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“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

~ Dr. Wayne Dyer

“There is nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.”

~ Hindu Proverb

Discovering the Positive Core

The common thread that weaves throughout most of the *Live Your Strengths* newsletters is the idea that success and fulfillment in our lives and work can be increased by the conscious decision to identify and build on strengths. However, this idea runs contrary to the popular opinion that focusing on overcoming weaknesses is the best way to improve.

In fact, studies by the Gallup organization have shown the vast majority of people (87%) believe that finding and fixing weaknesses is the best way to achieve outstanding performance. If the strengths-building approach is so successful, then why is this ‘problem-solving’ focus so prevalent? What are the benefits of searching for the positive core of strengths and talents, whether at the individual level or the organizational level?

To answer this question, I encourage you to examine the way you think about strengths and weaknesses. You will need to shift your mindset to realize that they are not two points on the same continuum. Many people believe that each skill or trait is on a continuum that

runs from weak to strong. We believe if we just try hard enough or spend enough time working on a weakness, we will eventually become strong at it. I encourage you to shift that view and picture your weaknesses and strengths as being on two different continuums: your Weakness Continuum (ranging from weakness to average ability),



and your Strengths Continuum (ranging from good ability to excellence).

From this point of view, you can see that by focusing on weakness, the best you can hope to achieve is mediocrity. However, by putting the same amount of time and energy into your strengths, your potential for development is unlimited.

The Strengths Continuum is what the most successful people work on every day. Each person has a very unique and specialized set of

strengths and weaknesses. We must do away with the prevailing notion that to be successful means to be well-rounded. The most successful people and organizations are the ones that specialize in their strengths and manage around their weaknesses.

With this in mind, we can also see why our typical approach to change (based on a notion of problem-solving) doesn’t make much sense. If we want to learn about success – whether at an individual or organizational level – it doesn’t make sense to study weakness. All we will learn by this approach is what has contributed to the problems, not what is necessary for success.

For example, if your company wants to become even better at providing customer service, it makes sense to study instances where it has shown exemplary service in the past and to study what factors and conditions made those positive situations occur. This approach will highlight what criteria will make it more likely that this success will be repeated in the future, based on the company’s own unique set of strengths and talents (continued on page 2).

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When we view our strengths and weaknesses in this light, it also becomes clear that we must become conscious about the questions we ask, as they have a significant influence on the results we get. The areas on which we choose to focus our attention should be the areas that we want to grow and expand, not what we want to diminish. If we choose to study the areas in which we are weak, we will become fixated on these weaknesses and they will become the focus of our activities. On the other hand, if we ask questions about our strengths and talents, and are curious about the root causes of our successes, we will learn more about our positive core and will find ways to strengthen it.

Consciously focusing on our strengths creates a different level of motivation, which contributes to further success. Over the last 20 years, a number of studies have found that people are more intrinsically motivated when they focus on past successes and positive experiences and work toward creating more of them. Consider your own experience – aren't you more motivated to work at something in which you feel strong? Isn't it more appealing to be creative and learn more about things you enjoy and in which you feel confident in your abilities?

Are you ready to begin learning more about your strengths and talents—your positive core? To find out what makes you and/or your organization successful, join me in this month's *Live Your Strengths* Challenge.

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge

One of the best ways to learn more about the strengths and talents that make you successful is to study instances when you have demonstrated 'peak performance' or moments of greatness. This approach is the foundation of a change methodology called Appreciative Inquiry, and it has been used in hundreds of businesses, non-profit organizations, and community/international development organizations to produce dramatic results.

Although originally designed to facilitate change in large organizations, the principles are just as effective to discover the positive core in individuals. First, start by identifying a specific skill or strength that you would like to study. (For the purpose of this example, we will focus on leadership skills, but you can substitute any trait or skill you want to learn more about.)

- Think of a time when you demonstrated powerful leadership skills. When were you at your very best as a leader? Think about this situation in as much detail as possible: What were you doing? Who was involved? Why do you feel you were at your best in this situation? What was the outcome?
- Without being modest, what do you value most about your unique approach to leadership? What type of people do you most enjoy leading? What environments bring out your strongest leadership qualities?
- Now, imagine you had the opportunity to become an even better leader. Drawing on what you have learned about your own approach to leadership, how could you improve your skills even further? What would you need to learn? What impact would you like to have on the people you work with? What kind of environment would you like to create to enhance your opportunities for demonstrating strong leadership?

By asking yourself questions such as these, you can learn more about your own positive core—what makes you feel strong and how to become even better at what you already do well. Truly understanding your unique strengths, talents, and passions is the first step on the path to designing a more successful future!

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

“Conventional wisdom tells us that we learn from our mistakes. The strengths movement says that all we learn from our mistakes are the characteristics of mistakes. If we want to learn more about our successes, we must study success.”

~ Marcus Buckingham

Do you have suggestions for upcoming newsletters or success stories you want to share?

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