

GALLUP PRESS

FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE #1 WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLER

**STRENGTHSFINDER 2.0**

**STRENGTHS**

**BASED**

**LEADERSHIP**

GREAT LEADERS, TEAMS, AND WHY PEOPLE FOLLOW

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**PART ONE:**

INVESTING IN YOUR STRENGTHS

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If you spend your life trying to be good at everything, you will never be great at anything. While our society encourages us to be well-rounded, this approach inadvertently breeds mediocrity. Perhaps the greatest misconception of all is that of the well-rounded leader.

Organizations are quick to look for leaders who are great communicators, visionary thinkers, and who can also get things done and follow through. All of these attributes are desirable and necessary for an organization to succeed. But of all the leaders we have studied, we have yet to find one who has world-class strength in *all* of these areas. Sure, many leaders can get by or are above average in several domains. But paradoxically, those who strive to be competent in all areas become the least effective leaders overall.

### LEADING BY IMITATION

Sarah has a knot in her stomach as she drives to work on Monday morning. While she rarely looks forward to the start of a workweek, today the mere thought of going to the office is making her ill. While driving through traffic, Sarah begins to wonder why this particular Monday is so much worse. She's perplexed because last Friday was one of the best days in the office she could remember.

As Sarah pulls into the parking lot, she figures out why the end of last week was so enjoyable. Her boss, Bob, was out of town. That was the good news. The bad news is that he was attending yet another course that would equip him to be a better leader. As Sarah walks across the parking lot, her stomach tightens even more when she remembers what happened the last time Bob went to one of those leadership retreats.

Earlier in the year, Bob had attended a conference that explored Lincoln's leadership style during the Civil War. When he returned, Bob predictably spent the next month trying to teach everyone on his team to be "exceptional communicators." Sarah chuckled at the memory, recalling how awkward this was for the computer programmers in her office, who usually prefer typing to talking. Fortunately, like all Bob's phases, this one came to an abrupt halt once he read a book suggesting that the best leaders had humble personalities, and he subsequently quit pressuring Sarah's more introverted colleagues to be the next Lincoln or Kennedy.

When Sarah enters the building, she has no choice but to pass Bob's office, and the knot in her stomach tightens. As if on cue, Bob waves her in. Reluctantly, Sarah leans against the frame of the open door. In her mind, Sarah is cynically wondering what favor will be served up this month. But to be cordial, Sarah asks Bob about the retreat.

After telling Sarah how peaceful and serene it was in the small mountain town where the event was held, Bob cuts to the chase. He declares, "My big takeaway from last week was that

we all need to be more *adaptable to change* in order to grow our business." Then Bob leans forward, looking at Sarah earnestly, and continues, "We went through this activity where each of us had to map out how quickly we adapt to new market trends. Well, like everyone else, it turns out that we spend nowhere near enough time readying ourselves for big change. If we're going to lead our industry, we need to not only *anticipate*, but better yet, *create change*." Bob rambles on for 10 more minutes, but Sarah had gotten the message right away: The leadership buzzword for the next few weeks or months is going to be "change."

As Sarah walks away from Bob's office, she is already anticipating the means and groans of her peers when they hear about the latest fad. Then she suddenly realizes something about Bob that almost has her feeling sorry for him. While he has spent much of his career in a leadership role, the vast majority of her boss' efforts have been focused on trying to mimic traits of leaders he has known or read about.

The bookshelf in his office is lined with weighty tomes about famous political and business leaders, dead and alive. When Bob speaks to groups, he frequently quotes the company's CEO and other leaders who have appeared in the media. On occasion, usually when talking to groups of managers and leaders in the organization, Bob even puts together a "greatest hits" list of all the things that he has learned from studying historical leaders and modern-day corporate chiefs. He describes how all leaders must be empathetic, creative, disciplined, strategic, humble, decisive, and of course, great communicators.

Sarah can see that Bob has spent most of his career striving to be just like the leaders he admires. Yet he fails to realize that the people he looks up to are all very different. There is no single person who embodies even half of the characteristics on Bob's exhaustive list of what makes a well-rounded leader. And perhaps most strikingly, the one leader that Bob knows the least about is *himself*.

## FINDING YOUR LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS

*"We never met an effective leader who wasn't aware of his talents and working to sharpen them."*

— Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark,  
in *The New York Times Magazine*

Without an awareness of your strengths, it's almost impossible for you to lead effectively. We all lead in very different ways, based on our talents and our limitations. Serious problems occur when we think we need to be exactly like the leaders we admire. Doing so takes us out of our natural element and practically eliminates our chances of success.

If you look at great historical leaders such as Winston Churchill or Mahatma Gandhi, you might notice more differences than similarities — and it is the differences that defined them and led to their success. Churchill's bold and commanding leadership succeeded in mobilizing a war-ravaged nation. It is unlikely he would have had as much success if he had tried to emulate Gandhi's calm and quiet approach. Yet

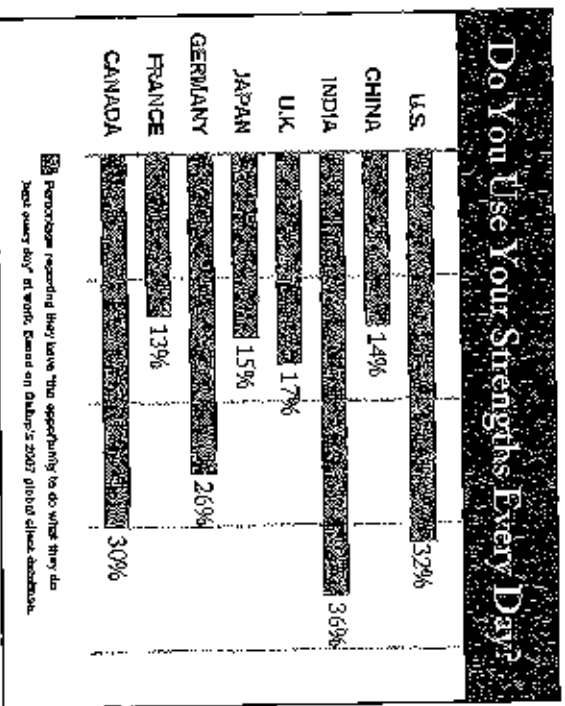
Gandhi's leadership, during India's struggle for independence, was much more effective because he did not try to emulate the dominating leaders of the past. Both men knew their strengths and used them wisely.

All too often, leaders are blind to the obvious when it comes to something of critical importance to them — their own personality. Many political and business leaders have self-concepts that are miles away from reality. They simply don't know their own strengths and weaknesses.

This is the stuff of parody for late-night talk shows, sitcoms, movies, and stand-up comics. And this problem goes far beyond the boss who thinks he's funny, even though people only laugh at his jokes out of obligation. Most people have encountered a leader who is completely unaware of a glaring weakness. We have spoken with several leaders who claim to be great at developing their people, but when we interview the people they lead, we hear a very different story. In some cases, the leaders in question may be better at demoralizing than developing people. At its worst, this lack of self-awareness can lead to masses of disengaged employees, unhappy customers, and undue stress beyond the workplace.

Although less noticeable, another serious problem occurs when people try to lead while having no clue about their natural strengths. Unfortunately, few people have discovered the place in life where they have the most potential for growth. Based on an analysis of Gallup's 2007 global client database, the vast

majority of people *do not* have “the opportunity to do what they do best every day” in their current job. (See chart below.) This problem runs rampant in workplaces throughout the world.



It was this problem that led the late leadership researcher and Father of Strengths Psychology, Dr. Donald O. Clifton, to begin studying the unique strengths of leaders. Beginning in the 1960s, Clifton, along with his colleagues from Gallup and the academic world, conducted more than 20,000 interviews with people in leadership roles across almost all industries and occupations, including former heads of state and other global leaders.

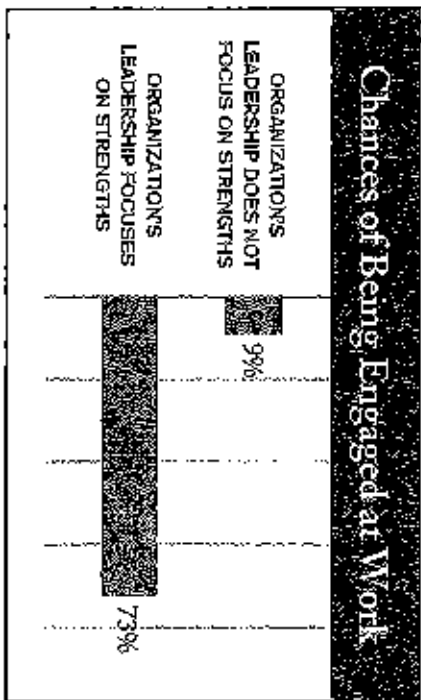
Each of these 90-minute interviews was carefully structured; for most of the interviews, the various leaders were asked the exact same questions. This allowed for side-by-side comparisons of leaders' responses. For many business leaders in this study, data on the leader's actual performance were available. This allowed Clifton and his team to compare the best leaders to those who were less successful, based on objective measures.

After all of this research, you might think that a team of scientists would find at least one strength that *all* of the best leaders shared. But when Clifton was asked, just a few months before his death in 2003, what his greatest discovery was from three decades of leadership research, this was his response:

*A leader needs to know his strengths as a carpenter knows his tools, or as a physician knows the instruments at her disposal. What great leaders have in common is that each truly knows his or her strengths — and can call on the right strength at the right time. This explains why there is no definitive list of characteristics that describes all leaders.*

To help aspiring leaders identify their strengths, Clifton and his team created a web-based program dubbed “StrengthsFinder.” As a part of this book, you will have an opportunity to take a new leadership version of the StrengthsFinder program. In addition to helping you discover your own strengths to lead, this new version will provide

you with several strategies for leading others based on their unique strengths. As you can see in the chart below, if you are able to help the people you lead focus on their strengths, it will dramatically boost engagement levels throughout your organization.



### A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

As one top executive summarized, "If you focus on people's weaknesses, they lose confidence." At a very basic level, it is hard for us to build self-confidence when we are focused on our weaknesses instead of our strengths. Over the past decade, Gallup scientists have explored in much more detail the mechanism through which a strengths-based approach influences our lives. These studies revealed that people experience significant gains in self-confidence after taking

StrengthsFinder and learning more about their strengths. This increase in confidence at an individual level may help explain how strengths-based programs boost an organization's overall engagement and productivity.

The awareness of one's strengths and the subsequent increase in self-confidence it produces might have longer term implications as well, according to a landmark 2008 study led by the University of Florida's Tim Judge. Judge and his colleague Charice Hurst studied the self-evaluations of 7,660 men and women who were between ages of 14 and 22 when they were first studied in 1979. These 7,660 participants were followed for the next 25 years, and the measures (which included questions about career success, job status, education, and health) were repeated in 2004.

What Judge and Hurst discovered from this 25-year longitudinal study was quite profound. They found that people with higher self-confidence in 1979 ended up with higher income levels and career satisfaction in 2004. But what was even more striking was the fact that people with high self-confidence in 1979 saw their income increase at an *entirely different rate* compared to those with lower levels of self-confidence.

The people who had more confidence in their abilities at a young age (between 14 and 22) started off with slightly higher income levels — making, on average (in 1979), \$3,496 more per year than the low-confidence group. As each year went by, this gap continued to widen. When the researchers reviewed follow-up studies from 2004, the group with higher self-confidence

was making \$12,821 more annually compared to the average annual income for the lower self-confidence group. The people with higher self-confidence in 1979 continued to capitalize on their disproportionate gains as each year passed.

In addition to the income and career benefits, what Judge and Hurst discovered about the link between early self-confidence and physical health may be even more surprising. When asked about the number of health problems they have that interfere with their work, the group with low self-confidence in 1979 reported almost *three times* as many health problems 25 years later in 2004. Almost unbelievably, the group with high self-evaluations in 1979 reported having fewer health problems in 2004 than they did 25 years before.

The results of this study suggest that people who are aware of their strengths and build self-confidence at a young age may reap a “cumulative advantage” that continues to grow over a lifetime. A preliminary Gallup analysis (using the same longitudinal panel from Judge and Hurst’s study) suggests that people who report having a chance to use their strengths in the workplace gain a similar advantage. Our research team found that people who had the opportunity to use their strengths early on (between the ages of 15-23) had significantly higher job satisfaction and income levels 26 years later.

These outcomes highlight the value of leaders knowing their own strengths and also reveal how important it is for leaders to help others uncover their strengths as early as possible. If an organization’s leaders are able to help each

person capitalize on this cumulative advantage, it is likely to create more rapid individual and organizational growth. These studies also reveal a mechanism through which a truly strengths-based organization may be able to grow at an entirely different rate for decades to come.