

Strengths-Based Goal Setting

First know, then make the most of, what you do best!

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Whether the economy is good or bad, most organizations are constantly looking for ways to increase productivity and affectiveness. For a leader/manager who is looking to do more with less, a key first step can be to know their employees *individually*. This helps a leader/manager position workers for success, motivate them, and keep them focused on actions, which are essential for the continued health of their organization.

It can be difficult for a leader/manager to do any of this if they are not attuned to the strengths of the people on their team. It is just as difficult for workers to use their strengths if their leader/manager does not understand, appreciate, and/or maximize a persons' strengths.

Knowing What Is Expected

Of the millions of employees Gallup has surveyed, just over half have a clear understanding of what is expected of them when they show up to work every day. Imagine! This can be alarming. It is difficult for an organization to accomplish its goals if its employees do not understand how they can contribute to achieving those goals.

One of the most important foundations of performance is determining what you are good at, what you have the potential to be great at, and bringing that *awareness* and *understanding* to the work that you do, everyday. When people can bring their gifts to the workplace, they are more engaged, they are more productive, and they are going to be more successful in meeting their expectations.

A lack of clearly defined expectations is detrimental to the productivity of an organization. Worse, it is almost impossible for the organization to be credible in the eyes of its employees, if it cannot clearly articulate what employees can be doing at work. So what is the best way to communicate expectations to employees?

1. Describe **what** each employee is supposed to accomplish, **not how** he or she is supposed to accomplish it. Explain expectations in terms of the outcomes the employee can achieve to reach organizational goals, rather than explaining expectations as an exact process or set of steps.
2. Get to know the greatest strengths of each employee. Then, discuss how an employee can leverage their unique strengths to achieve expectations. This also helps a leader/manager understand the specific ways an employee will create exceptional results. There is rarely only one way to accomplish a task. Freeing an employee to use their strengths to achieve key outcomes can help

them find more efficient and affective ways to meet expectations.

Identifying Strengths

It is so important to understand your own strengths and how you apply them to your job. It helps you map yourself and your team -- someone may not be good at *that*, but they are very good at *this*, and knowing it is very helpful in understanding how to divide up the work. It can also assist you in bring less prone to put someone in the wrong job or to give them responsibilities, which do not fall into areas where they excel. There is a behavioral truism, which speaks to this experience: ***You cannot take someone where you have not been!*** When leading others in this experience it works best when we can identify and leverage our own strengths prior to attempting to identify and leverage another persons strengths: *simultaneous learning* works too, if you are willing to share your discoveries along the way – learning and leveraging strengths can be a two-way street!

Gallup has asked numerous employees the following statement: "Every week, I set goals and expectations based on my strengths." Only 36% of those questioned could strongly agree with that statement. It appears, the majority of employees are either not aware of their strengths or are unable to apply them in their current jobs. This is unfortunate, because employees who set their own goals based on their strengths are more than seven times more likely to be engaged in their work and therefore much more likely to be high performers. Isn't that interesting?

Identifying the strengths of each employee can be difficult, and often an individual does not know how to describe what they do best. The *Clifton StrengthsFinder* is a tool, which can provide a starting point for identifying specific personal strengths. It is best when employees know more than just what strengths are theirs'. They can also know how to use what they have learned about their strengths at work, which can become the work of strengths-based development with a developmental leader/manager.

Strengths-Based Development Programs

It has become clear through research; these programs can offer significant financial benefits to organizations. These benefits hinge on whether employees can apply and learn to leverage their awareness of their strengths, within their everyday tasks. The most basic and crucial aspect of this developmental process is learning how to set goals and expectations, based on a persons individual strengths.

Done with intention, a strengths-based goal-setting process clarifies what the organization means by success and invites each employee to achieve it by leveraging their strengths. Employees who intentionally apply their strengths to their work increase the odds of their success. And when these employees are

working at their best, they demonstrate to their colleagues and leader/manager what to expect from them.

This approach can also help build a positive emotional connection (relationship) between employee and leader/manager, which is a necessary precursor to **employee engagement**. It can help developmental leader/manager understand how to motivate their team members. It is one thing for employees to know what they do well; it is quite another thing entirely to do it to the best of their abilities every day.

Performance Reviews of Career Conferences

The leader/manager can start with a list of strengths with positive specific examples of implementation, which can be much more personal and accurate than using a year of notes and observations. This approach accomplishes more than helping direct an individual or team performance. It also shows an understanding of each person individually, which can help an employee feel seen and understood. A level of specificity becomes helpful to guide an employee to use their talents, knowledge, and skills. It is also great from an employee perspective to know your leader/manager gets you; the *process* becomes even more developmental.

Learning about strengths, is a *journey, it is not a destination!* It can start with an individual, and it often becomes a team effort accomplished with and for employees, leaders/managers, patients/clients, and organizations. Once the *journey* is begun, everyone involved can learn about each other's capabilities and build on what they know. All can learn to set individual and organizational goals, reaching milestones, which help organizations and all stakeholders succeed.

A Conceptual Formula of Developmental Leadership/Management

Donald O. Clifton, PhD

Talent x (Relationship + Expectation + Recognition) = Growth