

# Putting the Strengths-Based Perspective to Work

## An Executive Briefing



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### Summary

- Building a Strengths Culture in Your Organization
- An Introduction to Marcus Buckingham's New Performance Management System
- Case Studies from Winning Companies





## Overview

Nearly every company in the world will tell you, “Our employees are our most valuable assets.” How many companies do you think are actually putting their assets to most productive use? Every CEO knows that more engaged employees lead to better performance, happier customers and higher profits. How many companies do you think are really winning the hearts and minds of their people?

The simple answer to these questions is: “not many.” Study after study has shown that employees are the least understood and most underutilized assets. The majority of employees are either not engaged or actively disengaged at work.

Many companies are not doing what they know they should do, and they are not making good on the promise to deliver the greatest value to their employees, customers and shareholders. In today’s fast-changing marketplace, all companies are pressured to perform at higher levels of innovation, service and speed than ever before. The ability to close this promise-performance gap will make a real difference between winning and losing.

So why is there such a huge gap? More importantly, what can companies do to close the gap?

Every business leader should be asking these two crucial questions. This executive briefing addresses them based on our research working with the world’s leading corporations.

## Building a High-Performance Organization through Individual Strengths

Recent research has convinced us that the promise-performance gap persists because, at the most fundamental level, most companies underutilize the strengths of their people. Strengths are properly defined not simply as activities at which people excel, but also as activities that strengthen people and energize them; activities for which they have a strong appetite.

Based on this definition, the logical acid test of whether a company is using the strengths of its people is this key question: what percentage of your working day do you spend doing things you really like to do? According to our Strength Confidence Index, only 17% of people spend most of their working day doing things they really like to do.

For everyone’s sake, this number needs to be higher. While only an idealist would expect that 70% or 80% of workers would spend most of their time doing things they really like, we believe that 17% is unproductively and unnecessarily low.

So, the question is: how do we “move the needle”? How do we create an environment in which people’s appetites for doing their best work are unleashed every day?

The most critical step toward creating such a strengths-based organization is to find out what stops people from using their strengths at work, and to overcome the barriers, at both the organizational and individual level.



*“The Simply Strengths program provided my organization with a new and unique platform to approach development planning. The result was a more engaged organization. An unexpected benefit for our team, aside from the personal learning and development, was the team-building that occurred as a result of the program.”*

Susan Gambardella  
Central Region Vice President,  
The Coca-Cola Company

Organizationally, many companies have adopted an industrial approach to performance management since the 1950s. To ensure product quality, reduce costs and increase operational efficiency, companies have standardized work processes, codified job requirements and legislated employees’ styles and behaviors. Order, control and consistency have been a higher priority over autonomy, creativity and individuality at many companies. The human resources systems have been focusing on selecting, training, promoting and managing people so that their capabilities and work demands will strongly match. Most of the HR activities have been centering around “filling gaps” and “fixing deficits” rather than capitalizing on employees’ natural differences and strengths.

To be sure, these organizational barriers need to be removed to free up the unique strengths of each employee. In today’s economy, in which innovation, agility and empowerment are the keys to success, companies cannot afford to just fix employees’ weaknesses, because fixing weaknesses only helps people prevent failure, but it never helps them reach excellence. In people’s strengths lie the true opportunities for growth and world-class performance.

Our research, however, has shown that removing organizational barriers is only part of the battle. Removing individual barriers is the other part of the battle—the harder part. Two things stand out from our research:

1. We found that most employees are not even trying to use their strengths at work. Our Strengths Confidence Index shows that only 41% said they would achieve the most by building on their strengths, while 59% said fixing their weaknesses. This data suggests that most people take their strengths for granted, and instead devote most of their energies to the uphill battle of fixing their weaknesses.
2. This fascination with weakness-fixing is reinforced by managers. The same Index reveals that only 25% of managers spend time coaching employees to leverage their strongest talents. Of the remainder, 40% said their manager’s focus was on correcting their flaws, while 35% said that their manager never talked to them about either strengths or weaknesses.

Based on these insights from our research, we believe that building a strengths-based organization begins and ends with the individual. When individuals express the best of themselves at work, they feel most confident, authentic, creative, purposeful, resilient, powerful and strong.

They will make the greatest contribution to their team, company and customers. Everyone will win.

So building a strengths culture in your organization ultimately comes down to one important principle: teaching individuals to seize control of their time at work and tilt the floor degree by degree, day by day toward their strengths and away from their weaknesses.

## An Introduction to Marcus Buckingham's New Performance Management System

It sounds simple. But it's hard work. It's a journey that requires clarity, focus, and deliberate and consistent effort, both individually and organizationally. It requires a new way of managing and improving performance.

First, we have a confession to make. We believe that most of the performance management systems today are overcomplicated, demoralizing and quickly becoming obsolete as the world of work changes so rapidly.

We have been partnering with industry-leading companies such as Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Facebook, and Kohl's, among others, to create a new generation of performance management system. We call it the Simply Strengths Program. This new performance management system is based on the revolutionary insight in Marcus Buckingham's best-selling books, including *First, Break All the Rules, Now, Discover Your Strengths*, *The One Thing You Need to Know* and *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*.

Driven by a simple but profound vision—to “move the needle” so that everybody is spending 75% of their day doing things that strengthen them—the system helps individuals take personal responsibility for claiming your strengths and turning them into great work performance.

### Here's How It Works

The Simply Strengths program engages participants with interactive learning techniques, including a unique short film series, *Trombone Player Wanted*, designed to teach people how to recognize and use their strengths in the workplace. In working with leading companies, we heard repeatedly that for the program to take root, it needed to be



*“Bringing the Simply Strengths program to our company totally changed the way we look at our People Development and Talent Review processes. Attending the workshop has not only helped me implement a strengths-based culture within the company; it has also completely changed the way I operate personally and the way I lead and coach my own team.”*

Debbie Slocum,  
VP Human Resources,  
Husqvarna Construction Products

inspirational, practical, flexible, and simple. So we built these needs and requirements into Simply Strengths. Our program is:

#### Inspirational

*Trombone Player Wanted* takes participants back to childhood to recall “what got you out of bed every day,” to reconnect with their talents and the things they enjoy, and to identify their strengths. Those strengths become the key to understanding how to bring the best of themselves to their work and to their personal lives.

#### Practical

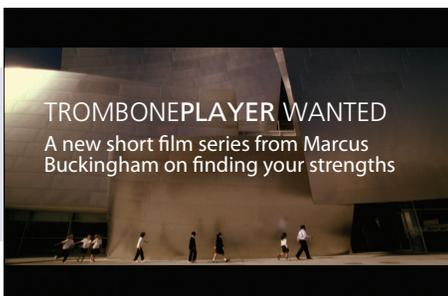
Embedded in your daily workflow, the program provides participants with a process loaded with strengths-building tools, techniques and activities. This innovative delivery anchors the concepts discussed by Marcus and shows people how to apply their strengths to their current jobs and achieve better results.

#### Flexible

The Simply Strengths Program can be delivered in a variety of formats, including a two-day workshop, eLearning modules, or a virtual classroom experience.

#### Refreshingly Simple

No jargon, no buzzwords, no consultantspeak. Using everyday language, the new system cuts through complexities to get participants to the core of living a strengths-based working life.



## Case Studies from Winning Companies

The Simply Strengths Program has been embraced by many individuals at major corporations including Best Buy, Coca-Cola, Chick-fil-A, Hampton, Kohl's, Yahoo, John Deere and Merrill Lynch. We were delighted by the positive feedback and results. Many of the individuals using the new system succeeded in "moving the needle" on their Strengthometer (our key measurement tool), spending 50%-75% of their work day doing activities that strengthen them. They felt more engaged, focused and productive at work than before they used the system. Their passion and energy impacted the people around them, leading to stronger teams and better business outcomes.

*Case #1: Using the insights and skills learned from the Simply Strengths Program, a general manager at Hampton Inn acquired a deeper understanding of the unique strengths of each individual on his team. He realigned the roles and responsibilities of his team members, and helped everyone perform at their best using their strengths. He leveraged his own strong ability to engage others and frequently brainstormed with his team for better ways to serve and delight hotel guests. As a result, his hotel ranked No. 3 out of the 1,200 hotels in the country in terms of customer satisfaction.*

*Case #2: A director at Yahoo felt at her weakest when she had to address performance issues with her direct reports. The Simply Strengths Program helped change her perspective on this recurring managerial challenge. Instead of approaching the performance conversation negatively as a reprimand, she realized that it could be turned into a positive experience of learning and discovery. Using the Strong Conversation Guide provided in the program, she is now more confident and constructive in providing direct feedback to drive team performance.*

*Case #3: A Business Consultant at Chick-fil-A knew that one of his core strengths was to challenge and encourage others to fulfill their potential. The Simply Strengths Program heightened his awareness of this particular strength. He became very intentional about deploying his strength in his daily work. As a consultant, his main job responsibility was to provide Chick-fil-A's franchise operators with guidance on business growth strategies and plans. One of the operators he worked with had reached a point in his business where he had become stagnant. His business was not growing, and he was not growing. Through more one-on-one time with the operator, the consultant used his strength to help him cast a new vision for his business. The operator is now re-engaged in his role, working to take his business to the next level in 2010.*



*"Simply Strengths is a gift to each individual who commits to the journey. I have heard from numerous hotel managers and employees that applying Simply Strengths techniques to uncover what makes them feel strong and what makes them feel weak has had a major impact on their lives, both personally and professionally."*

Gina Valenti,  
Senior Director Brand Program  
Development & Integration, Hilton Hotels



### Take Action Today

Your people and their unique strengths and motivations are the ultimate power supply of your business growth, innovation and productivity. Unleash this tremendous power through the Simply Strengths Program.

Take action today.

For more information on creating a strengths-based organization, please contact:

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"Helping Smart People Think Differently"