GALLUP®

# Introduction to Strengths-Based Development

> "What would happen if we studied what is **right** with people versus what's **wrong** with people?"

This simple question sparked decades of groundbreaking research into what people are like and how they develop. A person's most direct path to individual growth and improvement begins with a primary investment in his or her greatest talents.


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> The popular notion is that people can excel at anything if they try hard enough.

If this notion is true, we must believe that most, if not all, behaviors can be learned.

We have to assume, for example, that a person who has always struggled with numbers can be proficient enough at math to become an accountant or statistician, if he takes the right classes. And a person without much natural empathy can infuse empathy into her personality, if she only tries hard enough.

The reality is that a person who has always struggled with numbers is unlikely to be a great accountant or statistician. And someone without much natural empathy will never be able to comfort a friend in the warm and sincere way that great empathizers can.


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> Every person is one of a kind, with a unique set of talents and strengths. While we can, and should, try anything we wish to, long-term success will elude us unless we have a basic talent for the endeavor.

Strengths-based development is unique in its approach and outcome. It is based on the simple notion that a person's talents do more than make him or her a unique individual. Our greatest talents — the ways in which we most naturally think, feel and behave — represent our innate power and potential. When we tap into this source of wisdom and power, we are more efficient; we act with more confidence, direction and hope; and we are more productive.


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A **strengths-based development** strategy starts by focusing on what people do well. It then **emphasizes** and **builds** on those strengths to help individuals become even more productive.

There is nothing wrong with being aware of our weaknesses and managing them, but our greatest opportunity for success lies in building on our natural talents.


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## Conventional vs. Strengths-Based Development

The conventional approach to development starts with the assumption that if we are already good at something, we don't need to worry about it. We simply maintain our strengths and work on fixing our weaknesses.

The conventional "let's fix it" approach for development is simple:

1) Identify an area for improvement.
2) Develop an improvement plan.

For this approach to succeed, several additional assumptions must be true. First, we must believe that most, if not all, behaviors can be learned. We have to assume, for example, that a person who has always struggled with numbers can become proficient enough at math to become an accountant or statistician, if he takes the right classes. And a person without much natural empathy can infuse empathy into her personality, if she only tries hard enough.

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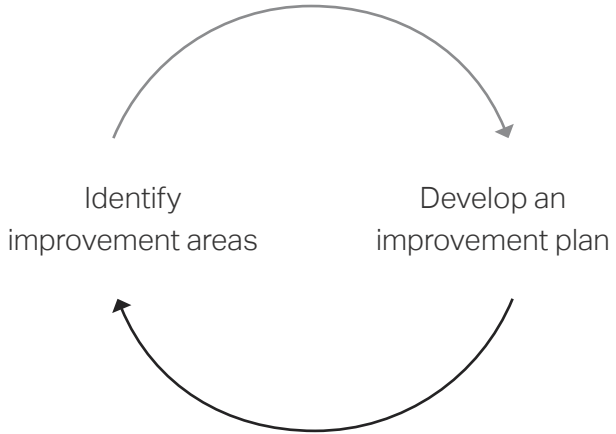
**Conventional approach to personal development**

## **Maintain** each person's **strengths** and **work** on fixing weaknesses.




Most, if not all, behaviors can be learned.

The best in a role display the same behaviors.

Weakness fixing leads to success.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# Weaknesses never develop into strengths. Strengths develop infinitely.

A person's talents and strengths are quick, powerful, dynamic and transformative. When people learn how to consciously seek and invent ways to apply their talents to their goals and tasks, their ability to perform with excellence increases substantially.

A strengths-based development strategy starts by focusing on what people do well. It then emphasizes and builds on those strengths to help individuals become even more productive.

The key to personal development is to fully understand how to apply your greatest talents and strengths in your everyday life. While that means paying some attention to your lesser talents, decades of Gallup research reveal that your best opportunity for success is to recognize and develop your dominant talents.


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**Strengths-Based approach to personal Development**

## **Focus** on each person's **strengths** and **manage** around weaknesses.

Only some behaviors can be learned (skills and knowledge).

The best in a role deliver the same outcomes using different behaviors.

Weakness fixing prevents failure; strengths building leads to success.


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# But what about weaknesses?

Adopting a strengths-based approach to development does not mean that a person can ignore his or her weaknesses. The reality is that a person can't ignore his or her weaknesses.

Instead of trying to become something we are not, we can find support systems or build complementary partnerships with others to address our weaknesses.

A support system can be as simple as someone with gaps in his or her mathematical talents using a calculator. In a slightly more involved support system, for example, a person who has difficulty putting faces to names might create portfolios or contact lists on a smartphone that include not only names but also photos.

There are many ways to manage a weakness, but what Gallup's research has discovered is that a person's best opportunity to grow, develop and succeed is to primarily focus on developing his or her strengths.


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> The best advice is not to focus on your strengths and ignore your weaknesses, but to focus on your strengths and find ways to manage your weaknesses.

Accordingly, a person's best opportunity for excellence is to generally follow this approach:

1) Identify talents and weaknesses.
2) Focus most of a person's development time on talents.
3) Integrate activities of a person's life with his or her talents and manage areas of weakness.

**At its core, strengths-based development primarily focuses on enhancing the areas that hold the greatest potential — a person's talents.**

- ✓ Everyone has strengths — the unique combinations of talents, knowledge and skills that help them do what they do best every day.
- ✓ Our greatest talents do more than make us unique individuals. They also serve as our best opportunities for excellence.
- ✓ The key to personal development is to focus on your dominant themes — your greatest talents — and find ways to manage or work around your lesser talents.


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Employees who receive strengths feedback have turnover rates that are **14.9% lower than those for employees who do not receive feedback.**

Employees who learn to use their strengths are **7.8% more productive.**

For the employees who agree that their manager focuses on their strengths, active disengagement **falls to an astoundingly low 1%.**


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