

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS IN COLLEGE

BY

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People go to college with an end-goal of assuming roles and responsibilities based on what they know and the influence they can bring to bear on individuals, groups, and organizations.

Many people view college as a stepping-stone to careers in which they will be leaders. This leadership may be in a classroom, courtroom, corporation, hospital, community agency, ministry, service organization or in their own business. This reality, plus the fact that virtually every college graduate will be supervising someone, points to the importance of learning how to be an effective leader.

By nature, leadership involves an influence relationship that is designed to produce real changes. And virtually every college graduate will be involved in some type of influence relationship where the goal is to bring about real changes.

We want to give you a brief overview of some basic leadership principles and functions, then suggest how these functions can be performed from a strengths perspective. Finally we will share some practical suggestions from college students on developing leadership abilities during the college experience.

We have written this paper to supplement our book titled *StrengthsQuest: Discover and Develop Your Strengths in Academics, Career and Beyond*. The StrengthsQuest book includes a code on the inside cover for gaining access to the StrengthsFinder inventory. StrengthsFinder is an online assessment tool for identifying a person’s top areas of talent. In addition, the code inside the book opens three additional online programs for developing and applying strengths. This paper also augments curriculum and activities found on the StrengthsQuest Web site at <http://www.strengthsquest.com/>.

Our ultimate goal is to generate a vision in the minds of educators and students regarding the college experience. We wish that every college student and every college professor, administrator and student affairs profession saw developing strengths for leadership as one of the most important goals of a college education.

Three Essential Qualities of a Leader

I. A Drive to Execute

Leaders want to do something. They want to accomplish something. They want to get something done. Leaders want to bring about change.

The drive to execute means that you are not satisfied and not content to see things remain the same. You want to see change. You believe that change is needed. In fact, you believe that change is essential and absolutely necessary. Leaders are passionate about what they believe needs to be changed. Out of this passion, leaders have a drive to execute. In essence, the leader stands up and says, “We need to change.” The leader has drive to execute a plan/design to produce real, substantive change. And this drive to execute isn’t removed. In word and deed, the leader stands up and says, “Let’s do it.”

II. An Ability to Relate

Leaders simply must have an ability to relate to those they lead. They must have a way to relate to those they want to impact. Some leaders relate through the power of their personality and their ability to generate enthusiasm. Other leaders relate through intimidation and even fear. The point is that influential leaders have a way to relate that impacts other people and persuades them to do something that they might not otherwise do.

Clearly, in a democratic society, leaders must be able to relate to others in ways other than through force and intimidation. When people are free, leaders must be able to relate in ways that generate a willingness to follow and become involved in the pursuit of important goals. Free people require leaders who relate to them with respect for their individuality.

III. Integrity

Leaders must have integrity because they are ultimately dependent on their followers. If followers no longer trust their leaders or no longer have confidence in their leaders, they will not follow. Simply stated, you are not a leader if nobody is following. Sooner or later, leaders who lack integrity lose their leadership because they lose the trust of their followers. And once you lose the trust of your followers, you no longer have people who are willing to follow you. The challenge of leadership involves more than the courage to achieve an important goal and pursue an important vision. Leaders must have the courage to live truthfully. They must have the courage to live with integrity and be the person on the outside who they really are on the inside.

Five Basic Functions of Leaders

I. Visioning

Leaders are always looking to the future. They see how things are today and they are discontent. They believe things can be and should be better than they are. They have active imaginations and can literally see how things could be in the future. This visioning of the future is usually clear to them even though they may not know exactly how to get from here to there.

II. Establishing Stretch Goals

Out of their discontent with what is happening today and their visioning about how things can be in the future, leaders establish goals for themselves and for those they want to influence. The goals of leaders stretch people to think beyond today. But more than stretching into the future, the goals of leaders stretch those who follow to think beyond current perceptions of what they can do and what they can be. The stretch goals of leaders pull people out of self-limiting thoughts and behaviors. In establishing stretch goals leaders communicate confidence in their followers and in what their followers can accomplish. Even more establishing stretch goals communicate to people who the leaders believe that the followers can become.

III. Team Building

Leadership involves a relationship between the leader and the followers and between the followers. For dynamic leadership to occur, the leader and the follower must come together and form a team. But even more important, the followers must come together and form a team with each other. A primary responsibility of every leader is to form a committed partnership with followers, and to help followers partner with each other so that there is a united team dedicated to reaching the stretch goals and vision of the leader.

IV. Measuring Progress

Leaders figure out ways of knowing where they are, how much progress they have made, and how much further they need to go to reach their stretch goals and fulfill their vision. Measuring progress also needs to include measuring the contribution of individuals and groups within the team so that their contribution can be affirmed.

V. Celebrating

Leaders celebrate the progress made by the group and by the individuals in the group. This celebration is based on the progress that individuals and the group are making as they move toward the vision and the stretch goals. Celebrating can be formal or informal. The important thing is for people to be affirmed for the contribution that they are making and moving the group toward the vision and the goals.

Strengths-Based Leaders and Leadership

Leaders know their talents – what they naturally do best – and build their lives upon their talents by developing and applying strengths.

Outstanding leaders build an organization of people with talents and strengths that compliment their own.

Strengths-based leaders lead with their talents and strengths, and they partner with others around their talents and strengths.

The best leaders realize that many talents and strengths are needed to achieve important and challenging goals. Therefore, the best leaders orchestrate opportunities for themselves and others to use their strengths to achieve the goals they have set.

Great leaders realize that building a team with the right combination of strengths is critical to achieving goals. Their focus is on strengths of people. They believe that leadership involves getting work done through people. But they also focus on providing opportunities for people to learn, grow, and develop. In a sense, strengths-based leaders not only believe that leadership involves getting work done through people; they also believe that leadership involves “getting people done through work.”

A strengths-based approach to leadership focuses on who the people are and the strengths they bring to the process of leadership. Leaders and followers both have strengths that are needed. No leader has all of the strengths needed to make a vision become a reality. That is one of the main reasons why leaders need a constituency and followers.

No single leader can be expected to fulfill each of the leadership functions listed above. Each leader has his or her own group of strengths. But leaders must rely on other people who have strengths they do not have in order to fulfill all of the leadership functions. This means that leaders will be able to fulfill certain functions better than others, while some of the “followers” will be able to perform certain “leadership” functions better than the identified leaders.

To be effective, leaders must identify their own strengths, then identify others who have the strengths needed to complete the leadership functions required to bring the vision to reality.

The Gallup Organization’s Study of Leadership

The Gallup Organization has been actively studying leadership and the qualities of the most effective leaders for over 35 years. In particular, Gallup has been studying the “best of the best” leaders in virtually every field with this question in mind: “What qualities in the best of the best leaders are most responsible for their leadership effectiveness?”

The simple answer to this question is that the best of the best leaders are all alike. The bests of the best leaders build their leadership efforts around their strengths and talents.

While leaders don't all have the same strengths and talents, they capitalize on whatever strengths they have in performing their leadership roles and functions.

The "best of the best" leaders are outstanding because they have more fully developed and more fully applied whatever strengths and talents they have as they lead.

A direct extension of Gallup's research is that if people want to become effective leaders, they must develop their strengths and talents and then they must strategically apply their strengths and talents in the various functions of leadership.

After studying more than two million individuals, Gallup has identified more than 400 themes of talent, and narrowed the list to the 34 themes that are most prevalent among the top achievers and leaders. In an effort to help people discover their talents, then develop and apply strengths, Gallup has developed an online inventory called StrengthsFinder, which measure the presence of talent in those 34 themes.

The 34 Talent Themes Measured by StrengthsFinder

Achiever

People strong in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

Activator

People strong in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.

Adaptability

People strong in the Adaptability theme prefer to "go with the flow." They tend to be "now" people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

Analytical

People strong in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.

Arranger

People strong in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.

Belief

People strong in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their life.

Command

People strong in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.

Communication

People strong in the Communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.

Competition

People strong in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.

Connectedness

People strong in the Connectedness theme have faith in the links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.

Consistency

People strong in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone in the world with consistency by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.

Context

People strong in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

Deliberative

People strong in the Deliberative theme are best described by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate the obstacles.

Developer

People strong in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from these improvements.

Discipline

People strong in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.

Empathy

People strong in the Empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives or others' situations.

Focus

People strong in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track. They prioritize, then act.

Futuristic

People strong in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their visions of the future.

Harmony

People strong in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.

Ideation

People strong in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

Includer

People strong in the Includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out, and make an effort to include them.

Individualization

People strong in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.

Input

People strong in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

Intellection

People strong in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.

Learner

People strong in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

Maximizer

People strong in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.

Positivity

People strong in the Positivity theme have an enthusiasm that is contagious. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

Relator

People who are strong in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Responsibility

People strong in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

Restorative

People strong in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.

Self-Assurance

People strong in the Self-Assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.

Significance

People strong in the Significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.

Strategic

People strong in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

Woo

People strong in the Woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.

Strengths-Based Leadership

Strengths-based leadership begins with understanding the nature of strengths.

A talent is a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied. Each and every one of us has talents, and our most dominant talents are our greatest opportunity for achievement and excellence through strengths.

A strength is the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. The key to building a strength is to identify your dominant talents, which are often found within your top themes, then refine them with knowledge and skills.

As we examine leadership functions, think about your strengths in terms of each function. In areas where you are less confident, you will want to partner with people who

have strengths that can help you fulfill that function. Seen from this perspective, it becomes increasingly evident that a person's ability to lead depends on the quality of relationships the person forms with individuals who possess complementary strengths.

I. Visioning

Real leadership stems from people who care deeply about some problem or group of people. They care so much that they are willing to assume a leadership role as an expression of their determination to make things better.

Stemming from this passionate concern about a group of people, individuals who become leaders see what is, and they want to change things for the better. Based upon seeing possibilities, leaders have a vision about how things could be better, and they are passionate about seeing their vision become reality.

Robert Greenleaf wrote:

“Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams. Much more than a dreamer is required to bring it to reality, but the dream must be there first.”

Your dreams and visions are extremely important. All else rests on your dreams and your vision. Formulate your own personal mission based on the deepest core of your being. The vision you are most passionate about will energize you to assume a leadership role and can excite others to work with you.

As you formulate the vision you are passionate about, individuals with strengths in the following themes can be valuable partners: Achiever, Activator, Analytical, Arranger, Belief, Command, Communication, Competition, Connectedness, Context, Developer, Empathy, Focus, Futuristic, Ideation, Input, Intellection, Learner, Maximizer, Positivity, Restorative, Self-Assurance, Significance, and Strategic.

II. Establishing Stretch Goals

Stretch goals excite the imagination and generate enthusiasm. They pull your mind into a better future.

Leaders must be able to rally people to support their vision and work toward making their vision become a reality. An important step in this process is translating the vision into exciting, specific goals that others can readily understand. These goals also need to be measurable. Specific, measurable goals provide a basis for rallying support and involvement from other people. Having specific, measurable goals helps the planning process and helps the leader see when progress is being made.

Leaders must be able to articulate their vision and articulate stretch goals in ways that generate enthusiasm and commitment.

This leadership function points to one of the ultimate issues of leadership: Will people work with leaders to produce the desired change? Leaders must find ways to communicate their vision and goals in ways that generate enthusiasm and a commitment to make the vision a reality.

Finding the right words to communicate a vision and stretch goals takes considerable thought. Asking others to share your vision and goals requires courage because you will be calling on people to change and you will be putting yourself and your reputation on the line.

As you go through the process of establishing stretch goals and articulating your vision and goals, individuals with strengths in the following themes can be valuable partners in this process: Achiever, Activator, Analytical, Arranger, Belief, Command, Communication, Competition, Connectedness, Consistency, Context, Deliberative, Developer, Discipline, Focus, Futuristic, Ideation, Includer, Individualization, Input, Intellection, Learner, Maximizer, Positivity, Responsibility, Restorative, Self-Assurance, Significance, Strategic, and Woo.

III. Team Building

The importance of relationships in leadership cannot be overemphasized. Leadership *is* a relationship. Leadership is an *influence* relationship, and this means that followers have a choice to follow or not follow. Similarly, the constituency of people who are needed for support can choose to support or not to support a leader. The choices of individuals to follow and support a leader will in large measure be determined by the quality of the relationship that leaders form with their followers.

To make the point clear, let's go to the defining issue in leadership. Imagine that a person pulls out a gun, points it at you, and cocks the trigger. The person then says: "Follow me." Is that person a leader? If you follow the person and do everything the person says, is he a leader? We would say *no*. Leadership isn't proven simply because someone follows and does what another person says. When coercion is involved, it stops being leadership. Leadership occurs when people choose to do things at the request of the leader while being free to choose otherwise.

When we freely follow the leadership of others, it is usually because the vision of the leader is so important that we choose to invest our energies or because we trust and respect the leader so much. The best basis for leadership is a compelling vision and a quality relationship.

Relationships are built one person at a time. While many think of leadership in terms of a role or someone at a distance who gives directions and pronounces decisions, the most effective leaders are influential because of the relationships they form.

From the strengths perspective, it is all-important for leaders to know the specific strengths of those with whom they work. Helping followers identify, affirm, celebrate, develop, and apply their strengths is absolutely critical to strengths-based leadership. As leaders and followers work from their strengths, the whole organization improves and each person becomes more motivated to fulfill the vision.

Without quality relationships that form a bond between the leader and the followers, little will be accomplished. False, forced, and uncommunicated expectations always lead to conflict and confusion. In this phase, everyone needs to be clear about their roles and what is being expected of them. Followers need to know what is being expected of them, and they need to know what they can expect from the leader.

Followers need to know and appreciate one another so that they have a basis for teamwork. Leaders also need to provide opportunities for followers to voice their expectations of themselves and of the leader.

A team becomes stronger and the motivation and confidence of team members increase as people know, develop and apply their individual strengths.

The most critical aspect in team building is for each person in the group to know, understand and respect the strengths of each person on the team. Next, each person needs to understand and appreciate how the strengths of each person fit into a plan for reaching stretch goals and fulfilling the vision.

Building a strengths-based team means that each member of the team can use his or her strengths on important functions and projects in the organization and that their strengths play a vital role in reaching stretch goals and fulfilling the vision as set forth by the leader. Each member of the team must also understand the need for having individuals with their unique strengths working together to achieve the goals and make the vision become reality. In this way, team members come to value one another and see that each person is both important and each person is dependent on the others in the team to reach their mutual goal and vision.

The expectations of team members reflect how each member of the team will apply their strengths to fulfill the tasks needed to reach the goals and the vision. Helping team members understand the connection between their strengths and the expectations of them reduces confusion and builds confidence.

Equally important is helping each team member see how, where and why members of the team are needed. Helping team members know each other in terms of their respective strengths begins this process. With an awareness and respect for each other's strengths, the team really begins to bond because they understand how the expectations of each team member connect to their strengths.

Finally, the team really comes together as timelines are established. This is where the steps needed to achieve the goal and the vision are tied together with the strengths and expectations of each team member. With this awareness, the members of the team really understand how they are interdependent on one another and why they need the talents of each other.

As you build a team, establish expectations, and set timelines, individuals with strengths in the following themes may be valuable partners: Achiever, Activator, Adaptability, Arranger, Belief, Command, Communication, Connectedness, Consistency, Deliberative, Developer, Discipline, Empathy, Fairness, Focus, Harmony, Inclusiveness, Individualization, Input, Learner, Maximizer, Positivity, Relator, Responsibility Restorative, Strategic, and Woo

IV. Measuring Progress

This is where the management functions of leadership come in. With specific goals that are measurable and tied to the vision, this leadership function becomes much easier. But it is also a troubling aspect of leadership because of the accountability. At issue are assessments of how much progress is being made and whether timelines are being kept. Other assessment issues involve the quality of work being done and who is being responsible or irresponsible in the process.

From a strengths perspective, leaders are always looking for the best fit between the strengths of those with whom they are working and the tasks that need to be performed. But beyond fit, a strengths-based leader is interested in the growth, development, and maximization of the strengths of his or her followers. Seen from this vantage point, strengths-based leaders are educators. They are continually involved in training as they are concerned with “growing strengths” in others. Again, the wisdom of Robert Greenleaf comes to the surface as he sets forth that the best test of leadership is whether the followers grow as persons.

This leadership function is ongoing. It is task oriented, people oriented, and people-task oriented. But from a strengths perspective, we are looking to how people are functioning in their tasks and how their strengths are being applied in the completion of tasks.

As you monitor and measure the progress of followers, individuals with strengths in the following themes may be valuable partners: Achiever, Adaptability, Analytical, Arranger, Competition, Consistency, Context, Deliberative, Developer, Discipline, Focus, Ideation, Inclusiveness, Individualization, Input, Intellection, Learner, Maximizer, Positivity, Responsibility, Restorative, Self-Assurance, and Strategic.

V. Celebrating

Leadership is an ongoing relationship composed of interactions with followers. Everyone involved needs to be affirmed for the role they are playing as they strive to

reach the goals and fulfill the vision. It is critical to maintaining high energy and productive work. Recognition and affirmation from leaders is extremely important. But a leader's recognition isn't only focused on the people. Leaders need to affirm people in light of how important the vision is.

This leadership function is an ongoing process and extends from the earliest stages of formulating a vision and translating that vision into stretch goals. Throughout the process, those with whom you partner and consult need to be affirmed for their involvement and contribution to the vision and the goals. As a strengths-based leader, you will want to take every opportunity to help people build their strengths and gain more confidence in their strengths. Celebrating plays an important role in strengths and confidence building. Therefore, you will want to mirror back to people the strengths you see in them and how their strengths are contributing to the achievement of the goals and the vision. As people gain this type of feedback, they will become encouraged and be even more motivated to contribute their best.

Celebrating progress and achievements is often overlooked. But it should be emphasized, if for no other reason than building a constituency and increasing the loyalty of followers. Besides affirming all of the work invested, celebrating produces a foundation for the future. Celebrating has one other important function. People need closure, and celebrating provides a positive sense of closure.

From a strengths perspective, leadership has two objectives: getting work done through people and getting people done through work.

From a strengths perspective, people are the focus of leadership because if people aren't at their best, goals and visions simply won't be accomplished. Therefore, celebrating the accomplishment of goals is really a celebration of people and the strengths they have invested.

In this celebration process, focus on three things: 1) the strengths of individuals, 2) the team formed by the strengths of the individuals, and 3) the fact that people were willing to contribute their particular strengths for the sake of the vision and goals.

As strengths-based leaders affirm people and celebrate their accomplishments, they generate hope and optimism. The reality of achieving goals paints a bright future for everyone. The message of achievements says that those who were involved have within them the seeds for future greatness.

As you celebrate the accomplishment of goals and the fulfillment of the vision, individuals with the following strengths may be valuable partners: Achiever, Activator, Belief, Command, Communication, Competition, Connectedness, Context, Developer, Focus, Futuristic, Harmony, Ideation, Inclusiveness, Individualization, Maximizer, Positivity, Relator, Significance, and Woo.

Becoming a Strengths-Based Leader

Leadership is a process, and becoming a leader is also a process. Becoming a “strengths-based leader” involves a process that begins with who you are, then moves to what you do. What follows are a group of steps that you can take to become a person who leads through strengths.

1. Realize that you do not need to be in a formal leadership role to provide valuable leadership.
2. Lead with your strengths as you work in groups to help them accomplish your goals and their goals.
3. Identify your specific strengths in leadership.
4. Assume leadership roles that use your strengths or talents you want to develop into strengths.
5. Pay close attention to others in the organization and try to identify their talents and strengths.
6. Encourage others in the organization by helping them to see the positive contributions they are making as they use their strengths productively.
7. Create opportunities for others to develop and apply strengths.
8. Become clear about your personal goals and help the members of the organization to focus on the goals they want to accomplish.
9. Most of your strengths enable you to fulfill two primary leadership functions or help other leaders fulfill these functions:
 - a) Establishing stretch goals
 - b) Helping people come together and form a team based upon understanding and affirming their talents and strengths
10. Hold yourself accountable to two standards in evaluating your leadership ability:
 - a) The capacity to pull people together based on their strengths to get an important job done
 - b) The growth and development of your followers

Developing Leadership Strengths Through the College Experience

The college experience can be a magnificent opportunity to develop and apply leadership strengths. The key is to be intentional. Each and every one of your talents can be applied in one or more of the leadership functions described above. Many talents can be applied in multiple leadership functions. Look for every opportunity to learn more about leadership and look for every opportunity to develop and apply strengths in leadership.

Based on our work with thousands of college students, we have identified several ways in which you can intentionally develop your leadership abilities in college. We present these suggestions to stimulate your thinking. There are many more ways to use the college experience to build and apply leadership strengths. Let your imagination devise the approach and the activities that are best for you.

Leadership Development and the College Experience in General

Because leadership is an influence relationship, watch for how and why people are influenced by other people. Because leadership brings about measurable, progressive change, you will want to analyze the conditions under which people make these types of changes. Since leadership involves the ability of a person to rally others so that they create measurable changes, you will want to note how people are able to rally other people to change and to make changes.

Pay particular attention to when and how you influence others and how you are able to rally others to change and make changes.

Conversely, note when and how others influence you and rally you to change and make changes.

Leadership Development and the Classroom Experience

Classes and the work of instructors in the classroom provide a magnificent opportunity to learn about leadership. Because learning always involves changing and because leadership is designed to produce measurable change, you will want to note when and how instructors influence students to change. Here are some questions that will stimulate your thinking as you learn about leadership from observing and reflecting on the work of educators as leaders:

- What is the difference between effective and ineffective instructors?
- What strengths do the best instructors seem to have?
- How do the best instructors interact with students?
- How do the best instructors organize lessons and classroom activities?
- How do the most effective instructors persuade others?
- How do effective instructors use their strengths when they teach and interact with students?

- Which strengths do you have in common with the most effective instructors?

Leadership Development and Class Selection

The key to leadership development in class selection is being intentional. Remember that leadership always involves interpersonal interactions, influence relationships, persuasion, change, and progressive movement toward measurable goals. Any class that addresses one or more of these topics can be a fruitful source for learning about leadership and developing your leadership abilities. In some cases, almost all the classes in a field of study can provide valuable insights for the learner who intentionally wants to develop leadership competencies. Here are some examples:

- Any classes in communication studies or speech
- Any classes in leadership studies or management
- Almost all classes in sociology or social psychology
- Most classes in organizational development, organizational psychology, and community development
- Humanities classes that focus on rhetoric and persuasion.
- Philosophy classes in argumentation and logical reasoning
- Mathematical reasoning and patterns in scientific problem solving
- Most classes in political sciences
- Many classes in cultural anthropology
- Many classes in ethnic and cross-cultural studies
- History and other social science classes that focus on the dynamics of change and/or the influence of particular leaders in the change process
- Mythology, Missionology and World Religion classes that study how people are influenced and changed by individuals and ideas
- Great books and other studies of great ideas that have influenced civilizations, individuals, and groups

Leadership Development in Class Assignments and Independent Studies

Be intentional. Make class assignments work for you by asking to study leaders and leadership. We recommend a focus on studying the best of the best leaders and what made them so outstanding. You may be able to do library research and study historical leaders or current leaders. You may be able to conduct your own investigations of the best leaders you know or the best in a particular field. As you study leaders and the process of leadership, here are some questions to focus your thinking and investigation:

- What is it that makes these leaders so effective?
- What strengths do they have?
- In what environment and with what groups of people do leaders with certain strengths seem to be most effective?

Leadership Development in Athletics

Athletics is a prime place to learn about leadership. On the most basic level, athletics help you understand a lot about the concept of talents and strengths. You also learn about how you need different types of talent to play different kinds of sports and positions. Then there is the whole challenge of turning talents into strengths and the attitudes that are involved.

Additional insights about leadership can be gained by asking questions that are key to success in sports and athletic competition:

- What makes a great coach?
- How do effective coaches work with players?
- What are effective coaches doing during practice and during a game?
- What are the most important elements of preparation?
- What are the most important things to do and not do during training?
- What is the best way to learn a new approach, play, or move?
- What is involved in changing old habits and grooving new habits?
- What are the best ways to formulate goals?
- What is the best way to develop a “team” and “team spirit”?
- What is the best way to deal with injuries and setbacks?
- What are the most effective ways to maintain motivation?
- What types of “self-talk” move a person toward optimal performance?

Leadership Development Through Internships and Experiential Education Opportunities

Most colleges and universities offer internships to work with professionals in the field. This provides an up-close and personal look at how leadership works in real life. From this vantage point, insights are readily available. Even if the internship isn't the most positive experience, you can learn what not to do when you are in leadership. The key to producing an outstanding learning experience is to stay focused on the talents that produce influence through relationships and the dynamics involved in creating change. Look for how each of the five leadership functions identified above are carried out and how your talents can be applied in these leadership functions.

Experiential education and internships force you to move from being an observer to being responsible for performing a function. This provides great opportunities for you to practice your leadership in identifying a vision you are passionate about and then translating that vision into goals. You may have opportunities to perform several other leadership functions through your internship or experiential education assignment. Again, be intentional and particularly try to learn as much as you can about how you can help other people become more aware of their talents and strengths and how you can help other people more fully utilize their talents.

Leadership Development in Study Groups

Many students fail to see study groups as an opportunity to develop leadership strengths. But, on reflection, you can readily see that most of the leadership functions apply here. As you work with other students in study groups, use your most dominant talents to help yourself and others learn. For example, an effective leader helps others use their strengths to help the group function better and to effectively move toward a desired goal. Likewise, consider the strengths of your study group members and allocate tasks based upon the strengths of the members. This may mean that one group member may be best at analyzing a piece of literature while another might be best at forming a persuasive argument while another might be best at seeking additional information through library resources. Some group members may be better at arranging and allocating the learning tasks, while some have a talent for keeping the learning group focused and working in harmony.

As you use study groups to develop leadership strengths, look for every opportunity to help others learn about their talents and strengths. In the process, you will be learning more about yours. And, of course, you will want to use the learning strategies spelled out talent theme in the StrengthsQuest book and encourage others to do the same.

Leadership Development through Student Organizations

Student clubs, organizations, and service projects provide some of the best leadership development opportunities available on campus because all of the leadership functions listed above must be fulfilled. Another reason that student organizations provide an excellent opportunity for building leadership strengths is that everyone involved is a student and a volunteer. But this also presents a massive challenge because students have multiple commitments, competing priorities and their work in student organizations is purely voluntary. For each of these reasons, leadership within student organizations is extremely challenging but a marvelous opportunity to develop leadership strengths.

A strengths-based approach to leadership may be particularly effective when you are working with student organizations. As you help students identify their dominant talents and build strengths, they will become more motivated and committed to the organization. As students are able to do what they do best, they will experience more fulfillment and they will be more likely to fulfill their commitment to the organization.

With your knowledge your own dominant talents and how to use them in the various leadership functions, you will gain confidence as a leader in college and beyond.

Leadership Development through Employment and Work Experience

Nearly every college student works to pay some or all of their college and living expenses. But rather than considering employment as only a job for earning money, try to make it a learning experience to develop leadership strengths.

One of the most important leadership tasks is supervising others. From the strengths perspective, supervisors will be most effective if they capitalize on their strengths and consciously use their strengths as they supervise others.

The best way to supervise someone needs to take into account both the strengths of the supervisor and the supervisee. The book *Now, Discover Your Strengths* has specific strategies for how a supervisor can use his or her talents to best supervise others. The same book describes how to take into account the talents of those who are being supervised.

Armed with the knowledge contained in *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, you'll be able to see when people are and are not using their top talents and you can begin thinking about how you can best supervise others by most effectively using your own dominant talents.

Leadership and Self-Management Development

Someone once said that before you can lead others, you need to learn how to manage yourself. Self-management begins with how you will spend your time and energy.

College demands time and energy. What makes this so challenging is that there simply isn't enough time to learn everything you need to learn, and there isn't enough time to do everything you want to do, need to do, and have to do.

In college, demands come from all directions. It begins in the classroom. Then there are work demands and demands at home. Of course, family members have their own expectations. Add to these realities, your desire for a social life, love relationships, and to be involved on campus. All this adds up to significant demands on your most precious resources: your time and energy. At this point, self-management strengths become essential.

The net effect of all of these time and energy demands causes most college students to feel stressed and overwhelmed with multiple priorities and competing demands. Sometimes it feels as though you are being pulled apart by all the demands on your time and energy. In addition, there is always the uncertain future and the riveting question from others and from within yourself: "What are you going to do after college?"

Developing self-management strengths forms a foundation for leadership. But in this case, you are both leader and follower. You are both your own leader and your own

follower. The challenge of becoming a leader of yourself begins with a vision you are passionate about. So let's start right now: What are you passionate about doing and becoming? Remembering the leadership functions listed above and those with whom you might need to partner, begin moving through goals and tasks to reach your vision. Most important, which of your talents can you apply to build self-management strengths?

Other Opportunities for Leadership Development within the College Experience

In addition to the opportunities listed above, the college experience provides countless opportunities to develop leadership strengths. For example, most colleges provide opportunities for students to become involved in musical performance, drama, theater and other artistic modes of expression. Each of these can be rich opportunities to develop leadership strengths.

The most important thing is to be intentional. Purposely look at each college experience in terms of learning something about how to be a leader. Whether you are a leader or a follower, you can learn something about leadership. Living groups, residence halls, Greek organizations, and social groups all provide opportunities. And never overlook the importance of having a mentor and being a mentor.

Recommendations About Leadership Development in College from Student Leaders

Listed below are suggestions and insights from current and past college students regarding leadership development in college.

- Focus on the needs of others as a basis for your leadership.
- Develop humility! Realize that following is a part of leading.
- Make synergy your goal: helping and letting others do what they do best.
- Leadership demands courage – step up and focus on what needs to be done. You must have confidence.
- Make sure you see others clearly. You may think you see strengths in others that are your strengths and not theirs. You may think you see faults in others that are yours and not theirs. Seeing clearly is important to leading.
- Take classes that offer opportunities to build strengths by adding knowledge and skills to your greatest talents.
- Accountability is important but hard to learn. You are accountable to people inside and outside of your group.
- The best leaders get things started, and then they encourage people to do what they do best and then affirm them for what they do.
- Interview people whose top themes are similar to yours -- other students, instructors, staff members. Find out how they use their talents to be effective. Talk about their jobs and how their jobs relate to their talents.
- Always keep moving forward toward the goal. Although some of your followers may try to be a hindrance, you will be teaching those that follow the importance of focusing on a goal.
- Pair yourself with mentors. Encourage others in your group to also have mentors.

- You must have courage to be successful. You must have the ability to focus on the needs of others -- particularly those who follow you.
- College is a place to try new things and to discover what you are good at. Don't miss the opportunity.
- Know your talents and know your weaknesses and limits. Most of all know your boundaries. A good leader is able to say "no."
- Follow your heart and do what you love.
- Create opportunities for yourself and for others to shadow adults in their leadership roles.
- You will always need a support group. Every student leader needs a support group to be an outlet for the frustrations that naturally come from leading.
- To me leadership is walking with people and meeting them where they are.
- Learn how to empower others by serving them.
- To increase motivation, create a vision and a purpose, and then develop an action plan.
- Create an atmosphere where people are free to be themselves.
- Learn how to work with people from very different backgrounds and personalities.
- Getting into leadership in college involves knowing your talents, seeking leadership positions in areas you are interested in, and getting out of your shell. Become involved, serve and encourage others.
- Encouraging others is a basic leadership function. If you think about it, you can always practice encouraging others.
- A major problem in college is that there are so many opportunities for leadership and leadership development. It's best to start with one thing that you are passionate about.
- Your most important responsibility as a leader is to discover and draw out the talents of others.
- The leadership opportunities that college brings begin with the fact that few people know who you are. This means that you can try new things and that you are not constrained by the opinions of others from the past.
- When you are in a leadership position, make sure that each person knows that they are a vital piece of the puzzle. The responsibility of a leader is to utilize the strengths of followers and give them a place to excel. When people know that they count and that they make a difference, they are more willing to follow.
- Becoming aware of your own dominant talents makes you want to see those of others – and encourage them. Meet with your team of leaders and talk with them about their talents. Discuss how you can better utilize their abilities in your organization.
- To really be a leader, you have to learn to build up other people and believe in them.
- Make community happen. Don't wait for it to come to you.
- Don't complain if change is needed. Be an instrument for change.
- Try new things. Test them out.

- Take risks, particularly with what you're passionate about, but don't assume that everyone will share your passion. It's yours, so go with it.
- Seek to serve and to understand others first.
- Surround yourself with people who believe in you and themselves. Great student leaders seem to cultivate and nourish relationships. My success as a leader comes from the fact that I care about who the people are, and I care about who they are becoming.
- The best thing about becoming involved in leadership is that it forces you to learn things you simply cannot learn from books alone.
- Great leaders are really great when they develop others to be leaders.
- Never overlook opportunities to talk to other leaders about how they lead.
- Remember that everyone needs to feel good about themselves and what they are doing. As a leader, you have a critically important role in helping people feel good about themselves and in particular becoming more and more confident.
- As you work to build leadership strengths, know that you are preparing yourself for a career, even though you might not be certain of what that career will be.

Summary and Conclusions

Basic Propositions About Leadership and Strengths

- Leadership is a people process: people interacting with other people.
- Leadership involves people influencing other people to move toward a goal.
- Leadership involves influence both from "leaders" to "followers" and "followers" on "leaders."
- Leadership is more a function of who the people are than of the techniques they use.
- Everyone has talents, and everyone has weaknesses.
- People differ in terms of (a) their talents, (b) the combination and intensity of their talents, (c) the extent to which their talents have been developed into strengths, and (d) the extent to which their strengths are being applied.
- People are at their best when they are leading with their greatest talents.
- People are at their best in helping groups or organizations when they have opportunities to develop and apply strengths.
- People are motivated to work in the areas of their talents and strengths.

Leadership is one of those things you try to learn, but never feel that you have completely mastered. Therefore, it's important to get good, honest feedback on a regular basis. Mentors are indispensable in developing your leadership strengths.

Leadership is a very humbling process because ultimately you are not in control. As one person has said, "It's hard to call yourself a leader if no one is following."

Leadership is ultimately measured by what followers do and accomplish. And you know when people are at their best and are accomplishing the most -- don't you?

People are at their best when they are doing what their talents enable and empower them to do. Accordingly, leaders are at their best when they help followers use and develop their talents. This is the essence of strengths-based leadership.

In the final analysis, strengths-based leadership boils down to this: Leaders using their strengths to help followers discover their talents, then develop and apply strengths in the process of achieving an important and noble vision.

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