



A Labour of LOVE

The truth of strengths

» BY CRAIG DOWDEN, PhD

Passion, engagement and drive are buzz words that continue to receive attention in the popular press and within organizations. It's easy to see why this is the case. Strengthening the connection we have with our work brings considerable benefits to ourselves, our teams and our organizations.

A recent BlessingWhite survey examined what the primary employee engagement drivers were for professionals around the world. Interestingly, the number one satisfaction driver in North America (and in many other countries) was having "more opportunities to do what I do best."

Leveraging the power of strengths is an idea that has been keenly developed by the Gallup organization. Based on their global research initiatives, which have involved hundreds of thousands of employees, Gallup researchers documented the myriad benefits of this approach. In one

large-scale study, they found that people who were aware of their strengths, and utilized them more frequently in the workplace, were more likely to be the strongest performers.

The benefits of using our strengths are not just limited to our performance. Gallup's research found that employees who were given "strengths feedback" had a 14.9% lower turnover rate than employees who did not receive such feedback.

Gallup has also observed that it is possible for organizations to introduce and apply the strengths advantage within their existing culture. In another research project focusing on workgroups, the Gallup researchers reported that managers who received a one-hour coaching session geared toward understanding and applying their strengths experienced significant increases in their engagement scores compared to their counterparts who did not participate in such a discussion. Another fascinating revelation was that these gains cascaded down to their teams, who benefitted from significant improvements in their own engagement scores following the intervention. This indicates the positive and contagious impacts that can be realized by focusing on our strengths.

Individuals and organizations can successfully leverage the strengths of employees and increase the likelihood they will love their work.

DEVELOP AWARENESS

The research is quite clear: being aware of one's strengths is the foundational piece. This intuitively makes sense—how can individuals maximize their time using their strengths if they do not even know what they are?

There are several ways employees and organizations can access this information. First and foremost, several assessment tools exist that provide detailed insight into this topic. Gallup offers StrengthsFinder 2.0, which yields a personalized report detailing the individual's strengths and provides customized tips for activities/opportunities to leverage these within the workplace.

The Values In Action (VIA) Institute on Character also has a strengths report (called the VIA Pro), which individuals and organizations can use. Hogan, one of the most widely respected and used personality assessments on the market, also has a suite of tools that can inform this discussion. These instruments provide an individual

with insight into their personalities and how they can use these natural tendencies to their advantage.

Although lacking the rigour associated with using one or all of the above assessment tools, another option is to ask colleagues or friends what they think are your greatest strengths. Ask them to be specific. If they say "interpersonal skills," ask them exactly what they mean. You could be a strong listener, a strong communicator or both. The more specific the feedback, the more actionable your future response.

HAVE A STRENGTHS DISCUSSION

Although this may seem to be aimed primarily at managers, employees can play a part in this as well. Employees can ask their managers directly for feedback in terms of what they do well, and also ask how they might engage in more activities that leverage these talents.

For managers, incorporate more of a strengths-based approach into your style. Provide feedback to your employees, not only on where they should improve but also highlight strengths they can utilize. Encourage team members to share their insights into others' strengths in the workplace. Integrating strengths concepts into daily routines helps keep them top of mind for everyone involved.

CONDUCT A "STRENGTHS AUDIT" TO IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Once again, this can be a joint responsibility. Employees can provide suggestions to managers around where they feel they can add even more value by maximizing their strengths. Furthermore, employees can keep their eyes open for new and interesting ways to apply their talents at work.

Managers can also view their work and the work of their employees through "strengths goggles." Examine roles and responsibilities to find opportunities to capitalize on employee strengths even more. At best, bring the employee into the conversation. Employees will possess unique and invaluable insight into how they can bring the best of who they are into their current role.

ASSIGN TASKS BASED ON STRENGTHS

This is specifically targeted to managers and leaders. Innumerable tasks and projects emerge within organizations. Rather than just assigning tasks randomly or through some other self-directed process, collaborate with your teams to determine who is the best fit and has the most to offer. This presents a wonderful opportunity to bring maximum capacity to an initiative.

Being your best is a mantra that has tremendous interest to employees and to their employers more broadly. The above research provides a compelling case for why maximizing opportunities to use our strengths is critical to realizing this goal. This is, however, a shared responsibility, in which each of us can play a role. Celebrating and leveraging our talents will benefit all parties involved and can contribute to building a culture where "loving your job" is not just a dream, but rather, a reality. **W**

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