



Live Your Strengths

Welcome to the April edition of *Live Your Strengths*, the monthly e-newsletter from In Search of Excellence.

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Powerful Thinking = Successful Organizations

As we have shifted fully into the information age, success is increasingly dependent on the ability to think powerfully about new situations. *Brainpower* is really what separates creative, innovative organizations from those that are just maintaining the status quo or are in decline.

So how do you produce the best thinking from the people within *your* organization? Part of the answer lies in how the brain functions.

Time for a little neuroscience 101 (not too much, I promise!): Our brains are made up of billions of neurons, which are tiny nerve cells that connect and communicate with other neurons. These neurons connect together to make networks or 'neuronets.' It is through these connections that the most basic functions are learned and carried out. In a very simple sense, every time a new thought, skill, or activity is learned, it is represented by a brand new neuronet in your brain.

Most recently, neuroscientists have realized that when a new idea or mental connection is made, there is a release of energy as the new neuronet forms in the brain and we have an 'aha' moment. Think about the last time you had one of these 'aha' moments – perhaps you were having a really productive conversation with a colleague about a challenge you were experiencing. Then suddenly, you came up with a great idea and it was clear what solution was needed to move forward.

Your clarity about this new solution likely produced a sense of energy and eagerness to get to work right away and begin implementing your great idea. As you created this new idea (which formed a new neuronet), there was a release of energy in your brain and even changes in the type of brain waves you experienced. These subtle changes in the brain create that sense of motivation

and excitement about a new project and can lead people to action.

So what does all of this 'brain stuff' have to do with *your* work? This understanding of how the brain works has important implications for how we lead and create motivating environments in our organizations. As David Rock notes in his recent book, *Quiet Leadership*, "It becomes clear why our jobs as leaders should be to help people make their own connections. Instead of this, much of our energy goes into trying to do the thinking for people, and then seeing if our ideas stick."

Reflect for a moment on the conversations you have with the people in your organization, whether employees, co-workers, or volunteers. Are you playing an active role in helping people to develop their own solutions? Are you allowing them to experience the motivation and excitement that can only come through this way of problem solving?

Don't just point out what people are doing wrong – help them to move forward in a productive manner. The best way to do this is to ask people future-oriented questions to get them thinking about a solution. If possible, avoid 'why' questions (such as, 'why didn't this work?'). These questions tend to get people stuck in focusing on the past and making excuses.

Your job as a leader should be to help them look for solutions by asking questions like, 'what systems need to be in place to make this work?' or 'how can you develop your strengths even further in this area?'

This information is not only useful for leading and motivating *others*; it also has an impact on how leaders and entrepreneurs will choose to increase *their own* skill levels. To become more productive and successful, it is necessary to develop more powerful thinking and planning skills. The most effective way to do this is by working regularly with someone who:

- provides a framework for effective, meaningful discussions
- listens for and identifies your sources of untapped potential
- asks powerful, unbiased questions that move you closer to your goals.

Do you know someone who can play this role for you? Perhaps it is an external coach, a manager, a mastermind group, or even a colleague from another organization. The important thing is that you have the space to think through the challenging issues you face. These powerful conversations can help you to find solutions that make sense for your unique circumstances and give you the little boosts of energy and motivation that you need to perform at your best!

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge

The verdict is in! One way to produce lasting increases in your level of happiness is to regularly express gratitude for the good things in your life. Studies have

shown that reflecting on the blessings in one's life can increase levels of life satisfaction, improve health, and even affect sleep patterns.

One interesting insight discovered in recent research is that cultivating gratitude does not have to be time-consuming to be effective. In fact, one study found that listing your blessings only once a week appeared to have even more benefit than doing so on a daily basis.

So, your challenge for the month is to schedule time once a week (yes, write it in your dayplanner!) to list 5 things for which you are grateful. The items don't have to be big or impressive to anyone else – sometimes small things are more important to living a happy life.

Could you use some guidance with this challenge? Call Denise for a free 30-minute coaching session. Start living *your* strengths!

A Personal Note of Gratitude

On a personal note, this month I will publicly participate in the monthly challenge. We experienced a serious fire in our business earlier this month. Thankfully no one was hurt and everything we lost can be replaced.

I am particularly grateful to wonderful friends, neighbours, clients and colleagues for their offers of help and support. I appreciate everything you have done and feel very blessed to have you in my life!

Cheers,
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