Strengths-Based Development: Leadership's Role

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Story Highlights

- Strengths-based organizations need commitment from leadership
- Strengths enhance business outcomes and employees' personal lives
- Leaders need to adopt a holistic strengths focus in their companies

This is the first article in a seven-part series.

Gallup's global study of companies that have implemented strengths-based management practices found that 90% of the groups studied had performance increases at or above the following ranges:

- 10% to 19% increased sales
- 14% to 29% increased profit
- 3% to 7% higher customer engagement
- 6% to 16% lower turnover (low-turnover organizations)
- 26% to 72% lower turnover (high-turnover organizations)
- 9% to 15% increase in engaged employees
- 22% to 59% fewer safety incidents

Even at the low end, these are impressive gains. In working with hundreds of organizations, Gallup uncovered the characteristics common among companies that accomplished the most with their strengths interventions. These companies often work toward creating a strengths-based culture using seven strategies. This article focuses on the first of these seven strengths strategies: leadership alignment.

Strengths Need to Start With Leadership

When leaders make strengths-based development a priority for their organizations, their decision-making authority helps the company make larger, faster strides toward strengths outcomes. Leadership alignment determines employee commitment, and only leaders have the authority and influence to create a strengths-based culture where employees incorporate strengths into all they do.

Best Practices for Leaders

After decades of strengths research, Gallup understands how leaders of top strengths-based organizations help their companies achieve the best outcomes. Here are their key strategies:

- **Show employees the bigger picture.** Strengths don't just benefit companies; individuals who use their strengths each day lead happier, more fulfilling lives, realizing outcomes such as lower stress, higher energy and greater job satisfaction. It's up to leaders to connect the dots, opening employees' eyes to how strengths enhance not only the business, but also their personal lives and customers' experiences.
- **Take strengths beyond the office.** Gallup finds that leaders of the highest-performing strengths-based organizations often naturally incorporate strengths into their professional and social networks, communities and personal lives. When leaders use strengths in their day-to-day lives, they amass a deeper understanding of how to take advantage of and integrate strengths throughout the company. Further, these leaders demonstrate their unwavering commitment to strengths, garnering greater employee dedication.

- **Put strengths in their own words.** The best strengths-based organizations make strengths their own, putting concepts into words that make perfect sense in their culture. Effective leaders make strengths concepts look, sound and feel natural to their employees so that workers perceive initiatives as internal strategies and take responsibility for increasing success.

- **Focus on individual and company strengths.** The top strengths-based leaders develop their business strategies in terms of their company's strengths -- what sets them apart from the competition and in customers' eyes. These leaders play to their company's strengths, ensuring that employees understand not only their individual strengths, but also the company's competitive differentiators and how to use them to develop the business.

- **Keep track.** Gallup found that the best strengths-based leaders often keep strengths a priority throughout their company by holding themselves accountable for continuously using strengths concepts in their conversations and communications. These leaders make strengths the basis of employee recognition at companywide meetings and hold managers accountable for focusing on employees' strengths.

- **Make strengths a long-term strategy.** When leaders treat the strengths approach as a one-time or short-term initiative, it isn't nearly as powerful. Leaders who get the most out of their strengths interventions don't view strengths as just another company initiative -- they rally their entire company around strengths, committing to strengths as a long-term strategy.

For organizations seeking to improve performance on crucial business outcomes, strengths-based development is a proven solution. Leaders who adopt a holistic strengths focus and employ multiple tactics to make strengths their company's modus operandi realize the greatest positive business results.

*The next article in this series will focus on the role of managers in building strengths-based organizations.*

*Bailey Nelson contributed to this article.*

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