What the Best Do Differently: Become a Strengths-Based Culture
Donald O. Clifton

1924-2003
Inventor of the Clifton StrengthsFinder®
and recognized as the Father of
Strengths-Based Psychology by
an American Psychological
Association Presidential
Commendation
Gallup created the science of strengths.

IN FIVE DECADES OF RESEARCH and development, we've studied more than 1 million work teams, conducted tens of thousands of individual interviews and coached even more executives, leaders, managers and employees.

CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER®

THE CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER IS AN online assessment that measures a person's natural talents within 34 themes and then identifies their top themes. By revealing the ways in which each unique individual most naturally thinks, feels and behaves, the assessment can help employees understand and build on the areas in which they have the most potential to grow and succeed.

Our world-famous Clifton StrengthsFinder has helped more than 13 million people discover their strengths and what they do best.

Our bestselling book, StrengthsFinder 2.0, has given millions strategies to develop their natural talents.

*As reported by The Wall Street Journal
Gallup has found that there is infinite potential in developing what is *right* with people versus fixing what’s innately “wrong” with them.

**ALL ORGANIZATIONS WANT TO DEVELOP** their employees’ strengths, but to get there, most follow the conventional wisdom that we must find what’s wrong with people and then attempt to “fix” it. Unfortunately, that common thinking results in a culture of mediocrity and disengagement. Instead, Gallup has found that there is infinite potential in developing what is *right* with people versus fixing what’s innately “wrong” with them. We define *strengths* as the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance in a specific task. And we have repeatedly found that when employees know and use their strengths, the effect on individual, team and organizational performance is spectacular.
Our strengths meta-analysis concretely links strengths-based development to improved business outcomes. Our strengths meta-analysis includes data from:

2.1 million
INDIVIDUALS

20,021
BUSINESS UNITS

45
ORGANIZATIONS

111
COUNTRIES

11
INDUSTRIES
When compared with their peers, employees who receive strengths-based development were found to have:

8%-18% increased performance*

7%-23% higher employee engagement

2%-10% higher customer metrics

20%-73% lower attrition

4%-10% increased citizenship**

*including performance ratings, productivity and sales data
**defined as employee involvement in company-sponsored activities
Similarly, workgroups that received strengths-based development were found to have greater performance outcomes than other workgroups. These teams had:

- **14%-29%** increased profit
- **23%-59%** fewer safety incidents
- **3%-7%** higher customer metrics
- **10%-19%** increased sales
- **6%-72%** lower attrition
There can be wide variation in the return that companies see on their strengths investment, depending on their approach.

**In the case of employee** engagement, for example, Gallup has found that some companies realize a 7% improvement in their engagement scores while other companies achieve as much as a 23% improvement. Why the range? In our experience, it all comes down to the company’s approach.

Some companies put their resources toward one or two strengths interventions, perhaps taking employees through the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment or providing managers with a strengths coaching session. As a result, these companies realize smaller — but still significant — improvements in business outcomes.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are companies that choose to invest in a complete, cohesive strategy for creating and sustaining a strengths-based culture. They have an unrelenting commitment to strengths and weave it into the very fabric of their organization. They target the entire workforce — leaders, managers and employees — and create systems, policies and procedures that support their strengths philosophy. As a result, these companies recognize the greatest gains in their business outcomes.

Gallup has studied and worked with the world’s leading strengths-based companies — those in the top echelon of performance. We’ve taken a quantitative and qualitative approach to understanding what they do differently, investing in a massive research effort but also partnering side-by-side with these organizations to help them put strengths into practical motion. Through this holistic effort we have discovered that the best companies share a few specific and compelling similarities. Most evidently, they have a mutual philosophy about strengths and the value of a strengths-based culture. And they actively pursue that culture through a set of powerful strategies.
Gallup has identified these strategies as:

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<th>Leadership Alignment</th>
<th>Manager Alignment</th>
<th>Internal Communication</th>
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<td>Setting the stage for a strengths-based culture</td>
<td>Developing teams and employees through the lens of strengths</td>
<td>Generating awareness and enthusiasm for strengths</td>
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<td>Tying the organization's strengths-based culture to its larger brand</td>
<td>Focusing development and recognition on employees' strengths</td>
<td>Building a network of strengths experts and advocates</td>
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Using the seven strategies as a guide, Gallup can help your workforce unlock its greatest potential. We are the world's leading authority on strengths and are solely positioned to guide your organization in creating and shaping a strengths-based culture.
Gallup’s Approach

**WHEN STARTING OR EXPANDING ANY** organizational initiative, it’s common for leaders to hear that they need to hit certain milestones by year one, year two and so on. This approach tends to set them up for disaster as change rarely follows such a straight and narrow path.

Gallup believes in meeting your company where it is — and making adjustments as circumstances evolve. Our approach is flexible and designed to guide you through any or all stages of cultural change. But in general, we find that strengths-based cultures are defined and shaped in three phases: discover, embed and sustain.

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<th>1 DISCOVER</th>
<th>2 EMBED</th>
<th>3 SUSTAIN</th>
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<td>Create an understanding of strengths and the principles and philosophies that define a strength-based culture.</td>
<td>Turn strengths into an integral part of individual, team and organizational behavior.</td>
<td>Continuously reinforce and energize strengths-based principles.</td>
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Under each of these phases, Gallup has designed activities to help your company realize and maintain a strengths-based culture. The activities are aimed at the overall organization as well as teams and individuals.
A STRENGTHS-BASED CULTURE HINGES ON leadership alignment. Leaders have to be moving together in the same direction toward the same goal. But alignment also refers to behavior. Leaders should be exhibiting the behaviors they wish to see in employees. They set the stage for change and must be its champions.

Gallup will work with your executives and managers to help them understand what it means for your organization to have a strengths-based culture. We will equip them with the knowledge and tools to set a vision for the future and empower them to bring that vision to life.

Gallup will help your leaders:

• Gain perspective and insight into their individual strengths
• Build solid teams, networks and partnerships
• Engage their followers
• Identify and develop the organization’s next-in-line leaders
• Enhance and sustain the organization’s culture and mission
Once leaders create a plan for a strengths-based culture, it is up to managers to take that plan and make it actionable for their teams and employees. The manager role is vital in helping employees know “what’s in it for me?” and how they connect to the bigger picture. But before those pieces can fall into place, managers need training and education to better understand how to integrate strengths into their management approach. While the Clifton StrengthsFinder works to help employees identify their potential, it is ideally up to the manager to help them maximize that potential.

Gallup will introduce managers to the strengths-based approach and give them the tools to leverage strengths for themselves and for their employees. We will support them in understanding how to use strengths in all aspects of their role from employee development and team formation to goal setting and action planning.

Gallup will help your organization:

• Discover and develop their unique strengths
• Understand and appreciate their employees’ individual strengths
• Define the right outcomes for each employee
• Provide strengths-based feedback and coaching
• Maximize employee and team productivity and performance
Internal Communication

COMMUNICATION ABOUT STRENGTHS IS NEVER a “one and done” event; it requires an ongoing strategy that encompasses multiple audiences, channels and tactics. Employees should receive communication about why their company is beginning or expanding its strengths initiative, but also communication well past any type of launch. Change management succeeds or fails with employee communication. The organization has to set the stage, develop a concrete plan, cascade that plan and stick to it.

Gallup will guide your organization in creating and supporting a fully developed employee communication plan. The fundamental goals of the initial plan will be to educate employees on the foundation of strengths and to generate excitement and enthusiasm for what's happening and what lies ahead. Beyond answering the “why,” the plan will also help employees understand the “how” — how does the initiative relate to the organization’s greater mission and how will it work to help the organization meet its goals? As strengths become part of employees’ day-to-day, Gallup will shift the communication focus to one of maintaining momentum.

Gallup will help your organization:

• Align the workforce around a common vision
• Create powerful messaging that informs, educates and inspires
• Cascade communication to all audiences through all channels
• Consistently explain the “why” and “how”
• Clarify and reinforce your culture and goals
Strengths Community

Companies begin to build a strengths community by helping employees learn about their own strengths and how to make those strengths work within the context of their teams. Employees speak a common strengths language and empower each other to operate from a place of strengths. Naturally, some of these employees will become strengths champions who will help grow and foster that strengths community.

A strengths community is also built in the day-to-day of the organization, in its policies and procedures as well as in the values and rituals that can sometimes be overlooked but go far in keeping strengths visible and relevant. For example, some companies add every employee’s top five strengths to his or her nameplate or ID badge while others may promote their strengths-based culture through a monthly “strengths day.”

Gallup will help your company create a “strengths community” by taking into account all of the factors that define and build a community. We will take employees through the Clifton StrengthsFinder and give them tools to understand their strengths and the strengths of their peers and team members. We will also audit and make recommendations on existing policies and procedures to ensure they reflect strengths-based principles and practices. And we will suggest and implement activities or tactics to promote strengths and make it the “norm.”

Gallup will help your organization:

• Speak a common language of strengths
• Provide every employee with insight into what he or she does best
• Create stronger, more productive teams
• Create enthusiasm and support for strengths through an internal champions network
Performance Management

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS ARE INCREASINGLY BECOMING a topic of debate in the business world. But no matter which direction companies choose to go, employee development will always be warranted and necessary — there can be no debate on that point. Yet, performance management systems are often set up to pinpoint areas of weakness, which doesn’t feel good to employees or managers and rarely works to produce the desired outcomes. In a strengths-based culture, performance management systems are designed to evaluate, reward and develop employees on the basis of what they do best. This focus provides a better path for helping individuals map their goals and career plan.

Gallup will evaluate your company’s current performance management system to determine if and how it might be in conflict with strengths-based principles of employee development. We will then make recommendations on where to make adjustments from a technical or process standpoint. We will also develop a plan to continually educate managers and HR staff on the system, its functionality and its merits.

**Gallup will help your organization:**

- Clarify expectations for managers and employees
- Set clear and meaningful goals for each employee
- Map employees’ careers on the basis of their strengths
- Create a consistent feedback loop
Coaching

COACHES PLAY A VITAL ROLE in a strengths-based culture. They are the on-the-ground strengths experts helping leaders, managers and employees fully develop and apply their strengths. Coaches also help individuals and teams respond to challenges, work with others, accomplish their goals and understand their biases and vulnerabilities. They make strengths real and applicable to individuals in both their personal and professional lives.

Every organization takes its own approach to coaching. Some organizations utilize Gallup's internal coaches or coaches who have been certified by Gallup while others choose a select group of employees to become Gallup-certified strengths coaches. Regardless of which direction your organization decides to go, Gallup will work with you to design a comprehensive coaching plan to meet your needs.

Gallup will help your organization:

- Support all employees in harnessing their strengths
- Transform team dynamics and performance
- Introduce and implement new techniques for managing strengths-based performance
- Create an educated and vibrant community of strengths coaches
Brand Building

A UNIQUE AND COMPELLING CULTURE paves the way for a unique and compelling employee value proposition. It works to attract candidates who care about what the company cares about, and who are naturally a better fit with the organization's purpose and mission.

Culture also provides the basis for the company's brand promise. When that brand promise is interesting and differentiating, it works to attract customers and makes them feel good about the products or services they are buying.

The world's most successful companies understand how to make this culture and brand connection. They share the same messages internally as they do externally, ensuring employees know and support the brand promise, and can deliver on it to customers.

Gallup will guide your organization in using its strengths-based culture to create external messaging that appeals to job candidates and customers. We will partner to develop a complete communication plan to introduce and reinforce your company's strengths-based messaging and set yourself apart from the competition.

Gallup will help your organization:

• Align internal and external messaging
• Give employees the education and tools they need to deliver on the brand promise
• Attract the ideal “fit” in terms of job candidates
• Build a contingent of internal and external brand advocates
• Establish a unique and differentiated brand
CASE STUDY

Positive Work Environment Creates Positive Gains for Manufacturing Company

AFTER A SERIES OF LEADERSHIP changes, a manufacturing company was experiencing a spike in employee attrition among its production teams. Working with Gallup, the manufacturer decided to introduce strengths as a way to create a more positive, productive working environment. Its approach included taking employees through the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment and providing them with coaching to help them understand their strengths.

Today, all employees who join the company take the StrengthsFinder assessment and enroll in the strengths course after their first 90 days. Upon completion, each employee receives a certificate and a strengths jersey emblazoned with his or her No. 1 StrengthsFinder theme. Employees wear their jerseys on Fridays, which is also known as “strengths day” within the company — a day to focus on each employee’s unique contributions to his or her team.

Strengths is also a common topic on the production floor. Each shift change begins with a meeting to discuss how employees can best use their strengths to tackle the day’s tasks. When interpersonal conflicts emerge, managers consult the strengths reports of those involved to help them understand the different dynamics at play. As new projects arise, managers assemble strengths-based teams to collaborate on how to best set up the process and roll it out to production.

The business outcomes that the company has achieved in a short period confirm the success of its strengths-based, engagement-focused approach. Monthly attrition at the company fell from 85% to just 8% over a two-year period. Also in that time, the scrap rate — or amount of defective parts produced — dropped from 35% to about 1% because of workers collaborating proactively to fix problems before defects proliferated.

Further, profitability increased by 233% and productivity jumped 200%, even without increasing the workforce and leading to record revenue gains for the company.
CASE STUDY

Strengths Helps Multinational Retailer Revitalize Employee, Customer Engagement

A MULTINATIONAL RETAIL COMPANY HAD experienced dramatic increases in its employee and customer engagement over a four-year period, but found its growth plateauing. Through a partnership with Gallup, the retailer discovered that its performance management system was actually working against its engagement efforts. Gallup helped the company shift the store management focus away from identifying and fixing weaknesses and toward building a strengths-based culture.

Strengths discussions between employees and managers led to significantly higher levels of employee engagement. Indeed, employees who learned their strengths saw their engagement increase by more than 30 percentile points compared with employees who did not learn their strengths.

In conjunction with the culture change, the client revamped its approach to engaging customers. Employees began offering shoppers personalized knowledge and advice about purchases, installation and repairs to foster stronger customer relationships. The client implemented these changes simultaneously with the strengths program, which presented some challenges in the stores. However, knowing their own strengths and those of their team members helped empower employees to connect with customers in a personal way and to provide the individualized service they needed.

The focus on strengths development and employee engagement accelerated gains associated with the client's new customer strategy. Stores that implemented the new customer strategy alone had sales growth that was an estimated 26% higher than the average store. However, stores that coupled the new customer strategy with the strengths-based focus generated an estimated 66% higher sales growth than the average store.

Indeed, employees who learned their strengths saw their engagement increase by more than 30 percentile points compared with employees who did not learn their strengths.
EVERY ORGANIZATION HAS ITS OWN starting point. Gallup will conduct an audit to understand where your company is in its strengths or development journey. Using the results of the audit, we will then work with your decision makers to determine the activities that are best suited to your company and its resources and objectives. Together, we will design and implement a plan that takes into account each of the strategies and the activities that make the most sense for your company. Once that plan is in motion, Gallup will ensure it is working through continuous conversation and measurement.
Change is Possible

IF THERE IS ONE ABSOLUTE truth that unites the world’s greatest strengths-based cultures, it is this: Change does not happen in a day. Change requires commitment and patience, which can seem daunting in this fast-paced and competitive business world, but the payoff is more than worth it. In a strengths-based organization, employees have the opportunity to do what they do best every day. As a result, they look forward to going to work, achieve more while they are there and stay with their company longer.

Becoming a strengths-based culture is possible. Focusing on what people do right rather than on what they do wrong is not difficult. Once companies get started, they quickly find that it’s a better way to do business, a better way to treat the people who work for them, and a better way to realize the returns they’d been looking for. The key is to be practical and build a strengths-based culture brick by brick. Gallup has helped numerous companies — of all shapes, sizes and needs — get to where they want to be and we can do the same for your workforce. We’ve spent five decades developing and refining the science of strengths and ensuring that organizations can become strengths-based through a pragmatic approach that is above all — achievable.
About Gallup

**GALLUP DELIVERS ANALYTICS AND ADVICE** to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

Gallup works with leaders and organizations to achieve breakthroughs in customer engagement, employee engagement, organizational culture and identity, leadership development, talent-based assessments, entrepreneurship and well-being. Our 2,000 professionals include noted scientists, renowned subject-matter experts and bestselling authors who work in a range of industries, including banking, finance, healthcare, consumer goods, automotive, real estate, hospitality, education, government and business-to-business (B2B).

**Learn More**

Visit Gallup.com to learn more about our client services and global reach. Our website also provides a wealth of information on the most important issues facing leaders and the world today. We continuously update Gallup.com with news stories and opinion pieces focused on our polling, research and client experience.

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For more information about our solutions, please contact Gallup Client Support at 877-425-5871 (U.S.) or +1-402-951-3600 (International), or visit us at Gallup.com.
“We change the world one client at a time through extraordinary analytics and advice on everything important facing humankind.”

JIM CLIFTON, CHAIRMAN AND CEO
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