

Are Myths Limiting Your Growth?

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Last week, I spent some time talking with Marcus Buckingham about his latest book, Go Put Your Strengths to Work. He's working to overturn a perception that may be limiting you from achieving satisfaction and excellence in your work.

How would you answer this question? "At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?" Sadly, Buckingham's research indicates that only 17% of Americans answer "yes."

Are four out of five of the men and women employed in our country really working at jobs where they are not allowed or encouraged to use their strengths? Isn't that counter to our economy's continual drive to increase productivity, enhance customer satisfaction, and reduce employee turnover?

Here's a second question: "Is finding your weaknesses and fixing them the best way to achieve outstanding performance?" Research indicates that 87% of us answer "yes."

This research confirms anecdotal evidence from my consulting work in the area of leadership development. As I help individuals build their leadership skills, they typically skip right over their strengths and want to focus on building up their weaknesses.

Why are so many of us drawn to learning the things we lack? Is it because it's easier? Is it because we believe "the chain is as weak as its weakest link"? Is it because, as students, our parents pushed us to improve the lowest grades on our report cards?

Though all of those may be true, Buckingham contends there are three myths that have become so entrenched in our culture that we are now oblivious to their influence. We need a paradigm shift to cause us to address these issues differently. But nothing is blatantly throwing the missing information in our faces. Buckingham suggests we consider three questions as he reveals the missing insights.

The myths are intriguing enough, and I'll share them next week. However, having been a student of "paradigm shifts" for a long time, I'm especially interested in the questions Buckingham offers for busting the myths. I think adopting these questions, for use on virtually any accepted perspective, is a powerful tool for leaders who seek enhanced awareness.

"How does this myth serve you?" Something in our perceptions must be affirmed by our belief. Otherwise, we would choose to believe something else, right?

"What would it cost you to stop believing in this myth?" We would give up something quite valuable if we replace the current perspective with a different belief, right? Before we can consider what we would gain, we first must evaluate what we will lose by moving away from current beliefs. Responses to this question are often humorous and are always quite interesting!

"How would it benefit you to believe the truth?" Your answers to the first question probably won't surprise you. Your answers to the second question may be quite surprising. Whatever your answers to the previous two questions, there better be some depth to your answers here, right? This is where the insight must be compelling, or you won't change your thought process or your actions. If your answers are undeniable, however, you've got yourself a paradigm shift!

I apologize that space considerations won't allow me to identify Buckingham's alleged three myths until next week. However, to give you some experience with these questions, let's test a belief held by many leaders: "I can't delegate more because the work won't be done adequately or on time."

Answer the three questions above relative to this contention to see how the process of challenging beliefs works. Feel free to contact me if you have difficulty.

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