6 Powerful Steps to Achieve Outstanding Performance

GO PUT YOUR STRENGTHS TO WORK

(Marcus Buckingham/Free Press/March 2007/320 Pages/$30.00)
GO PUT YOUR STRENGTHS TO WORK

6 Powerful Steps to Achieve Outstanding Performance

MAIN IDEA
What percentage of your average work day do you spend doing those things which play to your personal strengths?

When more than two million people answered this question, it was found only about 17-percent of people were able to answer that they spend the majority of their work days playing to their strengths. Everyone else seem to get sidetracked into activities which are unavoidably nonproductive. And this is despite the fact numerous studies of effective organizations have shown great achievers focus on capitalizing on their strengths rather than worrying about fixing their weaknesses.

The challenge is to find more ways to put your strengths to work every day. It might sound impossible given your work constraints, but almost two people out of ten are already managing to do that. To join their ranks, there are six steps you need to take every day:

1. Bust the myths – get your mind-set right
2. Clarify what are your personal strengths in vivid detail
3. Find workable ways to free up your strengths
4. Navigate away from activities that play to weaknesses
5. Speak up so others know what your strengths are
6. Build strong habits so you stay in the driver’s seat

About of Author
MARCUS BUCKINGHAM is the owner of his own consulting, training and e-learning company. After spending seventeen years with the Gallup Organization conducting research into workplace performance, Mr. Buckingham has become an author, researcher and speaker. He is the coauthor of First, Break All the Rules and Now,
Discover Your Strengths. Mr. Buckingham speaks in person to more than 250,000 people around the world each year. He is a graduate of Cambridge University.

There are three myths which persist in the world of business, each of which has the potential to drain your personal effectiveness if you believe them:

1. **Myth:** As you grow, your personality will change over time. This is interwoven into the fabric of popular culture to such a degree around 66-percent of people believe it. Everyone loves the story of Scrooge in Charles Dicken’s A Christmas Carol who started off as grumpy and ended up as a totally generous and well-rounded individual.

   **The Reality:** As you grow and mature, you actually end up becoming more of who you already are.

   The truth is A Christmas Carol was just a nice story. As you get older, you don’t suddenly morph into someone entirely different. You don’t magically change your personality and take on strengths which were never there before. In real life, what you do early in your life is actually a pretty reasonable indicator of what you will achieve later in life as well. Your parents have more than likely had a pretty fair idea of what your strengths are since you were about five years old. The truth is:
As you get older, you’re probably going to get better at the things you’re already good at because you will enjoy practicing and honing these skills.

With time, you’re probably going to become a little more graceful and generous but your basic competitive instincts will still remain pretty much intact.

While life is a journey and you will hopefully make good progress, it’s extremely unlikely you will suddenly branch out into new areas which run counter to your current personal preferences. Instead, you’re far more likely to do more of the things you’re already good at.

It’s quite true we are adaptive by nature. All of us can get better at things if they are important enough. But that does not suddenly mean valleys become peaks. It simply means the valleys become less steep and the peaks become a little more evened out.

2. Myth: You will grow the most in the areas where you’re weakest.

Around 61-percent of people believe this. Indoctrination in this myth starts in school. Most parents look at an F on a report card and tell their child they need to do something about that at length while they just gloss over all the As and Bs which are also there. The egalitarian concept that everyone should be well rounded and competent in everything runs deep in society.

The Reality: You will always find growing in your areas of greatest strength to be easiest and the most fun.

Contrary to popular wisdom, trying to get better at something you’re weak at is very hard work. By contrast, improving on what you already do well will be lots of fun and quite engaging. Because of your optimism and enthusiasm, you’ll leap forward when you’re operating in an area of personal strength. And if you’re doing something your peers value highly, you’re even more likely to be passionate about excelling in your areas of greatest strength. If you’re aware enough as a teenager to skew your activities towards your strengths, you’re laying a solid foundation for exceptional performance in the future.

3. Myth: Good team members do whatever it takes to help the team excel, even if they don’t like it.

91-percent of people believe they should subordinate their own personal preferences for the good of their team. Flexibility and adaptability are much spoken about in glowing terms in the business world with the result most people believe they should be unselfish to a fault.

The Reality: Good team members volunteer their strengths to a team the majority of the time so they can be effective contributors, and not merely dead wood.

Smart team members want to be contributors. The best way to achieve that is for you to identify where your strengths lie and then figure out how to allow your team to take advantage of what you have to offer as much as possible. If everyone on the team can seek out others who specialize in one aspect of the project or another, the team can become highly competent and well rounded, even if some of the individual team members
members themselves are less so. When a group of people work together to take full advantage of each other’s strengths, impressive things can and will happen.

Now admittedly it’s hard to get a team to function smoothly in the real world, but if people don’t take their own strengths seriously it becomes virtually impossible. It’s only when people are quite open about their individual strengths and weaknesses that it becomes feasible for the team leader to do things which will navigate towards strengths and away from areas of weakness. Good team members are not well rounded individually but they belong to a team which has a well rounded set of skills and competencies to use.

“There’s your journey toward living a strong life will be challenging enough. It will be nigh on impossible if you haven’t first convinced yourself that it’s a journey worth making. And the same applies to the people you work with. ‘Play to your strengths’ sounds so commonsensical that, when you say it, everyone happily nods his assent. And yet, most of us really don’t believe that we can live our life this way. To make this ‘sense’ more commonly held, you’re going to have to do your part in persuading those around you to see the wisdom of it.”

– Marcus Buckingham

The Six Steps in Putting Your Strengths to Work

2. Clarify what are your personal strengths in vivid detail

Your personal strengths are those specific activities which you do consistently well to world-class or near-perfect standard. If you are to have any hope of pushing more of your time towards your strengths, you need to clarify what specific real-world activities constitute your strengths. This isn’t as hard as it sounds because normally your strengths will be those activities you know you’re already good at and which you passionately love to do.

Your personal strengths will be a unique combination of:

• Your talents – what you find innately easy to do.
• Your skills – what you have learned to do well.
• Your know-how – the activity knowledge you have acquired.

There are four telltale signs of a personal strength which you can evaluate for yourself by considering a few key questions:
Simply put, your strengths will be those activities which actually make you feel strong when you do them. And equally, feelings of weakness will come to the fore when you’re doing things you’re not good at. As human beings, we naturally gravitate towards activities where our Is (instincts), Gs (growth) and Ns (needs) drive our Ss (successes). World-class success is not usually driven by diligent practice but just comes easily to those who have innate personal strengths in that field.

The best judge of your personal strengths is you. Only you can identify which activities you love and which you loath or do merely to get paid. Only you can tell which activities make you feel stronger inside and which activities make you feel weaker. Only you will know which activities you’re drawn to and thoroughly enjoy doing so much you happily volunteer to do them. If you can capture your internal reactions to different activities and then do more of what you feel best at, outstanding performance can and will follow.

If you’re like most people, however, you probably get so busy doing stuff you never really take the time to figure out where your personal strengths lie. If that’s the case, try keeping a running strengths and weaknesses log. This isn’t difficult. Just take two pieces of paper and head them up like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>= SUCCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I have been very successful at this activity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other people tell me I do this exceptionally well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I have rewards or recognition for doing this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>= INSTINCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I like to do this activity every day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I find myself volunteering to do this often.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This activity I perform by gut reaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G</th>
<th>= GROWTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I learn how to do this better very rapidly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I find myself thinking about this each day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I can’t wait to learn how to do this better.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>= NEEDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I always look forward to being able to do this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I consider doing this fun, not work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I derive personal satisfaction from doing this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whenever you complete an activity you feel very good about, pause and record what you specifically were doing when you felt strong.

Try and write down two or three statements which describes what you feel good about doing in bright and vivid detail.

Capture those activities where you feel your best – when you are innovative, resilient and highly focused.

Keep in mind what you write down is important for you and not anybody else. Try and write down what moves you without giving any thought to what anyone else will think.

Be specific. What you write will have more punch if you go into some detail.

Once you have a clearer picture of what you do best, you can then try and structure your week to do more of what you excel at and less of what you’re weak at. Imagine what your week will be like if you can fill it with your strong activities. You’ll feel invigorated rather than run down. You’ll feel like your creativity has been supercharged. You’ll achieve more than you would ever have thought possible.

Many people look for some external verification of their strengths. The problem with that is nobody else can tell you what you’re feeling when you do something. Nobody else can state whether you’re exhilarated by an activity or bored to tears. Others can judge the quality of your output but they will have no idea what paths your thoughts are taking. So trust your own assessments, even if they feel highly subjective. Nobody else can do a better job.

“Your challenge in the months and years to come can be summed up in the question: ‘How can I play to my strengths a little more this week than I did last week?’”

– Marcus Buckingham

“The most dominant themes of your personality will remain constant across time and situations. But these talents will manifest themselves differently according to the particular circumstances you’re facing. Over the years, you will be asked to take on new responsibilities. The danger is that you will allow your weeks to fill with activities that do
not invigorate you. To combat this danger, twice a year pick a week and capture your emotional reactions to the activities of the week. To seize control of your time at work, you have to know what your targets are, what you want to push your time towards. This twice-a-year process will set your targets.”

– Marcus Buckingham

The Six Steps in Putting Your Strengths to Work

3. Find workable ways to free up your strengths

Armed with knowledge of your personal strengths, it’s now up to you to make them relevant to your job. In practice, this usually means volunteering for teams where your strengths can find full expression. Nobody else is going to have as much interest in doing those things which harness your strengths as passionately as you do so take charge and become very proactive in positioning yourself advantageously.

Once you understand what your personal strengths are in better detail, there are five distinct strategies you should consider employing.

1. Identify exactly where each of your strengths helps you in your current role – and then find practical ways to squeeze more of what is working into each day. You’re probably already using your strengths at times and the aim here is to systematically extend those periods. Take stock of where and how you’re presently using your strengths and think about what can be done to maximize those periods.

2. Identify and find the opportunities to leverage your strengths in your current role that you’re missing – and do something about it. You can be certain there will be some missed opportunities there which nobody is specifically stopping you from taking but you’ve never got around to it. Or you may be able to arrange to avoid doing things which require you to spend an inordinate amount of time not using your strengths. If that’s the case, get into action.

3. Learn new skills and techniques which will have the effect of sharpening each of your strengths – so they become more prominent and noteworthy. Perhaps you will benefit from some focused learning and training which will enhance your strengths. Identify some specific skills, sharpen them up and then convince your boss to let you employ those newly enhanced skills. This will earn you a reputation as someone who is not prepared to rest on your laurels but who wants to keep learning and improving.

4. Build your current job and align it more towards your strengths – by making your skills much more central to your overall job description. The organization you work for will always be interested in better, cheaper or more productive ways to get things done. Come up with some creative and new ideas which just happen to allow you to practice your strengths more of the time. This has the potential to be a win-win for both you and your boss. If you can provide measurable proof what you’re suggesting will add to the organization’s bottom line, your boss has to at least entertain the idea, doesn’t he
or she?

5. Leave your current job and seek another position where you can better leverage your strengths – which is basically your strategy of last resort. It really shouldn’t come to this but if the situation is extreme and warrants it, then you really should be willing to leave your current job and seek something better. Make this your last option. Pursue all the other strategies first and more than likely you’ll end up being pleasantly surprised but if push comes to shove and your boss just won’t work in with you, then leave and find something better. The world beckons for those who know what they are good at and who have learned how to be highly productive.

The first four strategies for putting your strengths to work can be summarized in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>= FOCUS ON HOW THIS STRENGTH HELPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• When do I get to use this strength at work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How often do I use this strength?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How has this strength proven helpful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What feedback have I received about this strength?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>= RELEASE, FINDING MISSED OPPORTUNITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What new situations would use this strength more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can I change my work schedule to include those?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What new systems would amplify this strength?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who can I talk to about accessing these systems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can I track how much I use this strength?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can this help my other job responsibilities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>= EDUCATE, LEARNING NEW SKILLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What new skills would allow me to leverage this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What actions can I take to learn those skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who can I job shadow to learn these skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who can I confide in to help me become better?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>= EXPAND, BUILD AROUND YOUR STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can I share this strength with others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• When do these sharing opportunities arise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can I make better use of my strengths?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you get stumped for ideas on how best to find ways to free up your strengths, try going through these questions with a friend. They may be able to help you drill down a little bit more and come up with some concrete answers. Talking to a friend will also be helpful if you let yourself off the hook too readily. The scrutiny of a friend who knows you well may challenge you because they will be expecting the best. If you do decide to go with this peer review idea, there are a few things you need to tell your friend before you get started:

- Tell your friend it’s OK to say no to any of the questions – because if they don’t stimulate any ideas, that’s fine. You don’t have to tick every box.

- Ask your friend to grill you on specifics rather than let you get away with generalities. Get them to push you to articulate tangible actions rather than vague commitments. Your friend should spend a lot of time saying, “Yes, that sounds great, but what specifically are you going to do?”

- Explain that you’re enlisting your friend’s aid to enhance your own performance and rise above the daily grind. He or she will probably relate to what you’re doing and may want you to reciprocate. Be prepared to do so. If your friend knows you well, he or she will push you. That’s exactly what you need to grow and ultimately excel.

The most effective way to establish a new and improved routine is to orient your weekly planner towards maximization of time spent harnessing your strengths. A week is a good time to plan for this because it allows you to get down to some specifics. If you can have a “strong week” – meaning a week where a substantial proportion of your time is used up harnessing your strengths productively – you have a very powerful weapon in your battle to make maximum use of your strengths.

It should only take about 15-minutes to plan your week. The steps to go through are:

- Start by thinking about what percentage of your time last week was spent playing to your strengths. Draw a simple pie chart and then come up with what percentage of your time you used that way.

- Next try and predict how much time in the coming week you will spend playing to your strengths. Admittedly this is only your own assessment but focus on getting progressively better at doing this week by week.

- Identify two specific actions you will take in the coming week to free up more time for playing to your strengths. These two actions need to be specific and won’t probably be earth shattering but they should have the effect of creating more time to be productive.

- Finally, identify two actions which you need to take in order to stop spending so much time on activities which do not play to your strengths. Again, go into specifics. Don’t put anything down you are not actually prepared to do. Remember you’re trying to create some momentum so think through what you can cease doing which is not helpful and then commit to going out and doing precisely that.

- Do this every week, year after year.
“You need to establish in your life a specific routine or regimen that is straightforward enough for you to do regularly but meaty enough to keep your time at work centered on and moving continually toward your strengths. You don’t need this routine because, lacking it, your strengths would shut off and stop working for you. Your strengths represent a constant and irrepressible force that demands expression. You need it because the world at large cannot be trusted to channel this force for you. The world is not concerned with you and your strengths as is as likely to encourage you to let your strengths run free as it is to place obstacles in your way; or tempt you down the wrong paths, paths that lead to confusion, frustration.”

– Marcus Buckingham

“There’s magic in the seven days of a week. When you are asked to plan for the next year, you may manage to define a few carefully calibrated goals: what you will get done. But you rarely take it down to the level of specific activities: what you will actually be doing. Even a month is too long a time frame to wrap your head around. Whereas, at the other extreme, days, hours and minutes are too disjointed to provide you any real momentum. Only a week strikes the perfect practical and psychological note. There’s just something quintessentially useful about the scale of a week. The seven-day week is one of the best weapons you have in your battle to build your entire life around your strengths.”

– Marcus Buckingham

“You might think others will disapprove of your trying to get better at things you’re good at, but the opposite may well turn out to be true. You’ll earn a reputation as someone who’s not satisfied with his current level of performance which is not a bad thing.”

– Marcus Buckingham
Once you know for certain which types of activities weaken you and dilute your overall performance, you can then take some tangible steps to stop them before they impact on your work. The more toxic activities you rid yourself of every day the greater the control you will gain over your life.

The clearest signs of a weakness are:

• You will have a definite lack of success in that area.
• Your instincts will be to avoid that activity as far as possible.
• You won’t be interested in trying to improve your performance.
• You won’t feel any sense of achievement on completion.

There are four strategies you can and should use to try and stop your weaknesses from getting in the way of great achievements:

1. Stop doing the activity all together – and see if anyone important notices or even cares. Now admittedly you don’t want to get fired for doing this but it’s amazing how often nobody will even notice you’ve stopped doing something. With a bit of luck, you may well find the same kind of phenomena occurs when you stop doing whatever you don’t like. Most organizations are better at starting things than they are at terminating activities that no longer are needed. See if what you dread doing is a time waster that can safely be dropped without any problems.

2. Buddy up with someone who likes doing the activity you hate – and let them be strengthened by doing the very thing that weakens you. Of course, you’ll have to find someone who has distinctly different tastes and preferences to your own but that shouldn’t be difficult. If you can find just such a person and negotiate some kind of trade they will value, you can achieve a very powerful win-win situation for both of you.

3. Focus on one of your strengths – and gradually try to steer your job more towards your strength and less towards your weakness. Organizations always gravitate to whatever adds the most value. If you can keep so busy adding value by doing the things that you’re strong at that you have no time to do the things you hate, who will complain? Everyone agrees time and resources are limited and should always be directed where they will do the most good.
4. Try changing your perspective – and see whether your weakness looks better from a different point of view. This may be as simple as changing the time of day when you do this activity. Some people like to do their weakest activity later in the day when they feel strong and invigorated. Others will prefer getting the weak jobs out of the way as soon as possible. If changing the time of day doesn’t help, try and establish mental links between your weaker tasks and your personal strengths. For example, if you hate developing budgets but like being viewed as a team player, focus on how developing a new budget will ultimately help the team. Change your perspective.

These four strategies for navigating away from your weaknesses can be summarized in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STOP DOING THIS ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is this activity critical to my job success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is there any way I can stop doing this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If I can’t stop it, can I reduce the time I do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who can I talk to in order to make this happen?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAM UP WITH OTHERS TO STRENGTHEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Who do I work with who really likes this activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can I somehow swap activities with that person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who could teach me how to do this task better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I make this more fun to do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFER TO STEER YOUR JOB TO STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Which of my strengths are in use with this activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I volunteer to use those strengths?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVE WEAKNESS FROM OTHER VIEWS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How can I change my perspective about this task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Would it help to do this at a different time of day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I apply my strength in doing this better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can doing this enhance one of my strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I connect this with something I love?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“To paraphrase the great military strategist Sun Tzu: Keep your strengths close and your weaknesses closer. You want to keep them close because what you don’t know can hurt you. Like enemies, weaknesses are more dangerous when they are quietly corrupting your work and life. By becoming intimate with the activities that weaken you
and labeling them for what they are, you can take steps to stop their rotten work.”

– Marcus Buckingham

“Activities that weaken you are like dirty time bombs, waiting to spread their cloud into your strength time – time you could be spending on activities that make you feel strong. By identifying these toxic activities and naming them, you’ll be able to recognize them the moment they appear and either navigate around them or suffer through them for only a finite amount of time. In effect, you can shut them up in a lead box and neutralize them. Itemized, close, safe.”

– Marcus Buckingham

“The most useful definition of a weakness is an activity that makes you feel weak. It’s an activity that, no matter how proficient you may (or may not) be at it, consistently produces negative emotional reactions.”

– Marcus Buckingham

“Unlike the activities which strengthen you – which, as you would predict, fill you up with feelings of satisfaction and power – activities that weaken you seem to defy physics. They manage to fill an emptiness with a greater feeling of void. And this void is not neutral. It feels like loss, like the opposite of winning. This is one of the reasons why it’s so important to take steps to cut out your weaknesses.”

– Marcus Buckingham

Don’t be shy about telling others your strengths and your weaknesses. It’s vital that you have a my-strengths-and-my-weaknesses conversation with your manager. You should also have the same conversation with your peers so when project responsibilities are divvied up, they have a feel for where you can contribute the most. If you are to have any real hope of maximizing the amount of time you spend in areas of personal strength, you need to excel at having these conversations with bosses and coworkers. Learn how to talk about your strengths without bragging and to talk about your weaknesses without whining.

The essence of this step is speaking up so you can get practical help and assistance from your manager. Of course you want to do this in a way which lets you come across as a responsible person looking for ways to contribute more rather than as an egomaniac looking for praise. The key is to convince your boss that you want to make his or her life a little bit easier.
This approach requires a touch of boldness rather than tiptoeing around the issues. If you want to reach an outstanding level of performance, you'll need to be quite open and direct about what you're trying to achieve. The best approach is generally not to try and accomplish everything in one foul swoop. Instead, you want to have a series of four conversations along these lines:

**Conversation #1**  
The strengths chat

Note this is not a “performance review”, a “goal-setting session” or anything like that. Instead, it is just a casual conversation to sharpen up your own conclusions about what you're good at. You may not even have this conversation with your boss if he or she doesn’t know you all that well personally. All you want to do in this conversation is:
- Articulate what you see as your first strength.
- Give two or three examples of applying that strength.
- Explain how that strength helps your work performance.
- Repeat for two more strengths.

All you want to check here is that you can explain yourself adequately. It is not necessary to get the listener’s approval or agreement with what you're saying.

**Conversation #2**  
The “How can I help you?” chat

This conversation is with your manager. Pick just one of your strengths and describe to your boss how you can exploit that strength to advance a project or improve a specific performance outcome. Then ask directly if you can increase the amount of time you spend working on activities that draw on your strength so you can contribute more. If your manager agrees, you can then discuss whatever timelines and milestones to set together.

Note this meeting should be brief and focused around just one single strength. That’s all you want to discuss at this stage. Keep it brief and tightly focused.
Conversaçao #3: As falhas

Esta conversação é com o seu gerente, se você o conhece pessoalmente ou com uma pessoa próxima que se preocupa com você e com o seu sucesso. Como você já sabia, esta conversação tem o objetivo de ajudá-lo a esclarecer sua perspectiva e aprender a expressar-se de um modo mais do que apenas pedindo feedback. A estrutura da conversação é similar:

• Identifique sua principal falha pessoal.
• Identifique duas ou três falhas claras de que você se arrepende.
• Quantifique o impacto desta falha em sua performance.
• Repita este processo para duas ou mais falhas.

Ao final desta conversação, você deve ficar mais confiante de sua habilidade de expressar seus sentimentos de forma mais clara e concisa no futuro.

Conversaçao #4: Como posso ajudá-lo

Antes de organizar esta reunião com seu gerente, a primeira coisa que você tem que fazer é identificar sua principal falha que distrai sua atenção. Em seguida, pense nas maneiras pelas quais você pode minimizar este problema. Ao iniciar a reunião, você precisa lembrar ao gerente que você mencionou anteriormente e explicar como você gostaria de encontrar uma maneira de gastar menos tempo em atividades que são ineficientes, ao mesmo tempo em que pode encontrar mais tempo para fazer as coisas que realmente importam. Explique suas ideias e peça seu feedback. Se tudo der certo, você deve ser capaz de pensar em uma maneira colaborativa que permita que você obtenha resultados maiores. Depois disso, você precisará aceitar algumas ações, cronogramas e objetivos.

Admitidamente, essas conversações não são exatamente algo que você precisa aprender, mas seguindo esta estrutura, você será capaz de descobrir como descrever suas falhas sem parecer como uma criança reclamando. Espero que, ao final das conversações, se sinta mais confiável e capaz de coordenar melhor o caminho que deve seguir. As falhas são um elemento importante de crescimento pessoal.

“Para atingir níveis de desempenho extraordinários, você precisa parar de ficar andando. Você deve aprender..."
how to express – using unambiguous words and examples – what strengthens you and what weakens you. If you don’t know how to have these conversations, there’ll always be a limit to how much you’ll redirect your time at work toward your strengths and away from your weaknesses. You’ll push and push, but, lacking other people’s understanding and support, you’ll keep bumping up against the rigid walls of your job description, their job descriptions, and your manager’s boxes on his organizational chart.”

– Marcus Buckingham

“We need to learn how to take our existing job and each week, reshape it around our strengths – even in the face of interference from the world around us. To do this, we need to master a new discipline, one that brings order and focus to a series of incremental moves. Put this discipline into practice each week, and we will gradually, degree by degree, tilt the playing field so that the best of our job becomes most of our job. We must stay clearheaded enough to keep our weeks intentionally tilted towards the invigorating activities and away from the others.”

– Marcus Buckingham

The Six Steps in Putting Your Strengths to Work

Build strong habits so you stay in the driver’s seat

To stay in the zone where your strengths can come to the fore, you need to be clear-headed. You need to build good habits which will allow you to stay in control week-in and week-out. This is the only way you will have any chance of continuing to push towards activities which strengthen you and avoid those other activities which will only weaken you.

There are five habits which you must develop in order to keep positioning yourself so you can put your strengths to work as consistently as possible. These habits are:

Habit #1

Every Day

Read through your strengths statements and your weaknesses statements. Keep these fixed so clearly in your mind you can recite them word perfect from memory. These statements won’t mean anything to anyone else but you so embed them into your thinking each day. Try and think more about how you can be more productive, more creative and more resilient each day.
Habit #2
Every Week

Start with a quick planning session. Look at how you went in the past week and plan out how to make the upcoming week as close to an ideal week as possible. Identify the two specific actions you will take to try and leverage your strengths in the coming week. Also pinpoint the two actions you’ll take to minimize weaknesses. Make working to take maximum benefit of your strengths a habit which calls upon the very best you have to offer.

Habit #3
Every Quarter

Schedule a brief conversation with your manager about your strengths. Identify three tangible achievements where you were successful in harnessing your strengths or minimizing the effect of your weaknesses. Discuss these openly and candidly. In effect, what you’re doing here is closing the books on your strengths in the same way a company closes the books on its financial performance each quarter. You will have done lots and lots of different things over the past three months and it’s important to clarify and preserve in your mind the progress you’re making. In doing this, you also lay a foundation for deciding how and what you will contribute in the next quarter. Both you and your manager will benefit from having this conversation every three months so get into the habit. Ideally, you want to be in a position where your boss is expecting this little chat every three months. Don’t disappoint.
Habit #4

Every Six Months

Twice a year you should capture what changes are taking place in your career. Set aside a week where you update your strengths and weaknesses statements. Look carefully at what new experiences and assignments you can ask for at work. Be inquisitive about how you can experiment and grow your career. Track how you're growing and advancing your career in these twice a year evaluations.

Habit #5

Every Year

Once a year, evaluate your strengths systematically. Develop a metric you can use year after year so you can measure whether or not you're moving in the right direction. Let this movement serve as a leading indicator of your future performance and contribution. Pay attention to where you're at each year and keep track of your personal performance.

"The effective executive builds on strengths – their own strengths, the strengths of superiors, colleagues, subordinates; and on the strengths of the situation."

– Peter Drucker, management consultant

"While there are many good levers for engaging people and driving performance – levers such as selecting for talent, setting clear expectations, praising where praise is due, and defining the team’s mission – the master lever is getting each person to play to his strengths. Pull this lever, and an engaged and productive team will be the result. Fail to pull it, and no matter what else is done to motivate the team, it’ll never fully engage. It will never become a high performance team."

– Marcus Buckingham

"The most competitive companies, just like the most competitive countries, get their strengths together and make their weaknesses irrelevant."

– Peter Drucker, management consultant

“I believe that you have distinct strengths. I believe that no one has quite the same configuration of strengths as you. I believe that you will be at your most productive, creative, focused, generous, and resilient when you figure out how to play to your
strengths most of the time. And I believe that when you do, your customers, your colleagues, your company and you will win. Everyone will win. But in the end, it doesn’t much matter what I believe. It matters only what you believe. So let tomorrow be a different day than today. Let tomorrow be a stronger day than today. Let tomorrow begin with your asking yourself ‘What are my strengths, and how can I contribute them today?’ And let every day thereafter begin the same way. You’ve always known what your strengths are. You’ve always known what lies within you. So trust your strengths, be proud of them, and take your stand.”

– Marcus Buckingham

[세계 베스트셀러(NBS) 서비스는 영문의 경제·경영 및 정치·사회의 베스트셀러, 스테디셀러의 핵심 내용을 간략하게 정리한 요약(Summary) 서비스입니다. 영문 서비스는 단순히 서적을 소개하거나 광고를 위한 Book Review가 아니라 세계의 베스트셀러 도서의 핵심을 체계적으로 정리한 도서 정보로서, 이 서비스를 통해 세계의 정·경제·문화의 흐름을 빠르게 파악할 수 있습니다. 세계 지도층이 읽는 세계 베스트셀러 도서를 가장 빠르고 효과적으로 접해보시기 바랍니다.]