

Capitalizing on Your Natural Talents

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Are you a leader who wants to enhance your skills? Do you work to develop the capabilities of those under your authority? Are you guiding your organization toward genuine excellence?

Help is available for individuals to capitalize on their natural talents as they work to enhance learnable leadership skills.

Now, Discover Your Strengths, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton, appeared in 2001. The book guides readers to an internet-based assessment of their natural talents, the “StrengthsFinder Profile.”

The Gallup organization, developer of the assessment, studied the information learned from the two million individuals who took the “Profile” in the past six years. Gallup generated enhancements that are described in this year’s publication of *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, by Tom Rath. Purchase of this new book allows the reader to experience the improved version of the on-line assessment.

For several years, I have advocated that leadership teams use *Now, Discover Your Strengths* as a basis for some very affirming team enhancement activities. Based on recent experience, I am now advocating that future clients use *StrengthsFinder 2.0* and its enhanced on-line assessment tool.

Most of the material describing the 34 talent themes is carried over from the original book. However, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is 2/3 of the cost of the original (retail cost of \$20 vs. \$30; discounted cost of \$12 vs. \$18). This can result in quite a savings for a team of individuals, since a copy is required for every member who takes the assessment.

Conducting the on-line assessment identifies your five dominant talent themes (of the 34 listed in the book). Access to the “StrengthsFinder Profile” requires an alphanumeric access code, available only with the purchase of a book. I’ve asked representatives of the Gallup organization if I can buy a block of access codes. They do not allow that approach—a book is required for every participant. (Interesting marketing technique, huh? It’s great for the publisher; not so good for my clients!)

The book also provides a listing of ten suggested “Ideas for Action” associated with each talent theme. These are ideas that an individual strong in that particular talent theme should consider in seeking to more routinely apply those talents in his or her daily work.

The improved assessment generates a personalized “What Makes You Stand Out?” report based on your individual choices made during the assessment process. This description could be shared with you boss for collaborative thinking about how to better apply your natural talents.

My one regret with the new book is that the extremely interesting information in the first 75 pages of *Now, Discover Your Strengths* was not carried over. Of course, if one of the objectives of the publisher was to reduce the price of the book, they had to leave some material out. Because of the value of the information contained in those 75 pages, however, I am recommending to my clients that they purchase at least one copy of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*.

Most of my work with developing leaders is in the area of learnable skills. Everything referenced above deals with unchanging natural talents, not learnable skills. However, these two books and the “StrengthsFinder Profile” have allowed my clients to understand where their natural abilities lie, so that we can explore where and how their talents can be most effectively enhanced.

Stated another way, the natural talent themes identified by the “StrengthsFinder Profile” provide a firm foundation upon which learnable leadership skills can be built.

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