

Bringing Your Offering: Strengthening the Talent Table

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The Master's hand fashioned each of us with a unique set of talents to assist in building the Kingdom. This paper explores the benefits of a relational covenant between the organization, individual, and professional coach coupled with the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment as organizations put their greatest asset, their people, to work. When strengths are uncovered and mobilized, it bridges the gap between our worldly work and God's handy-work, creating a breeding ground for increased engagement and collaborative relationships. As individuals and organizations embrace and encourage strengths, they empower, energize, and maximize the workforce. Strengths development allows contributors to bring their best offering to the talent table, crafting a purposeful competitive advantage and an opportunity to generate a healthy bottom line; managing performance by design rather than default.

In a fast-paced, ever-changing work environment where the bottom line is the measure of success, many leaders are spinning on an unsustainable hamster wheel lost in the day-to-day tasks. They often fail to produce acceptable organizational growth to include growing their greatest asset, their people. The immediate need leans towards numbers to reach, deadlines to meet, and creating monetary value for shareholders leaving little time or room to bridge the gap between organizational success and the human factor.

Tom Rath, author of *Strengths Based Leadership*, suggests organizational growth is dependent upon developing its employees first through bringing the right people into the fold to accomplish its goals, but also investing in their strengths and needs. As organizations realize the requisite to elevate employees to that of a contributor through strengths development, the individual, team, organization, and Kingdom will prosper. Utilizing the Clifton Strengthsfinder® tool, organizations craft a purposeful competitive advantage, generating an engaged, synergistic, sustainable workforce and the opportunity to yield a healthy bottom line as they manage performance by design rather than default.

The Work Mindset

Mindsets are deeply embedded in each individual and essential to becoming a collective culture. Creating a collective culture takes individuals committing to be fully in, responsible, and obligated

to organizational success. Mindsets also uncover how all levels of the organization gage “work.” An accurate assessment of measuring one's work is to ask if it aligns with God's calling to further the Kingdom (Witherington, 2011). Work must have meaning, be purposeful and just because we are made in God's image. Hence, our work must emulate God's work (Ryken, 2002; Witherington, 2011). However, studies show individuals view of work can be very different. According to Witherington (2011), man either designs their plan for work without contemplating God's purpose for them or works hard in honor of Him.

Pew Research Center's, *The State of American Jobs* 2016 report implies the economy has been responsible for reshaping both work and society, which affects how people think about their skills and training. This research suggests not only is more preparation needed to achieve career success, but 54% of the Americans polled feel it "is essential" to continually upgrade and develop their skills, while 33% say it "is important, but not essential." Only 12% suggest on-going training will "not be important." The research additionally identifies 72% of the respondents stating, "...a lot of responsibility falls on individuals to make sure that they have the right skills and education to be successful in today's economy." The PEW report is more than analyzing percentages; it uncovers the mindset of today's workforce and points to the importance and responsibility of the organization to partner with their people to identify development needs and implement a strategic approach to keep both the organization and the individual engaged.

Employee Engagement

What is engagement and is it important in the workplace? Gallup® considers engaged to mean “involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace.” It is also defined as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards their organization and its values...works with colleagues to improve performance...is a two-way street between employer and employee” (Crabb, 2011, pp. 27-28), and “gets to the heart of what really matters to employees” (Kaye & Crowell, 2012, p. 165). The *Business Dictionary* gives a deeper understanding to the definition of employee engagement as the:

Emotional connection an employee feels toward his or her employment organization, which tends to influence his or her behaviors and level of effort in work related activities. The more engagement an employee has with his or her company, the more effort they put forth. Employee engagement also involves the nature of the job itself - if the employee feels mentally stimulated; the trust and communication between employees and management; ability of an employee to see how their own work contributes to the overall company performance; the opportunity of growth within the organization; and the level of pride an employee has about working or being associated with the company.

Moreover, Gallup's® *State of the American Workplace* report suggests there is confusion understanding engagement.

Employee engagement is not the same as engaging employees. Employee engagement is the *outcome* of actively engaging employees through a strategy that drives improved performance --achieving engagement is simply not as easy as putting together a survey to measure employees' level of engagement (Gallup®, 2017, p. 66).

Most companies provide surveys to gain knowledge, but do not heed the results to develop their people or, pledge change to their employees with little to no follow through (Gallup®, 2017; Kaye & Crowell, 2012).

Interestingly, Gallup finds only 33% of employees are engaged at work. This number on engagement has remained between 26% in 2000 and 32% in 2015, with a 1% increase in 2016. Likewise, 51% of the employees are not engaged, and 16% are actively disengaged. This means an astounding 67% of the employees in your organization are either showing up for work just going through the motions or, they are already mentally out the door. According to the US Department of labor in 2012, this disengagement “costs the economy \$300 billion annually” (Kaye & Crowell, 2012) with more recent research determining it is “between \$90 billion and \$1.2 trillion per year” (Harter, 2017). Harter and Adkins (2017) assert 51% of the employees polled are either watching for openings or searching for new jobs. The top reasons for leaving their current employment are:

- Career Growth Opportunities
- Pay and Benefits
- Manager or Management
- Company Culture
- Job Fit

This concurs with the research of Kaye and Crowell (2012). How can we change this? Research suggests organizations report “increased engagement and achievement” when clients pursue strengths development (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2011), which also leads to experiencing overall well-being and optimism (Passmore, 2012). When strengths are uncovered and mobilized, it beautifully bridges the gap between our worldly work and God’s handy-work, creating a breeding ground for increased engagement and collaborative relationships. Gallup® maintains, the longer an employee stays at their job, the more opportunity they have to do “what they do best every day.” Therefore, organizations must weigh their current employee engagement against what research has found and see where changes can be made or improved upon.

Collaborative Contributors

According to 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 we are one body with many members, each working together. Cohesive groups are more likely to accomplish group goals and feel a sense of belonging than those who lack cohesion and work against each other (Moore, Kizer, & Jeon, 2011). Lyons (2012) maintains trust brings about cohesion, igniting team dialogue, spontaneity, and an unstoppable team. There is value in determining the make-up of individuals and comprise a team with complementing strengths across categories to bring cohesion (Rath, 2008). Imagine, rather than being told what or how you will contribute to a team, you were asked where your strengths lie and how you could best use them for the assignment, or, given an assignment and confidently complete it with excellence? This is the sweet spot for those who know and effectively activate their strengths. By doing so, it honors God in the way that is pleasing to Him. It is here where the conversion from employee to contributor occurs, engagement is found, and collaboration begins.

When employees emerge as contributors, they affirm and appreciate their own and others' differences, naturally strengthening over-all relationships instead of managing discontent and disengagement within their work walls. When contributors develop and increase collaborative, goal-oriented relationships, a talent team is born. A talent team is one who functions like a well-oiled machine because it is versed and immersed in strengths. This team dynamic stretches beyond brick and mortar walls, and into the virtual environment where many of today's teams are connected "24-7" across the globe.

The Jagged Offering

The Master's hand fashioned each of us with a unique set of talents to assist in building the Kingdom. We are not created well rounded, but rather have masterly crafted jagged edges, which are unique to each individual, not meant to be smoothed away, but become a foundational springboard to advance our strengths (Winseman, Clifton & Liesveld, 2008). However, if we are unsure of what those talents are, they cannot be activated proficiently. On this premise, to build the Kingdom begins first with knowing your talent, and then bringing those talents as your personal offering to the talent table.

According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of an offering is:

- a) The act of one who offers.
- b) Something offered; especially a sacrifice, ceremonially offered as part of worship.

The Bible declares, give with a cheerful heart (2 Corinthians 9:7), what we are able according to God (Deuteronomy 16:17). In Philippians 2, Paul calls us to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vanity (v. 3) and value others above self (v. 4). Therefore, based on scripture, we are to bring our offering cheerfully and unselfishly, as we work on behalf of God, not our earthly masters (Colossians 3:23) to fulfill His good (Phil. 2:13).

In the workplace, there are numerous untapped, missed personal connections. The Greek philosopher Aristotle believed, "The whole is more than the sum of its parts" and this remains true for the talent team. Building goal-oriented relationships in the workplace brings excitement and synergy to the talent table. Workplace relationships, which are forced for the sake of the team rather than through work fellowship, produce tension and distrust. Success occurs through creating purposeful partnerships and establishing a cooperative approach by identifying individual strengths. Cooperative efforts allow people to have a common purpose, promote transparency, stability, and predictability (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

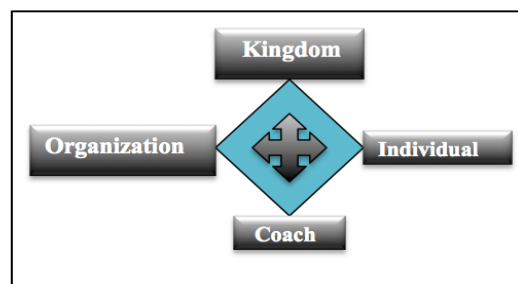
Our work is Christianized through the Spirit, the one who guides, sets boundaries and embeds gifts within us (Witherington, 2011). This cooperative partnership as Ryken (2002) contends, gives insight to understanding; it is with and through God that our work for the Kingdom exists. When an individual feels "magnetic influence"; a pull that finds them performing a repeated activity learned with ease and all sense of time can become lost as they are engrossed in the pursuit, signature themes are at work (Winseman et al., 2008). When we allow ourselves to be submerged in ours and others' strengths, we honor our authentic self, honor authenticity in others, and honor

God. As authenticity emerges, the right fit composition at the talent table brings opportunity for strategic collaborations, and highly functional teams and organizations.

A Kingdom Partnership

Organizations seek to employ or un-employ a leadership coach for different reasons. Ineffective coach-client relationships are the reason half of all assignments are terminated (Boyce, Jackson, & Neil, 2010). The relationship between an organization, individual, and coach is a covenant; a trusting partnership, each positioned to give of self and together work for the good of the Kingdom.

Figure 1. The Covenant Partnership



Trust and commitment are necessary to build relationships (Boyce et al., 2010; Chidiac, 2013; Collins, 2009; Ehin, 2013; Kaye & Crowell, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Lyons, 2012; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rath, 2008). Relationship building through trust and commitment is supported by and reflected in the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the Christian Coaches Network International (CCNI) competencies as standards for the coaching industry. Regardless of a coach's education or certification, these competencies as well as the Code of Ethics are the foundation and beginning point for best practice coaching.

A “good fit” coaching dynamic centered in trust assists clients to maximize their potential and provide an environment for transformational development and change to occur. A transformational coach brings out excellence in others by recognizing the spirit of excellence, challenging others to identify what their talents are, and how they are using these talents to contribute to the world (Umidi, 2005). A successful outcome with any coaching engagement will be found in the relational factor through direct interactions (Chidiac, 2013; Lyons, 2012; Rousseau, Aubé, & Tremblay, 2013). A good match includes rapport and commonality, which leads to trust. In a trusting, supportive environment where sensitive information is shared without judgment, assumptions are challenged allowing the client to expand their thinking and create significant outcomes (Boyce, et al., 2010).

As a practice, coaching is a “powerful way to amplify” organizational learning (Frankovelgia & Riddle, 2010, p. 125). Coaches who engage in coaching conversations, tapping into strengths, become way-makers for their client and the organization as a whole. They become champions as they create awareness around personal strengths, which may have been stifled, missed, or incorrectly understood by the client. They purposely focus their client through a new set of eyes, leading by strengths rather than weakness. For clients, the outcome of coaching is process

dependent, with the process being dependent upon the relationship and commitment to the result. Clients who are willing to give themselves to the process and put in time and effort will meet with success.

Leveraging the Links

Coaching for today has to go beyond coaching for performance or spot coaching but seek to use the practice as a true developmental tool to reach individual goals that also align with the organization. When organizational objectives are linked to individual development outcomes, coaching becomes a high-value tool and competitive advantage for 21st century global companies. Developing a coaching culture is an organizational benefit, with coaching not just for top executives, but is part of developing organizational capabilities (Chidiac, 2013). As coaching is pushed down and throughout the organization, it maximizes both the individual and organization's potential for success.

Further, when managers as coaches help their people through creating awareness, it improves engagement, but also becomes an example of how coaching is used through everyday conversation. They too can apply these skills as a way to meet, maintain, and sustain the organization's objectives. When coaching becomes the norm instead of the exception, a coaching culture is born. Both Hunt and Weintraub (2007) and Anderson and Anderson (2011), posit the need to capitalize on organizational coaching, which when done right, creates a cascading effect throughout the organization to provide a direction to lasting change. As the culture trickles down throughout the organization, it will produce and improve work performance, business management, time management, and team effectiveness according to research conducted by the International Coaching Federation 2016 Global Coaching Client Study.

A desirable environment for developing a coaching strategy is one that is conducive to learning and understands the strategy's value. Nevertheless, leadership can have the greatest strategy, but unless organizational culture is aligned, it will most likely fail or stall at best (Schneider, 2000). In order for team leadership to be successful, "the organizational culture needs to support employee involvement," which is done over time (Northouse, 2009, p. 288). Strategies must be organizationally and learner specific because not all leaders and followers learn, perceive, or adapt to the same set of circumstances in the same way.

Effective leaders consistently develop other leaders to assist in accomplishing organizational goals (Collins, 2009). These leaders learn to perform at peak performance levels and become vital contributors. When individuals are strengthened, so are their organizations (Collins, 2009; Rath, 2008). Barbara Green, of *Career Partners International*, argues, "The success of today's leaders should be measured by how well they engage and develop others, and how well they contribute to organizational performance and sustainable momentum for their companies." This statement sets the bar for leaders and demonstrates how we as coaches can assist our clients in this area. To do this, leaders and coaches must understand and analyze what it takes to motivate and create synergy within the organizational walls. To create a sustainable workforce, a full commitment is necessary at all hierarchy levels and ingrained in the fabric of the culture. This begins with senior leadership advocating for coaching as a viable, professional development tool, but also supporting coaching initiatives with financial resources (Hunt & Weintraub, 2007).

Moreover, ROI has consistently been the measuring stick for organizations to determine the worth of their investment. It is crucial for coaches and consultants to understand strategic objectives and what success looks like to leadership (Anderson & Anderson, 2011). When a coaching culture strategy is successfully implemented, the organization will see a positive return on their investment in both tangible and intangible measures, both equally important as described by Anderson and Anderson (2011). The ICF Global Coaching Client Study opines 86% of the companies polled say “they at least made their investment back” and 96% would repeat the coaching process again. Grant (2012) contends ROI is just one element of measurement and although organizations seek to justify the expense, they must come to the realization they are not just a money-making machine, but also a social and psychological environment. The Gallup® Global Study on ROI found 29% increase in profit for strengths-based workplaces, along with increased employee and customer engagement, productivity, and sales (Rigoni & Asplund, 2016). This same study found decreased employee turnover and safety accidents.

Clifton StrengthsFinder®

Strengths tell the story of a person; uncovering and bringing awareness to answer the question of why we act, think, and say what we do (Rath, 2008). Workplace contributors learn to bring out excellence within themselves and their workplace through strengths coaching. It is up to organizations to hire for fit, but also create meaningful development opportunities for their people. A coach versed in strengths can expose raw, underdeveloped talent and help the client raise what is raw to a level of maturity where proficiency can be achieved. As the client understands the impact of this knowledge and begins to work at being their best, they learn to do more of what they are good at. While coaches seek to initiate and assist in moving employees towards contributor status, the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment can help advance the process.

StrengthsFinder® is a web-based assessment developed by Don Clifton PhD, the father of strengths-based psychology and pioneer researcher who spent forty years studying great leaders (Gallup®, Rath, 2008). The assessment is composed of 177 pairs of potential self-descriptors, such as “I read instructions carefully” versus “I like to jump right into things.” The descriptors are on anchoring ends of a continuum. The participant is given 20 seconds to choose and respond to the best personal descriptor and to what extent it lies. Initiating a first reaction with little time to allow the brain to formulate a debate as to what may be the right choice is a strategic attribute of this assessment. Although the assessment is designed to be completed by those with an “eighth-to-tenth-grade reading level” with little or no problem, alternative accommodations may be requested and arranged on a case-by-case basis with Gallup® to include turning off the timer (Winseman et al., 2008, p. 246). Upon completion, the report generates a list the individuals Top 5 out of 34 strength themes disseminated in four possible domains as outlined in *Strengths Based Leadership* by Tom Rath (2008). These domains include:

1. **Executing:** These are the “catch” an idea and “make things happen” leaders.
2. **Influencing:** This is the take-charge leader who speaks up, and sells ideas on a broad scale.
3. **Relationship Building:** These are the glue sticks. They hold the team together and make it greater than just the sum of its parts.

4. **Strategic Thinking:** The analyzer and information absorbers are future focused, but also keep everyone else focused.

The assessment report is only the beginning to understanding the power of the StrengthsFinder® assessment. The magic unfolds when the coach and client partner to unpack, strengthen, and proactively work the StrengthsFinder® results. This work is like casting a lamp to the client's feet to light their path (Psalms 119:105). As with any assessment, debriefing with a professional coach is crucial. This aids the client in understanding the findings and coaches the client towards using strengths strategies in the workplace. Assessments can be full of information and a way to offer insight to a client and coach; yet, the value becomes diminished if a coach has little experience or is not certified in interpreting the results (Nielsen, 2016).

StrengthsFinder® is a simple, effective tool, but at the same time has a complexity that is wittingly present. Gallup® research indicates only 1:33 million participants will emerge having the same Top 5 Strength sequence. This differential is astounding and exciting to suggest just how unique we are as individuals, but this goes much deeper. An individual contributor may have the same foundational Top 5 strengths as another, but because of their uniqueness, they are typically used and expressed in different ways.

Setting the Talent Table

High performing organizations average an employee engagement rate of 70% (Gallup®, 2017). Building a high-performance organization is an ongoing process. When the organization strategically builds for strength, it is essential to look at who has what theme, but also, what they do best in order to create confidence and align the correct individual with the right assignment. To build a strong, effective, collaborative, sustainable workforce, the process must begin before selection and hiring and continue into succession planning. An organization that establishes and manages performance by design rather than default creates a foundation, inviting in success at the onset through a strengths approach. This design sets the individuals, teams, and organizations up for success.

Below is an example of a contributor talent table where all four strength domains are accounted for. This includes the task and the contributor whose dominant theme and offering match the task. According to Rath (2008), it is up to each team member to understand and appreciate the diversity of the team, while gaining an understanding of each member's strengths. This creates an engaged, collaborative, trusting, peak performance talent team. The example below identifies one talent theme per team member. However, it is important to remember there are four other themes for each team member that build additional strength into the talent table.

Table 1.

The Talent Table: Collaborative contributors by design (Adapted from Sorensen & Crabtree, 2001)

Team Task	Contributor	Theme	Offering
Group Selection & Recognition	Anthony	Individualization	Aligns fit with person
Leadership/Vision	Shannon	Futuristic	Builds the vision
Presents For Team	Tara	Woo	Sells the idea
Goal Setting/Measurements	Charlie	Strategic	Sets goals & timelines
	Diane	Maximizer	Prioritizes, stimulates group excellence
Communication	Ike	Communication	Gets the word out
	Phyllis	Arranger	Updates and circulates to-do list
Accountability	Kelly	Responsibility	Keeps team on track-follow up

In today's global arena, developing people is not only necessary as this research has determined, but is expected, and if God is in the presence of our work, no matter what position we hold, it becomes great (Ryken, 2002). From a spiritual sense, Winseman et al., (2008) informs, when we "deny our talents and instead focus on our weaknesses, on some level, we are telling God that we know best...he made a mistake in gracing us with our unique mix" (p. 12).

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam

As the Parable of the Bags of Gold instructs in Matthew (25:14-30), each of us has a responsibility to use what we are given, even if it is "less than" what another has received. This responsibility can be found in the unique offering we bring to the talent table as God works within us for His purpose (Phil. 2:13). This is demonstrated and described in Exodus as God provided a team for Moses first through Aaron and adding Miriam to "multiply their effectiveness exponentially" (Winseman et al., 2008, p. 27). Each of these prophets, were crafted with a unique purpose and talent; where one lacked, the other found strength.

God used Aaron to speak influence over the Pharaoh for his brother Moses. As Moses focused in the present shaping and readying the Israelites through God's Commandments, Miriam focused on the future, giving hope for the anticipated celebration of their liberation (Friedman, 2004).

Miriam as her brother Aaron, were both gifted with strong relationship talents; Aaron through peace making and Miriam forming a human relation network (Friedman, 2004). In Exodus, the display of collaboration and collective strengths of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are keenly disseminated in the StrengthsFinder® domains of executing, influencing, relationship building, and strategic thinking. By using their strengths, these shepherds guided God's people out of slavery in Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land.

Conclusion

Strengths knowledge is important for professional coaches. This knowledge is demonstrated when the coach looks through a strengths lens and explores and brings out the best in their client. Through goal setting and implementing actionable strategies, the coach is positioned to “facilitate and accelerate development and performance” (Rigoni & Ashplund, 2016, p. 2). The strength of coaching lies in “asking rather than telling, acknowledging, and calling forth” the client to see their achievements even in the light of adversity (Umidi, 2005, p. 67). As a whole, organizational awareness, insight, and collaboration are transported to higher levels when leaders realize dominant strengths play an important role in their success and a competitive advantage is established. When goal-oriented relationships and collaborations are implemented and achieved, a collective culture and sustainable workforce is created.

A collective culture promotes increased engagement and confidence in individual and team abilities (Banai & Tulimieri, 2013). Having individuals functioning at their best to build the Kingdom takes a partnership between the organization, individual, and a coach to bring a well-crafted contributor and their jagged offering to the talent table. Strengths-based coaching and team building is a way to promote individual and organizational success, moving away from gender, generational or cultural bias; seeing the person clearly through the eyes of talent, which is rooted in each of us by and for the Creator. The concept of strategically implementing strengths to increase employee engagement and workplace partnerships initiates bridging objective with a purposeful fit and our worldly work with God's handy-work. By utilizing the Clifton Strengthsfinder® tool coupled with professional coaching, individuals and organizations embrace and encourage strengths to empower, energize, and maximize the workforce. Together, they craft a purposeful competitive advantage and the opportunity to generate a healthy bottom line by managing performance by design rather than default.

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