Using Strengths in Leadership Development for College Students

Krista M. Soria, Leonard Taylor, Jr., and Alex Reinhard,

University of Minnesota
Donald Clifton began studying unique strengths of leaders in the 1960s.

“What would happen if we studied what is right with people?”

People gain more when they build on their strengths rather than spending effort to remediate their weaknesses.
Strengths Background

• After 20,000 interviews, Clifton found that not one leader had the same set of Strengths
• Led to the development of the StrengthsFinder assessment
• As of today, over 7 million people have taken StrengthsFinder, including over one million college students
• Odds of having the same top five talent themes in the same order as someone else: 1:33 million
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achiever</th>
<th>Activator</th>
<th>Adaptability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>Belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Futuristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>Includer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Intellection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>Maximizer</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relator</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Restorative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Assurance</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University of Minnesota
Building Strengths

**Talent**
(a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving)

\[ \times \]

**Investment**
(time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building your knowledge base)

= **Strength**
(the ability to consistently provide near-perfect positive performance)
Writing Challenge

STRESS

STRESS EVERYWHERE

University of Minnesota
Maximizing Talent

• We can maximize the talents of others (and ourselves) by setting them up for success.

• Knowing someone’s strengths can tell us a lot about the way they execute, influence, build relationships, and solve problems.

• When we know someone’s areas of excellence we can help them use their strengths by positioning them in situations or with others where those strengths can flourish.
Strengths in Leadership

Leonard Taylor, Jr.
Strengths & Leadership

• The most effective leaders are always investing in their Strengths

• The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team

• The most effective leaders understand their followers’ needs

• (Rath & Conchie, 2008)
Strengths & Leadership

• Executing
• Influencing
• Relationship Building
• Strategic Thinking

“Perhaps the ultimate test of a leader is not what you are able to do in the here and now – but instead what continues to grow long after you’re gone.” —*Strengths Based Leadership*
Executing

• Make things happen, take an idea and bring it to fruition—work tirelessly to get things done

Achiever          Discipline
Arranger          Focus
Belief            Responsibility
Consistency       Restorative
Deliberative
Influencing

• Helping a team to reach more people/larger audience, sells teams’ ideas and achievements externally, brings a voice to the team. When you need someone to take charge, speak up, and make sure a group is heard, look to influencers.

Activator  Maximizer
Command    Self-Assurance
Communication Significance
Competition Woo
Relationship Building

• Glue that holds the team together, creates groups and organizations that are much greater than the sum of their parts

Adaptability  
Connectedness  
Developer  
Empathy  
Harmony  
Includer  
Individualization  
Positivity  
Relator
Strategic Thinking

- Keep people focused on potential and the future, absorb and analyze information to help make effective decisions

Analytical Input
Context Intellection
Futuristic Learner
Ideation Strategic
UMNTC Leadership Minor Context

• All leadership minor students in the 1000-level class are offered an opportunity to take the StrengthsFinder

• Classes are “mapped” for team talents

• Project groups are developed with the goal of having one person represented from each of the four leadership domains

• Students reflect on their strengths and others’ strengths in formal written work
Team Talent Map

Theme Categories

- Executing: 8
- Influencing: 10
- Strategic Thinking: 24
- Relationship Building: 11
Steps You Can Take to Get Started

• Consider taking a strengths-related assessment
  – Serve as a mentor, model strengths in action
  – Encourage others on your team to take a strengths-related assessment as well
  – Discuss strengths in the workplace and develop team maps

• Encourage students to take a strengths-related assessment
  – Seek internal funding for assessments
  – Create a culture of strengths
Strengths in Teams

- Although individuals need not be well-rounded, teams should be well-rounded.
- Even if leaders have the same goals, the way they reach their goals is dependent upon the unique arrangement of their strengths.
- The most successful teams possess a broad variety of strengths.
- When we “recruit for strengths” we tend to find people like us; instead, seek those who have different strengths.
Team Engagement

Three stages of engagement

**Engaged**
Loyal and productive. Likely to stay with their organization for at least a year. Less likely to have accidents on the job and to steal.

**Not Engaged**
May be productive but are not psychologically connected to their company. More likely to miss work days and to leave.

**Actively Disengaged**
Physically present but psychologically absent. Unhappy with their work situation and insist on sharing this unhappiness with colleagues.
Employee Engagement

Regionally, Engaged Employees Most Common in the U.S. and Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
<th>Not Engaged</th>
<th>Actively Disengaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States and Canada</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia and New Zealand</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States and nearby countries</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2011-2012

GALLUP
Strengths & Engagement

Chances of Being Engaged at Work

- Organization’s leadership does not focus on strengths: 9%
- Organization’s leadership focuses on strengths: 73%

Source: Strengths Based Leadership, Gallup Press. Copyright © 2008 Gallup, Inc.
Complimentary Partners

• Consider your own top 5 strengths

• Think about what other strengths complement your strengths

• Find another person who has one of these complementary strengths and discuss how you might work together on a team
Key Takeaways

• We tend to hire or surround ourselves with people who are just like us

• Instead, we should find people with complementary strengths

• When you invest and leverage in people's strengths they are more productive and engaged in the workplace
Strengths Resources

- www.strengthsquest.com
- www.strengths.umn.edu
Upcoming publications:


- Soria, K. M., & Stubblefield, R. Building first-year students’ strengths and hope in transition. (revise and resubmit with the *College Student Affairs Journal*).


- Soria, K. M., & Taylor, Jr., L. Strengths-based approaches in college and university student housing: Implications for first-year students’ retention and engagement. (revise and resubmit with the *Journal of College and University Student Housing*).
