



Leadership's Guide to Strengths Based Performance Management

Introduction

Performance Management includes performance development.

Research shows:

- When an individual tries to improve their weaknesses, improvement is limited to about 10%
- When an individual works to improve their strengths, the improvement is substantial, 100% improvement and beyond

Focusing on strengths improves performance, goal achievement, engagement, job satisfaction, wellbeing, decreases stress, and has positive business results for the institution.

Concentrating on strengths does not mean ignoring challenges that are critical. Critical challenges are those that substantially limit an individual's performance and/or have a negative impact on their ability to be effective. They include behaviors that involve, but are not limited to: negativity, unprofessionalism, poorly handling conflict, providing or accepting mediocre performance, and resistance to change.

The best way to determine any critical challenge is to get anonymous supplemental feedback from peers, customers, vendors, etc. Also, watch for similar reoccurring situations or scenarios that consistently frustrate you or where you exhibit a negative or unproductive response – those are situations that challenge you beyond your strengths and/or ability to respond effectively.

Leadership Best Practices

Know your own strengths (see [Strengths Self-Development](#) below). To best develop other's strengths, you first need to understand your own. Leaders who play to their own strengths enhance their abilities and establish a unique management style. This practice fosters an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their strengths and limitations. When leaders are authentic and open about their own strengths, employees follow suit.

Support them to use their strengths. Understanding one's own strengths does not automatically lead to effective use of those strengths in the workplace. Help employees understand their own strengths and their team member's strengths. When job demands require employees to complete tasks that don't play to their strengths, great leaders provide recommendations and support systems, such as strategic partnerships, to help employees overcome challenges.

Harmonize team strengths. Great leaders factor in strengths when creating and working with their teams. Optimize employees by considering how the team member's complementary strengths can maximize team performance. Assign tasks that best match each individual's natural talents.

Keep strengths at the forefront. Ensure your employees take a strengths-based approach to every task. When tasks or projects come up, discuss the strengths needed to be successful to help determine who should be involved in completing the task or project. Create a chart with all team member's strengths prominently displayed -- offering a constant reminder to team members about the importance of

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playing to their strengths and for them to reference when they need to create teams or partnerships for projects/tasks.

Individualize recognition with consideration of strengths. Effective leaders consider each team member's preferences and strengths when providing feedback and recognition. For example, public awards might be highly meaningful to some employees but uncomfortable to others. Ask each employee what motivates them and how they prefer to receive feedback to determine the best recognition and feedback for that individual.

(Adapted from [Gallop's Strength Based Development: The Manager's Role](#))

Strengths Self-Development

Perform the below self-reflective activities to gain insights into your own strengths, performance, job satisfaction, and more. The activities can be done in any order and at different points in time. Be honest with your true self – these activities are not a judgement on you, they are to find out if you are being true to who you are, if you are doing what comes naturally to do, and if you are doing what you enjoy.

- **Complete a strengths assessment** (see [Resources](#) below)
 - Reflect on the assessment
 - Do you agree with the strengths that were identified? Why or why not?
 - What activities listed in the assessment align with your role?
 - What activities listed in the assessment are not part of your role?
- **Create a list of professional and personal activities that consider:**
 - Yearnings – What do you really want to do?
 - Rapid Learning – What areas do you quickly catch on?
 - Flow – List activities/tasks that when you are doing them time passes away without you knowing it
 - Glimpses of Excellence – List things you do really well and areas where you have received accomplishments/awards
 - Your satisfaction – What activities/tasks give you satisfaction?
- **Create a Love it/Loathe it list (a Marcus Buckingham exercise)**
 - Document your activities/duties as you do them for one week or more (if your work is cyclical)
 - Make note of whether you Love it! or Loathe it!
 - Use these questions to determine if you Love it or Loathe it!
 - Did/do you actively look forward to it? - Love it
 - Did/do you procrastinate or have apprehension before starting the task? - Loathe it
 - While you were doing the activity, did time fly by and you could easily concentrate? - Loved it
 - Did you struggle to complete the activity because you were bored or distracted? - Loathed it
 - Afterward, were you invigorated and authentically proud, strong, or happy? - Loved it
 - Did the completion of the activity leave you drained? - Loathed it
 - Reflect after you are done documenting your lists:
 - Which list is longer?

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- Why/what specifically about each activity made you love it or loathe it?
- For loathe it activities: Could you change or alter the activity or task to love it?
- Hardest question: Does your current role align with your strengths?

Act

Self-reflection is useless unless you act on it, that is where the true development begins. With your supervisor debrief the activities, your insights, and determine next steps.

For the love it/loathe it tasks, specifically, create a strategy to minimize the loathe it tasks.

- How can you collaborate with team members on activities to leverage team strengths?
- How can the team reorganize or structure work/activities to leverage everyone's strengths to be most effective?

You may also meet with a Human Resources and Affirmative Action representative. Contact us at 715-346-2606 or hr@uwsp.edu.

Resources

[StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Gallop](#)

[Strengths Based Leadership by Gallop](#)

[Standout by Marcus Buckingham](#)

[Gallop Business Journal](#)

[Beyond Performance: How Great Organizations Build Ultimate Competitive Advantage by Scott Keller](#)

[Scientific American Article: A Self-Improvement Secret: Work on Strengths](#)