

TITLE: Strengths-Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow

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PRIMARY THEME: Great leadership is based on a thorough understanding and application of one's strengths - the talents, skills, and knowledge one contributes to joint efforts. This is true of individuals as well as of teams. By identifying our unique aptitudes and focusing sustained attention on making the most of our natural assets, we can propel ourselves to greater levels of success than by following some prescribed method of leadership.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION: Not all leadership strategies work for every person. Not every great leader, for example, can rally followers with a fantastic speech, or with a brilliant strategy. This book uses four real life examples of effective leadership to show how people can use their specific and unique strengths to motivate others and achieve great results. Just as important is understanding and utilizing the strengths other members of a team bring to the table. Finally, by studying the needs of followers, leaders will be able to direct their efforts along demonstrably proven avenues.

CHAPTERS:

- *Introduction.* Research from The Gallup Organization shows that there are some traits common to most effective leaders: 1) they are always investing in their strengths, 2) they surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team, and 3) they understand their followers' needs. This is true of important world leaders as well as of those whose stage is less grand – parents, group managers, and committee chairs.
- *Part One: Investing in Your Strengths.* Truly effective leadership is predicated on having a solid understanding of one's personal talents – and honoring them enough to put them to work. Since our strengths represent our greatest potential for growth, engaging them is the surest route to increased levels of excellence. This is a high-yield investment. Also worthy of note is the payoff a strengths focus can have in self-confidence. If I spend most of my day doing those things I am already good at, I am more likely to be building the confidence in my own abilities that I will need to achieve high career satisfaction (which has a strong relationship to lifelong income.)
- *Part Two: Maximizing Your Team.* Individuals do not need to be well-rounded to be successful, but teams do. For a team to be truly strong and effective, its members should have a variety of talents. Here the authors take the 34 themes of talent from the Gallup research (thoroughly explored in Now, Discover Your Strengths) and sort them into categories. High-functioning teams have people who are strong in each of the categories as shown below. Strong teams also have other characteristics in common:
 1. They are focused on results and conflict therefore does not disturb them.
 2. They prioritize what is best for the organization and move forward with a united front.
 3. They are as committed to their personal lives as they are to their work.
 4. They embrace diversity, have different perspectives, and a variety of educational backgrounds.
 5. They are magnets for talent. Good people want to work on good teams.

Executing	Influencing	Relationship-Building	Strategic Thinking
<i>Knowing how to make things happen</i>	<i>Help the team reach a broader audience</i>	<i>Essential glue that holds a team together</i>	<i>Keep everyone focused on what could be</i>
Achiever Arranger Belief Consistency Deliberative Discipline Focus Responsibility Restorative	Activator Command Communication Competition Maximizer Self-Assurance Significance Woo	Adaptability Developer Connectedness Empathy Harmony Includer Individualization Positivity Relator	Analytical Context Futuristic Ideation Input Intellection Learning Strategic

➤ *Part Three: Understanding Why People Follow.* Since it is true that we don't know what people want or need until we ask, these Gallup researchers undertook to uncover the truth of what followers want from leaders by conducting surveys. Here's what they found:

Trust. Strong teams trust each other, move quickly, spend less time working out issues, and have little need to discuss trust. If a team talks about trust, they are probably struggling.

Compassion. When workers believe that someone at work cares about them as a person, they are more likely to stay in the job, are more productive, and have better customer service.

Stability. Followers need leaders they can count on to provide a solid foundation, who adhere to unshakable core values, and provide for the financial stability of the organization. Being transparent helps here.

Hope. People are motivated when they feel positive about the future. Good leaders can rally their followers by being clear that the future is getting better and better.

TOOLS: As with others in the strengths series, this book contains a pass code for an online test which allows readers to assess their unique talents and then generates a personalized guide for how to apply them in a leadership context. 132 pages of the book are dedicated to specific tips and strategies people with each of the 34 themes of talent (shown above) might employ to meet the four needs of followers (trust, compassion, stability, and hope.)

KEY TAKEAWAYS: Donald O. Clifton: *"A leader needs to know his strengths as a carpenter knows his tools, or as a physician knows the instruments at her disposal. What great leaders have in common is that each truly knows his or her strengths – and can call on the right strength at the right time. This explains why there is no definitive list of characteristics that describes all leaders."* p. 13

"While two leaders may have identical expectations, the way they reach their goals is always dependent on the unique arrangement of their strengths." p. 26

"The chances of employees being engaged at work when they do not trust the company's leaders are just 1 in 12. In stark contrast, the chances of employees being engaged at work are better than 1 in 2 if they trust the organization's leadership – a more than sixfold increase." p. 83

"One challenge is that our ability to progress in our career is often determined by our effectiveness in responding to near-term needs. When high value is placed on solving these kinds of problem, it creates a culture in which leaders spend little or no time thinking about what could be done because they receive more accolades for simply doing what needs to be done." p. 90

"Leaders stay true to who they are – and then make sure they have the right people around them." p. 93