

SMART SEQUEL IN THE 'STRENGTH MOVEMENT'

Go Put Your Strengths to Work: 6 Powerful Steps to Achieve Outstanding Performance

By Marcus Buckingham
(Free Press, 320 pp., \$30)

Reviewed by Darin Painter



Many business leaders and trainers assume excellence is the opposite of failure, and that a deeper understanding of one can bring about a similar understanding of the other. That's why organizations study unhappy customers to learn about contented ones, and managers responsible for performance reviews probe employees' weaknesses to learn how to make them excel.

That's "bloody crazy, chaps," British-born Marcus Buckingham might say. Widely considered one of the world's leading authorities on employee productivity, the Cambridge-educated author and speaker believes companies are much better off when they focus on cultivating employees' strengths rather than improving their weaknesses. Armed with perspective from his 17 years as a lead researcher with the Gallup Organization, Buckingham developed that idea with co-author Donald O. Clifton in a trio of bestselling books: *First, Break All the Rules* (1999); *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001); and *The One Thing You Need to Know* (2005).

Those books confirmed Buckingham as a leader in the positive psychology

"strength movement," which asserts a premise that flies in the face of conventional training and development: that the only thing people learn from mistakes is the characteristics of mistakes. Study unproductive teams, the author notes, and you soon will discover that teammates argue a lot. But study successful teams, and you'll discover they argue just as much. To find the secrets of a great team, you have to investigate what's going on between the arguments.

To find sharp, practical advice for achieving outstanding performance on the job, you have to read what's inside *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*, an articulate, introspective, 320-page book that reads like a sequential, how-to plan for maximizing your strong suits.

The book is a business sequel, but unlike so many of them, it doesn't gloss over the critical premise of its predecessors—that readers must first determine their true strengths. Using an ID printed on the inside back of the book jacket, readers begin by taking a 15-question online survey that measures their success on 34 themes of talent and yields a Strengths Engagement Track (SET) score that reveals how engaged they are with their strengths.

From that clever starting point, the book's structure is smart and entertaining, as it moves readers through a six-step (or six-week) experience that focuses on one main question: How can readers actually apply their strengths for maximum success at work? Mixing

compelling research with interesting case studies and anecdotes, Buckingham shows them how to seize control of their assets and essentially rewrite their job descriptions under the noses of their bosses.

Some positive thinking books tutor through hyperbole. *Go Put Your Strengths to Work* shows us "Heidi," who readers see rising through the ranks at a hotel, then experiencing what most employees encounter, such as promotions and setbacks. Readers will identify well with her and other examples of driven, business-savvy, experienced workers who move from burnout to triumph, thanks to embracing the principles, practices, and structured exercises Buckingham describes.

The book's most potent section is Chapter 3 (entitled "Free Your Strengths"), which informs readers why many employees have given up on the notion that they'll be able to showcase their strengths at work. In the chapter, they learn strategies for volunteering skills to teams and become handy with two tools: one that helps them generate ideas about effective ways to contribute and another that puts these ideas into practice. Chapter 5 also is important, as it succinctly describes how and why to approach a manager to talk about the importance of creating a strength-based culture.

Readers who are leery of authors who use acronyms to illustrate concepts might cringe when they learn how to "FREE" themselves to make the most of talents (by Focusing, Releasing, Educating, and Expanding) or how to look for the "SIGNS" of a weakness (analyzing lack of Success, Instinct, Growth, and Needs), but even these parts of the book are replete with insightful examples and engaging interactivity.

Calling Buckingham a positive thinker is an understatement, but labeling him a Polyanna is inaccurate. A few statements he writes are indeed flowery: "Whatever potential your strengths possess, the world will come

to see it, and your performance, and your career and the significance of your contribution will be forever changed." But the book never wavers from being straightforward and pragmatic.

Buckingham's goal is to get readers to not only join the strength movement, but also to do something about it during working hours. His previous books called out a revolutionary concept; this one is a call to action.

Go Put Your Strengths to Work is terrific—worthy of the rare four-cups-of-coffee rating.

Darin Painter is a freelance writer in Cleveland; writingmatters@hotmail.com.

Corporate Training Leader Paradigm Learning Announces New President

Paradigm Learning, a leader in business games, simulations and Discovery Maps® programs, announces the promotion of Robb J. Gomez to company president.



Mr. Gomez, a 12-year veteran of Paradigm, has led the company's efforts as executive vice president of sales.

"His leadership has been critical to Paradigm's growth in the ever-changing training industry," says Raymond Green, cofounder and CEO of Paradigm Learning. "No one knows the company like Robb. He has been involved in every aspect of the business and has proven to be a champion of our learning approach, a strong client advocate, a financially savvy businessperson, and a well-respected leader of Paradigm's employees."

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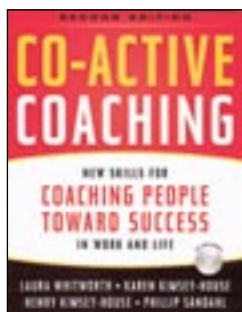
Texts that Teach

**T+D EDITORS EXPLORE THREE NEW GUIDES
FOR COACHES, MANAGERS, AND TRAINERS.**

Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life, Second Edition

By Laura Whitworth, Karen Kimsey-House,
Henry Kimsey-House, Phillip Sandahl
(Davies-Black, 302 pp. with CD, \$39.95)

Coaching means much more today than teaching someone how to bunt or throw a baseball. Coaches are sage advisors for individuals, usually managers, who need steady advice. The book provides a recipe for the necessary ingredients to serve as a business coach.



The best coaches employ a “meta view” whereby they act as an advisor to the client at a safe distance from the actual situation being discussed. Because another individual is relying upon sound advice, coaches have to be models of self-discipline. When personal concerns cause distractions, the best coaches find a way to clear their minds before an appointment or reschedule the meeting altogether.

The authors also say that coaches should use language in a suggestive way that encourages clients to test out solutions for themselves. They should not allow the client to drift into long-winded stories, and they must be ready to inject questions into a conversation without waiting for a pause.

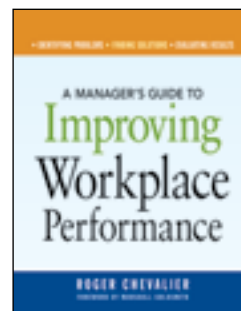
Michael Laff

A Manager's Guide to Improving Workplace Performance

By Roger Chevalier
(AMACOM, 224 pp., \$19.95)

Divided into three sections—developing the team, identifying and removing barriers to performance, and synergy—this book offers a step-by-step approach on how to guide employees to excellence by analyzing their problem areas, developing creative solutions, and implementing change.

Chevalier, who has almost 30 years of experience in employee performance and training, uses case studies and real-life examples to illustrate how to take employees from good to great. This book offers practical solutions for one of the greatest workplace challenges facing managers.



In his conclusion, Chevalier writes, “Never lose track of the fact that you create the work environment for your people. They will either excel or flounder based on the work environment you create with your coaching, leadership, counseling, and team building skills, as well as the way in which you analyze performance gaps and causes, identify and implement solutions, and measure results.”

Paula Ketter

A Practical Guide to Needs Assessment, Second Edition

By Kavita Gupta; updated and expanded by Catherine M. Steezer and Darlene F. Russ-Eft (Pfeiffer and ASTD Press, 336 pp. with CD, \$50)

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Most experts agree that learning, training, and performance improvement initiatives should begin by determining the organization's needs and how to address them. However, there is no consensus on a definition of needs assessment or the best way to conduct one.

This book aims to bring order into chaos by offering basic information for trainers who have little prior knowledge about needs assessment, as well as more sophisticated guidance for experienced practitioners who are facing complex situations. It lays the foundation for needs assessment practice through the details of the process.



This updated edition includes new needs assessment forms, more information on assessment models, examples of various assessment settings from nonprofits to the public sector, new chapters on ethical issues, and frequently asked questions. In a hefty 336-page format, the book is an extensive guide for anyone seeking a systematic approach to conducting needs assessments. Its various real-life case studies and tips add zing to the authors' no-frills, hands-on style.

Jenni Jarventaus



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