

Overcoming Weaknesses and Enhancing Strengths

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You face dozens of situations a day, right? Is every response you make effective? Does every action you take enhance relationships and yield outstanding results? If your answer is “Yes,” please contact me so that I can arrange to interview you! We could probably write a best-selling book together!

Every leader I know has both strengths and limitations. When a leader wants to improve his or her skills, there are usually plenty of opportunities. I point out that change does not occur easily. The process of improvement requires significant time and energy.

In taking on the task of skill enhancement, you should consider which particular attributes will likely yield the greatest return. What seems obvious to you, however, may not be the best choice.

Most individuals, probably because of that established organizational experience known as the performance review, believe that working to overcome weaknesses is the appropriate thing to do. If there is some glaring limitation that is significantly limiting your effectiveness, I’ll agree that we should work to eliminate it—or at least find a way to work around the negative effects it generates.

However, you can work and work, expending a lot of effort to correct some “terrible” characteristic. If you are diligent, over time you’ll likely improve your performance up to something like “still pretty weak.” The effort is not fun, and the outcome is usually less rewarding than originally expected.

I’ve had many leaders insist on building a leadership development plan to overcome their weaknesses, only to give up or provide little more than a cursory improvement. The commitment required to diligently persist is huge, and most people have more important things to do with their time.

Enhancing strengths, however, is much more satisfying and yields a much greater return on the investment of time and energy. In *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton wrote, “Each person’s greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strengths.”

They go on to say, “Most organizations take their employee’s strengths for granted and focus on minimizing their weaknesses....But this isn’t development, it’s damage control.”

Every time I help a leader consider improvement opportunities, I suggest that we find ways to enhance his or her existing strengths. I know that it will be more fun and will yield greater satisfaction, develop better relationships, and strengthen existing beneficial habits.

Why don’t more organizations do this automatically? Working on strengths seems too easy. Figuring out what exactly to do requires some creative thinking. And many people are ruled by the expression, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”

Think about a hobby that you enjoy a lot. Let’s choose fishing as an example. Don’t you occasionally look at magazines that explain the finer techniques of fish-finding and offer suggestions on new lures? Don’t you talk to the owner of the local bait shop to see what’s catching the species of fish you seek?

Why do you spend your time doing these things if you are already good? Because you want to get better, and you know there is still plenty of room for growth. That applies in the workplace, too.

Still, leaders believe that becoming more successful will require effort in too many areas. Not so! In their book *For Your Improvement*, Bob Eichinger and Mike Lombardo write, “You don’t have to be good at everything. Most successful leaders have four to six major strengths and lack glaring weaknesses.”

If a weakness is significantly hindering your effectiveness, aggressively look for ways to minimize its negative effects. However, given your limited time, look also for ways to maximize your existing strengths. Finding expanded ways to apply your known skills is a lot more rewarding for both you and those you influence!

Dennis helps leaders capitalize on their strengths and minimize the effects of their limitations. He also helps build future leaders in the organization. Contact dhooper2@juno.com, or call 478-988-0237.