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Debunking Strengths Myth #1

Adopting a strengths-based approach doesn't mean you can ignore your weaknesses

by Brian Brim

As someone who has worked with thousands of employees and managers on strengths development, I have been asked just about every conceivable question regarding this topic. It occurred to me that it might be helpful to address some of the questions I'm most often asked about discovering talents and building strengths.

This is the first of several articles that will do just that. In fact, this series will debunk several commonly accepted myths about strengths. Myth #1, which I'll cover here, suggests that adopting a strengths-based approach means you can ignore your weaknesses.

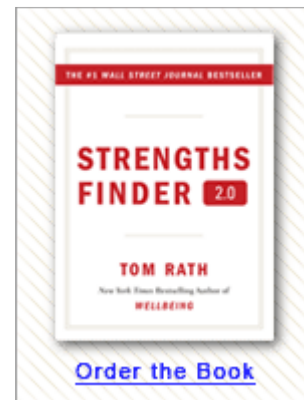
The reality is that you can't. To understand what this means, though, it is important to first define "weakness." In a strengths-based approach, a "weakness" is *a shortage or misapplication of talent, skill, or knowledge that causes problems for you or others.*

Using this definition, it's obvious that we can't ignore our weaknesses. Ignoring weaknesses doesn't banish them; it just makes them worse -- and they'll continue to stand in the way of what we want to accomplish. We have to deal with them so they'll quit dogging us.

Open communication

In far too many workplaces, admitting that something is dragging you down is a sure-fire way to derail your reputation and future opportunities. In a strengths-based approach, dealing with your weaknesses is not good for just you; it also helps your teammates and the company as a whole.

A strengths-based approach encourages open communication and positive action in the face of difficult situations in several ways. First, at the individual level, people begin to honor the fact that they are unique and that they need to find their own distinctive ways to succeed. For instance, Suzanne, who is fun and outgoing, establishes relationships with customers easily and closes deals right and left. But that doesn't mean that her more reserved colleague, Bill, isn't just as successful at making sales. Bill, who is more contemplative and deliberate, just



goes after business in a different way -- and sells just as much. A strengths-based approach can help Suzanne and Bill appreciate and capitalize on their unique talents.

Second, a strengths-based approach helps people at all levels understand that operating from weakness is a bad thing for each person and is, therefore, ultimately a bad thing for the company. The strengths concept encourages companies to create performance management processes, development programs, and career paths that enable employees and the systems that support them to function in unison and maximize the best in people every day.

How to manage your potential weaknesses

We all have days when everything goes right at work. We tackle the day's tasks with gusto, and completing everything on our to-do list seems to happen effortlessly.

Many times, though, that list includes tasks we dislike -- and maybe some that we dread. Mark, for example, who dislikes numbers and loathes doing his expense reports, arrives at work to find an ominous e-mail message from Accounting notifying him that he won't get reimbursed at all if his forms aren't completed in the next 48 hours. Jennifer, who avoids writing whenever possible, receives a call from her manager, who says he's looking forward to reading her latest project report -- tomorrow.

Like Mark and Jennifer, we all need to accomplish tasks that don't necessarily play to our greatest talents. How we conquer these challenges depends on our ability to manage the lack or misapplication of talent, skill,

“ We all need to accomplish tasks that don't necessarily play to our greatest talents. ”

or knowledge that is causing the problem. Here are some strategies that can help you confront your potential weaknesses and overcome them:

- **Get the right education and training.** How often have you seen an obviously talented person struggle at a job, only to discover that he or she simply didn't have the proper knowledge or skill for the role? The solution to this problem is often straightforward: a bit of education and training. A morning-long computer-instruction class for a "computer illiterate" yet talented salesperson or manager could lead to significantly improved performance.
- **Leverage your greatest talents.** If someone has been fully educated and trained for the job but is still struggling, sometimes it is because he is using the wrong talents -- or the right talents in the wrong way -- to tackle an aspect of the job.

You can't easily change the ways in which you least naturally think, feel, or behave as a unique individual, but you can make the most of your naturally powerful talents. I mentioned earlier that Suzanne uses her outgoing nature to build relationships with customers and win sales. That approach just doesn't come to Bill very naturally, so trying to be an extrovert simply won't work for him. But Bill is inherently adept at gathering data and creating a

compelling business case. This, then, is his best approach for closing more business.

- **Form complementary partnerships.** This solution is somewhat similar to leveraging your greatest talents, but in this case, you borrow the talents from someone else. What if Suzanne could generate a great deal of interest in a sale but her customer needed a compelling business case to be convinced to buy? Wouldn't a partnership between Suzanne and Bill make sense? Suzanne could break the ice, then use Bill as her subject matter expert to close the deal. And the same concept applies to knowledge and skills. If you don't have it, partner with someone who does.
- **Just do it.** Sometimes, even if the task you have to accomplish is in an area of weakness, you still have to do it. But if it's a task you don't have to do very often, it may be helpful to recognize that you may never excel at it, and you won't ever enjoy doing it -- then just do it and get through it.

Let me give you an example. Charlie is a brilliant magazine editor who hates doing quarterly budgets because the rigidity of the task doesn't maximize his exceptional creativity. But his company says he has no choice -- it's a key part of his job. So Charlie has found consolation in the fact that budgeting actually takes very little of his time when he decides to "just do it," and he spends the vast majority of his days doing the creative work that really energizes him. "It's actually a small price to pay for having a job that I love," he says. However, if the day comes when Charlie has to spend 30% or 40% of his time budgeting, he may decide he's in the wrong role.

- **Stop doing it.** Sometimes, no matter how you apply your talents, you may find that you are simply not good at a particular task. When this happens, you can explore all the options listed above to find a strategy that can help you overcome this challenge. And this can work, as long as the task isn't a key part of your role.

Other times, however, you may discover that no matter how many different ways you try to fit your talents to a role, it simply isn't the right fit for you. You may discover that you are always struggling while others are excelling. Rather than feeling energized every morning, you may realize that you are making excuses for not going to work. Ultimately, your performance will tell the story. If you have tried every strategy to manage your potential weaknesses -- your shortages or misapplication of talent, skill, or knowledge -- yet you're constantly underperforming, it's probably time to consider a new role. These decisions are never easy, but they definitely are worth making if you're in the wrong job.

Heads up

Managing your potential weaknesses isn't always easy. It takes planning and effort -- and maybe even a little humility -- but as you proactively deal with shortages or misapplications in talent, skill, or knowledge that could create problems, you will clear the path to strength for yourself, your teammates, and the organization.

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Debunking Strengths Myth #2

Why taking a strengths-based approach isn't as easy as it seems

by Brian Brim

This is the second in a series of articles on myths about strengths management.

Building a strengths-based organization seems like it would be simple. The concept is so intuitive, the thinking goes, that embedding strengths in a company's DNA should be almost effortless. This is, however, one of the biggest myths about strengths management -- and about managing transformational change.

It's easy to understand why some managers would embrace and perpetuate this myth. As a consultant, I've had the opportunity to implement many different initiatives for

“ Buzz on its own is not enough to create lasting organizational change.”

companies over the past 20 years, and I've never seen one that creates such an immediate, positive buzz as strengths. This approach honors individual differences and taps directly into people's core talents and beliefs, and that lends it tremendous energy and excitement.

But buzz on its own is not enough to create lasting organizational change. That initial burst of energy must be harnessed to generate a sustainable long-term transformation. If organizations don't begin this process with a purpose, a plan, and the discipline to carry it through, it can end up being just another in a long line of failed initiatives.

The problem is that in most companies, employees have seen too many initiatives come and go. Although many of them grabbed employees' attention at first, they didn't do much to improve individual or organizational performance. And when some employees think about the time and money their companies invested in programs that didn't change a thing, they can become wary of any new approach, even one as personally affirming as strengths.

When this happens, it's important to help employees understand the tremendous impact that a strengths-based approach can have on their workplace. It's like using a computer only to play solitaire. It can be fun, but it doesn't begin to capitalize on what a computer can do. The same is true of strengths-based development. Discovering your greatest talents is exciting, but learning how to use them gives you a tremendous source of power.

A strengths-based approach is ultimately about improving organizational performance -- whether that's enhancing individual achievement, employee engagement, customer engagement, or other important business outcomes. But building a strengths-based organization doesn't happen automatically or effortlessly. It takes work, and as I said before, it requires purpose, planning, and discipline to have maximum effect.

First why, then how

The effort is worth it, however, because a strengths-based approach is vastly more effective and sustainable than its opposite: trying to fix weaknesses. Performance management processes often include appraisal systems that focus almost entirely on what's *wrong* with employees. (See "Debunking Strengths Myths #1" in the "See Also" area on this page.)

Business culture can be equally single-minded in its attention to eliminating defects. That approach may work well for improving manufacturing processes, but it consistently fails when applied to people. For one thing, a concerted attempt to fix a particular weakness can at best make people mediocre, but never excellent, in that area. And focusing on weaknesses can create the opposite of the intended result, making poor performance worse instead of better.

A 2004 Gallup survey examined what happens when a manager focuses on an employee's strengths, focuses on an employee's weakness, or ignores that employee. Gallup found that 55% of the employees who felt that their managers focused on their weaknesses were not engaged or were actively disengaged. (See "Strengths: The Next Generation" in the "See Also" area on this page.)

In one company that Gallup studied, research showed that among employees who didn't agree that their company was committed to strengths, only 6% were engaged, and 52% were actively disengaged. This compares to 83% engaged and 0% actively disengaged among employees who strongly agreed that their company was committed to building strengths. Company studies have also shown that salespeople who receive feedback on their strengths significantly outperform sellers who did not receive this feedback. (See "How Marriott Vacation Club International Engages Talent" and "How Ann Taylor Invests in Talent" in the "See Also" area on this page.)

Before implementing a strengths-based approach, it's important to define how it will help the organization improve. Often organizations focus the power of the strengths concept too narrowly; they position it with employees as a nice developmental approach rather than as a way to unleash human potential to meet specific challenges. For example, is workplace engagement suffering? Are you trying to cope with dynamic change? Do you need teams to work together more effectively? Is it all that and several other problems too? Articulating *why* your company is implementing a strengths-based approach then creates an opportunity for determining *how* it will happen.

And *how* encompasses everything you can do to connect the talents of your people to your company's challenges. Start by assessing what already works. What forms of education and communication are effective in your environment? What new innovations could you try in these areas? How could you change the

nature of your day-to-day conversations with people to start from the strengths development perspective? What if everyone posted their top themes on their doors? These are just a few ideas for how you can infuse a strengths-based approach into your workplace so it becomes a part of each employee's thinking.

Finally, think about sustaining the approach. How can you embed strengths into your organization? How can you encourage the one-on-one conversations, meetings, and everyday activities that keep the strengths approach working at full power? How can you revise your performance management system to reward employees for using their greatest talents to meet key outcomes with strength?

Like any transformational organizational change, building a strengths-based organization can seem like a lot of work. But don't forget, that work can be really fun and energizing -- and it can be rewarding too. A recent

“ Think about sustaining the approach. How can you embed strengths into your organization? ”

study, which included 90,000 employees in 900 business units from 11 organizations, showed that companies that invest in a strengths-based approach can reap significant financial returns. In addition to large increases in employee engagement, teams that had managers who received a strengths intervention had productivity measures that were 12.5% higher as well as 8.9% higher profitability after the intervention than teams with managers who received no intervention.

Few things in life come easy. But clearly, building a strengths-based organization is worth the investment.

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Debunking Strengths Myth #3

When it comes to first impressions about employees' talents, you should trust -- but verify -- them

by Brian Brim

Sometimes employees express to me the concern that if their managers learn their top talents and strengths, they (the employees) might end up pigeonholed. Here's what they mean: The Clifton StrengthsFinder (CSF) is an online instrument that measures a person's talents -- the ways in which he or she naturally thinks, behaves, or feels -- in 34 categories called "themes," then reveals the user's Signature Themes (his or her top five themes). For example, someone whose Signature Themes include Achiever, Activator, and Focus might fear that she'll be stereotyped as hard-charging and action-oriented, and as such, not appropriate for projects that require careful thought and deliberation.

A related concern is that this person will be assigned specific responsibilities on a project or a team based solely on the results of her CSF assessment. I won't tell you that no one ever does this, but it's not a good idea. The themes of talent aren't labels that should be slapped on an employee.

“ Dig a little deeper, and you'll see that matching the Strategic theme to a strategic project is simplistic and a little reductive. ”

Ron's story illustrates this point. Ron is an executive who had taken the CSF, and he'd begun managing his team using a strengths-based approach. By the time we met, each of his direct reports had also taken the CSF. As we were discussing the results, Ron said to me, "I'm working on a big strategic project. Should I put everyone on my team with the Strategic theme in their top five on the project team?"

At first glance, that seems sensible. But dig a little deeper, and you'll see that matching the Strategic theme to a strategic project is simplistic and a little reductive. There's a better approach.

First impressions versus supported impressions

It's possible to use CSF results in a situation like Ron's while avoiding pigeonholing people. But first, it's important to recognize that people have differing levels of awareness of other people's strengths and greatest talents.

One type of awareness is what I call the "first impression of talents." These assumptions are often shallow because they are based only on initial information. Often, they're fairly accurate, but they're not at all comprehensive.

The CSF can help make those first impressions much more sophisticated. For example, Ron always thought that Heather, one of his direct reports, was "quiet." She doesn't speak unless she's directly questioned, and Ron got the feeling that she didn't like talking in public.

After Heather took the CSF, Ron discovered that her Signature Themes were Learner, Input, Deliberative, Focus, and Responsibility. Because Heather didn't have the Strategic theme in her top five, Ron initially eliminated her from the pool of candidates for his project. However, Heather's CSF results suggested to Ron that she was perfectly willing to speak her mind; she just wasn't going to do it until she took in information, gave it some serious thought, and had something useful to say about next steps. Until then, she wasn't going to say much.

First impressions aren't necessarily wrong, but -- like Ron's initial impression of Heather -- they're not necessarily right, either. It's important to remain open to more information and avoid assuming that your first impression is a fact. Although the CSF will give you good clues about a person's talents, it's crucial to verify your assumptions.

This leads us to the next type of awareness -- what I call a "supported awareness of talents." This is simply your first impression of someone plus knowledge of that person's talents, supported by further discussions with the individual. Ron's first impression of Heather was that she was quiet; his second was that, like other people particularly talented in the Deliberative theme, she would mull over information and be thoughtful about next steps.

Ron followed up on his initial impression by talking with Heather about her talents and how she uses them. "Lots of people think of me as quiet," Heather said to Ron, "but I don't see myself that way. I like to gather information and think it through before I give my opinions. So I really appreciate it when others give me a little time to reply or ask me questions, because it makes me feel like they value what I contribute to the discussion."

This conversation confirmed Ron's initial impression of Heather, but it also helped him clarify it. He reached supported awareness of her talents only after he'd talked with her to determine whether his assumptions were valid.

A good way to discover if your first impression is on target is to ask probing questions. For example, ask people to describe how their top five themes play out in their work. Dig further by asking them to give examples of how their top themes affect their decision making, relationship building, and motivation.

Don't use leading questions, however. That's just a way of confirming your assumptions, not eliciting authentic replies. Think about it: The response to "I see you as someone who needs to gather a good deal of information before making a decision. Is that correct?" will always be "yes," because who would say "no"? Don't *tell* people how they work -- ask them. (See sidebar "Discussing Strengths: Seven Probing Questions.")

“ A good way to discover if your first impression is on target is to ask probing questions. For example, ask people to describe how their top five themes play out in their work. ”

You'll find that supported awareness of talents will often reinforce aspects of your first impression. The CSF will give you great clues, but it's important to have some in-depth conversations before you can confirm your assumptions.

Verifying your assumptions, though, isn't the only reason to talk with others about their talents. Conversations about strengths and the talents behind them can drive employee engagement. A Gallup survey explored what happens when a manager focuses on an employee's strengths, focuses on an employee's weaknesses, or ignores that employee. Gallup found that 55% of the employees who felt that their managers focused on their weaknesses were not engaged or were actively disengaged. (See "Strengths: The Next Generation" in the "See Also" area on this page.)

And studies in companies bear this out: In one company Gallup studied, research showed that among employees who didn't agree that their company was committed to building strengths, only 6% were engaged, and 52% were actively disengaged. This compares to 83% engaged and 0% actively disengaged among employees who strongly agreed that their company was committed to building strengths.

The very act of verifying your assumptions can have a positive effect. People see that you're interested in them, and they feel they have a voice in how their talents are applied. Conversations like these also offer a natural segue to discussing how you can use your talents to support one another and what this will mean to how you work together. In many cases, these conversations will lead to discussions about how you can work with others, based on their talents, to form complementary partnerships. (See "Debunking Strengths Myth #1" in the "See Also" area on this page.)

Putting it together

Let's go back to Ron. On the surface, it seemed like a good idea when he considered assigning the people who had Strategic as a top-five theme to his project. Instead of basing his thinking on first impressions, though, Ron needed to go deeper. Ron and I worked together and discovered a more effective way to proceed.

First, we defined the project more clearly by breaking it into smaller pieces. During this phase, we avoided using the theme names from the CSF in the description of project steps. This helped us define what the project needed to be a success.

Next, Ron distributed the project description to his team. He asked them to think about how they could contribute to the project based on their talents. Each person rank-ordered the parts of the project they wanted to work on. Then Ron talked with them individually about their thoughts and suggestions before he assigned responsibilities.

It may sound like a lot of work, but Ron found that it wasn't difficult. He told me that the typical issues that arise from new projects were all but nonexistent on this one because people understood the individual pieces of the project, and they could see how their talents could contribute to its success.

In fact, the team members did much of Ron's work for him. In the group meeting, they examined the project more closely than they would have if Ron hadn't broken it down into its essential parts. They gave each aspect a lot of thought and came to solid conclusions about their potential contributions. And they were more than happy to have a follow-up conversation with Ron about their talents. Ron used those conversations to put together an excellent team.

Did that team's engagement level increase? Yes, it did. Ron's employees felt that they were being involved in the process, their manager cared, their opinions counted, and they had a voice. And after the project got off the ground, each of them was working with his or her strengths -- and that does a lot for engagement.

By having strengths-based conversations like these, you can avoid making the wrong assumptions, and you can keep people from feeling pigeonholed. The upfront investment of time and effort turns into increased engagement and gets things running smoothly. It's amazing what happens when people are

“ By having strengths-based conversations, you can avoid making the wrong assumptions, and you can keep people from feeling pigeonholed. ”

given a voice and asked to bring the best of who they are to the situation at hand.

Just ask "Deliberative" Heather, whom Ron ended up inviting to join the project after initially bypassing her. "I need her," Ron said. "I overlooked her at first because she doesn't have the Strategic theme in her top five. But I hate to think what would have happened if the team didn't have her thoughtful voice of reason."

Discussing Strengths: Seven Probing Questions

A good way to verify your first impressions of other people's talents is to ask probing questions, then discuss the responses. The questions below can help you get strengths conversations started in your organization.

To deepen the discussions, ask people to offer specific examples of how they use their talents at work. Some example follow-up questions are also shown below.

1. What are your top themes, and what are the patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that result? (Follow-up: Give me an example of how you used your talents at work during the past week.)
2. How do you communicate?
3. What drives you?
4. How do you set direction and make decisions?
5. How do you overcome obstacles? (Follow-up: Give me an example of a time when you used your talents to overcome a challenge at work.)
6. How do you build and maintain relationships?
7. What is the best way for me to recognize your achievements and celebrate your success?

Adapted from "Guide for Strengths-Based Discussions in Organizations," posted in the Resources area of the StrengthsFinder 2.0 Web site:

<http://sf2.strengthsfinder.com/content/26011/StrengthsFinder-2.0-Resource-Center.aspx>

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Debunking Strengths Myth #4

Understanding the real connection between talent and motivation

by Brian Brim

Think of "talent," and the first thing that comes to mind is probably athletic prowess -- say, a basketball player's innate knack for sinking jump shots. Or perhaps it's musical skill, such as a violinist's inherent ability to play Mozart flawlessly.

Now, think of "motivation," and completely different images come to mind: a salesperson's drive to close a deal, for example, or a politician's relentless ambition to attain higher office. To many of us, "talent" is something that comes naturally, while motivation is synonymous with drive, usually of the hard-charging variety.

Many of us buy into the myth that talent and motivation are totally separate things.

When you begin to understand people's talents from a strengths-based perspective, you start to grasp what motivates them and what they need from their experiences.

A strengths-based approach, however, debunks this myth. By understanding someone's natural talents, more often than not, we can get a clear perspective about their deepest and most substantial motivations. Simply put, their talents *are* their motivations; they're usually inseparable.

To make this clearer, it's important to understand that Gallup research defines talent as "a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving." Talent gives us clues to the specific aspects of a person's personality that may be driving him -- or at times, limiting him.

When you begin to understand people's talents from a strengths-based perspective, you start to grasp what motivates them and what they need from their experiences. Let's explore this by looking at two examples.

People who really need people

Sharon works part time in retail, but her real passion is her family and being a homemaker. Because her children are reaching an age of independence, Sharon is exploring things that interest her outside of the home. As part of her self-examination, Sharon took the Clifton StrengthsFinder -- an assessment that rank

orders an individual's top 34 themes of talent: the ways he or she most often naturally thinks, behaves, or feels. This assessment offers revealing insights into a person's motivators, drivers, and needs.

Sharon's Clifton StrengthsFinder report revealed that her most prevalent talents come from these five themes: Developer, Empathy, Harmony, Relator, and Arranger. Sharon's first four themes offer talents primarily associated with helping others, understanding where others are coming from, and building deeper relationships. Talents from her fifth theme, Arranger, often contribute to orchestrating and juggling multiple tasks.

Now, let's consider what motivation looks like in Sharon's world. Just from reading the names, your initial reaction might be that there is no real sense of drive or motivation in her top five themes. Even the Arranger theme doesn't suggest the kind of "oomph" you'd expect from a high achiever. But let's take a closer look at Sharon's first four themes.

Are there motivational factors at play that we're simply not recognizing? Sharon would say *yes*. Sharon's motivation comes from her urge to help people, and the way to maximize that talent is to let her do just that. Of course, the line "I'm a people person" has been used so much that the phrase has lost meaning, but in Sharon's case, it's the truth.

Sharon is the kind of person who will flourish in situations in which others rely on her for support. When these situations don't exist, Sharon is highly motivated to seek them out. She is the type of person who volunteers for projects at work or to help at school. Neighbors often find her dropping off a meal when she hears they're sick. Sharon is intrinsically motivated to help because that's where her talents lie.

What motivates

Sharon's story illustrates two key points. First, Sharon's talent for helping people and her motivation to do so come from the same source. Second, if we limit ourselves to thinking that only certain themes of talent result in "motivation," then we risk overlooking, for example, how Sharon's drive comes from her Developer and Empathy themes.

One manager, Pete, could learn a lot from Sharon. Pete recently came up to me after I had finished a talk and told me, "If someone doesn't have Achiever or Competition in their top five, I'm not sure how they can get anything done." Interestingly, he had both Achiever and Competition in his top five themes of talent, which may have biased his perspective. When I pointed out to him that there are 32 other Clifton StrengthsFinder themes and that each one of them offers elements of motivation, he didn't quite believe it.

Pete had framed his perspective on what he considered "traditional motivators" - or perhaps on his own motivators -- which limited his appreciation of how motivation works differently for different people. We discussed that motivation is driven by people's needs, such as Sharon's need to help others. The 34 themes of talent are the windows into those needs.

They're also an excellent indicator of how different people get things

done. If Sharon worked for Pete, for example, she could do a great deal to drive customer engagement because she needs to help others. That's because helping others is so fundamentally fulfilling to her, she naturally seeks opportunities to do so. It would be to any organization's benefit to let someone like Sharon find ways to support and nurture customers, whether internal or external. This would be motivating to her and engaging to the customers.

Each time she helps, Sharon gets a psychological and emotional boost. She has thought long and hard about what that means for her future.

Underestimated talents

Managers like Pete can easily overlook talents such as Sharon's, as well as her source of motivation, if they don't look at motivation from a strengths-based perspective. By examining several themes, though, it becomes much easier to see how talents factor into drive.

Let's look at the Input theme, for example. Input has to do with gathering information; people who have a lot of Input talent are compelled to find out, to learn, to know. If I was managing the launch of a new project, for example, and had someone on the team with Input in her top five, I might ask her to investigate the different aspects of the project. She'll be highly motivated to gather potentially helpful information, and she could become the project's "human reference desk."

Now let's consider Woo, a theme that captures the essence of "Winning Others Over." This is another theme that doesn't seem traditionally motivational at first. People motivated by Woo talents enjoy interacting with others and always need to meet new people. Knowing this, I might ask my team members with exceptional Woo talents if they would like to give tours of our work environment. This would likely be very motivating to them and could result in highly engaging tours for our visitors.

Even traditional motivators can be misunderstood; take Competition, for instance. People who are motivated by Competition talents genuinely need to be the best at whatever they do -- and if they don't feel they are likely to "win," they won't play. So if I had someone with a lot of Competition on a project team, I would need to understand that if the project won't end with a clear individual winner, she might not be motivated to do her best. To play to her Competition, I would want to point out how well someone else did on her specific part of the project in the past and what she would need to do to beat that performance. In the end, she would strive to win, and the team would win as well.

Talents, motivators, and needs

Ultimately, understanding what drives someone comes down to understanding the connections between his talents, motivators, and needs. And that understanding starts when we realize that looking at a person's talents through the lens of traditional motivators won't give us a complete picture of what drives

him. Expanding our perspective to include an understanding of his unique talents will give us a deeper, more nuanced appreciation of how his talents inspire him to succeed.

Sharon has applied these insights in a way that is reshaping her career and life. She has recently discovered that she's most productive and motivated when she's in an environment that gives her ongoing opportunities to help others. Each time she helps, Sharon gets a psychological and emotional boost. She has thought long and hard about what that means for her future. Understanding her talents has helped her make some important decisions about how to maximize her natural drivers, and Sharon continues to think about connecting this to her future. She is exploring many opportunities beyond her volunteer work and is considering giving nursing or teaching a try.

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