

KNOW YOUR OWN STRENGTH

How to mesh what your team does best

There has been a steady growth in leadership literature of emphasizing the importance of leading and managing with strengths in mind. Understanding the strengths of individuals plays a critical role in organizational performance and success. But knowing strengths and knowing what to do with that knowledge are two different things. Before we explore a few basic principles of strengths-based leadership, let's take a brief pit stop to clarify what we mean by strengths.

Socrates has suggested that the "beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms." For our purposes, we will define strengths as the intersection of what you're good at with what energizes you. As we know, those who serve in leadership roles often excel at many work tasks. At the same time, those tasks may drain them of energy they need to focus on strategic business leadership. Just think of the energy expended in creating or poring over the minutia in financial

reports. It may energize some leaders, but more often than not, it can be a process that drains leaders.

Having clarified what we mean by strengths, what are the key principles of strengths-based leadership? First, it is important to know your own strengths. Where is your personal intersection of excellence and energy? And, of course, a corollary is to know your weaknesses. Where is the intersection of where you excel and feel drained? What don't you do well?

Secondly, do you know the strengths of your team? This means three things:

- 1.) Do you know the strengths of the individuals on your team? What is each person's intersection of excellence and energy?
- 2.) Do you know how those strengths relate to yours? Are your strengths complementary to those of your CFO? Are you the big-picture strategist and she the detail-oriented pragmatist? Do you understand how to use the inevitable conflicts of perspective in a way that benefits your organization?
- 3.) Do you know how the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals on your team synthesize into team strengths and weaknesses?

Is your team quick to make decisions? That's an obvious strength in a fast-moving business climate. At the same time, it can be an asset to have a process or a person who can slow you down at times and point out factors that need to be considered before a final commitment of precious resources. On the flip side, a more deliberate team may benefit from a process or person who can foster quicker action so you don't miss short-lived opportunities.

Finally, have you filled in the gaps? Are you missing someone on your team who thinks about the future and how to manage the change necessary to keep ahead of your competition? Are you missing the organizational cheerleader who can rally the troops behind a common, strategic cause? Are you missing the customer expert who knows what your customers value and expect and can assess when you're not delivering?

Are you missing the person who executes and manages organizationwide projects and understands how to create meaningful metrics for your success as a company? If so, fill these gaps quickly. <<

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