is a place to begin to think about questions such as these, and it is one of the arrows in your quiver of resources to help you take charge of your life. Think of it as a "living document," one that will change as you and your circumstances do. It can be a useful tool throughout your caregiving career, not just at the outset. ■



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