

Serve from Your Strengths

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(Items in red added after publication.)

“Each person’s greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength.”

Do you believe that? Or do you believe, like the majority of people (including leaders of many organizations), that each person’s greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her weaknesses?

How do you think those who worked around Thomas Edison, William Shakespeare, or Meryl Streep might have responded to these questions? Do you think the mentors of these three giants in their fields suggested they spend a lot of time and energy improving their weaknesses?

Over the past thirty years, I’ve seen a massive transformation in the research on and application of leadership development. Following a performance evaluation thirty years ago, the boss and the team member would start to build a plan to shore up those ever-present weaknesses. The focus today is more likely to be on how the organization and the individual can capitalize on the identified strengths.

Don’t get me wrong. Significant weaknesses need to be addressed! But if the limitation is not debilitating for the individuals affected by the behaviors, finding a way to work around the limitations is often very effective. Focusing on weaknesses may prevent significant problems, but even a massive corrective effort will never propel the individual or the organization to excellence.

I recommend *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, a **2001** book by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton. The quote that opens today’s article is one of their conclusions from thirty years of Gallup research involving over two million people! **(StrengthsFinder 2.0, a 2007 book by Tom Rath, also from the Gallup organization, allows the reader to take an enhanced version of the online assessment. The book is smaller and less expensive. Though it doesn’t have contextual information, if you are going to start with one of the books, obtain StrengthsFinder 2.0.)**

I find their definition of “strength” very interesting: “consistent near-perfect performance in an activity.” The authors emphasize both the “near-perfect performance” and that the effects of the behavior are predictably excellent. Why is this important? Because it leads to success and fulfillment for the individual--and to consistently satisfied **internal and external** customers of the organization.

The authors explain that strengths come from combining knowledge, skill, and talent. Knowledge consists of the facts and lessons you learn over time. Skills are the specific steps involved in executing a given process to achieve the desired outcome. Ah, but they offer a unique description of talents: “your naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior.”

This book provides access to an internet-based “StrengthsFinder Profile” for identifying your most dominant talent themes. The assessment aims to help you find your potential for superior performance. The results often provide paradigm shifts for my clients about their capabilities.

The Profile measures 34 talent themes that the researchers delineated during their long study of excellence. The output of the assessment identifies your five strongest talent themes, those that describe your most frequently recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior. Most of my clients who have taken the Profile are favorably surprised with the accuracy of the information.

Why is this insight so valuable? Because there is little that is as satisfying as having work that allows you to do what you love every day! Armed with this information, you can modify responsibilities for every individual under your authority such that they use their natural talents to serve downstream “customers,” those inside and outside the organization. Talk about win/win! Wow!

Do you have a healthy leadership development process in your organization? Are you building leaders to support your organization’s future growth? To enhance whatever currently exists, you’ll find these books and the “StrengthsFinder Profile” to be useful tools.

If you have no current methodology for consciously building future leaders, contact me. Let’s explore how you might orchestrate a major improvement in your organization’s culture.