

Strengths: The Next Generation

A new book builds on the concepts first popularized in the bestseller *Now, Discover Your Strengths*

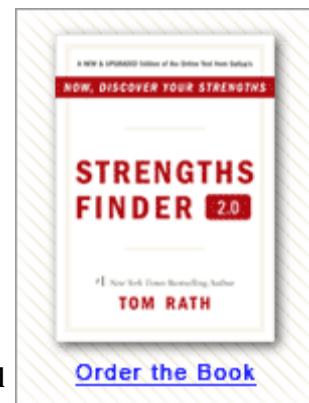
STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPMENT

A GMJ Q&A with Tom Rath, author of *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (Gallup Press, February 2007)

Last month, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* hit the bookstores. Book browsers, no doubt, had many questions, and among them was probably "Didn't I already read a book about this?"

Well, actually, yes. But the topic was worth revisiting for two reasons.

In the six years since the release of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, more than 2 million people have taken the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment, which means billions of people have not yet had the opportunity. The second reason is that Gallup researchers just haven't been able to let the topic rest. Over the past decade, they've done more surveys, more interviews, and more studies; they've prodded and poked and analyzed. And they realized that there's a lot more to understanding human talent than most people know.



Those who are familiar with the StrengthsFinder assessment know that it is designed to uncover certain key talents -- patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that can be productively applied. These patterns are categorized into 34 broad themes -- such as Achiever, Ideation, and Relator -- and those themes indicate and predict one's innate and unique talents. Those talents, when multiplied by the investment of time spent practicing, developing skills, and building knowledge, can become strengths.

Some of this is just common sense; it seems intuitive that your performance will be better if you're doing what you naturally do well. But some of it seems counterintuitive and runs directly against conventional wisdom: No amount of training will help you excel in your areas of weakness. You can't do anything you want to do -- or be anything you want to be -- because you're just not going to be good at *everything*. But if you work with your talents, you can be extraordinary.

StrengthsFinder has resonated with the business community because there's a direct link between talent development and performance. (See "How Ann Taylor Invests in Talent" and "How Marriott Vacation Club International Engages Talent" in the "See Also" area on this page.)

In this interview, Tom Rath, author of *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, discusses what Gallup scientists have learned since the publication of the first book, what more there is to discover about your talents, and why it's bad to focus on your employees' weaknesses, but simply cruel to ignore them completely.

GMJ: *Why the new book?*

Tom Rath: *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is an effort to get the core message and language out to a much broader audience. We had no idea how well received the first strengths book would be by general readers -- it was oriented more toward managers -- or that the energy and excitement would continue to grow. More than two million people have taken the StrengthsFinder assessment, and each month, the number of people learning about their talents goes up.

But readers keep asking us: "Now that I know about my strengths, what do I do next?" So we went back and surveyed hundreds of them and asked them how they apply their talents. Then we whittled

“ We found that if your manager focuses on your strengths, your chances of being actively disengaged go down to 1 in 100. ”

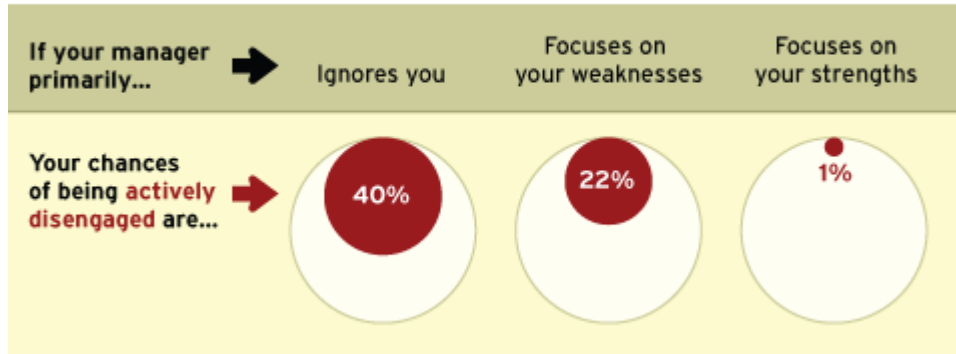
their suggestions down to the ten best ideas for each theme. We also added more than five thousand Strengths Insights to version 2.0 that allow us to offer more individualized theme descriptions than we could before. So, instead of general descriptions of your top five talent themes, in 2.0, you get a talent profile so unique that you're unlikely to share even a sentence with someone else.

And as I said, the first book was really written for a business audience. People have had trouble retrofitting the theme descriptions if they are in non-management roles, but they've tried. This book helps readers apply strengths theory to any type of role and gives them ideas to help them apply their talents in their daily life.

GMJ: *It's been six years since the first book was published, and Gallup has done hundreds of thousands more interviews. Have you discovered anything new about talents and strengths? Have you altered your original premise?*

Rath: No, but we've seen more and more evidence that demonstrates that focusing on your talents is important. We did a survey in 2004 that examined what happens when your manager ignores you, focuses on your strengths, or focuses on your weaknesses. We found that if your manager focuses on your strengths, your chances of being actively disengaged go down to one in one hundred. (See graphic "Focusing on Strengths Reduces Disengagement.")

FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS REDUCES DISENGAGEMENT



Source: Gallup

Graphic by Tommy McCall

<http://www.strengthsfinder.com/113647/Homepage.aspx>