

“Don't Take Your Strengths for Granted”

by Markku Kauppinen

After talking on the phone with Debbie for about two minutes, I was certain she had to be a very analytical, “C-style” individual. Her deliberate, steady pace of speech and her very specific questions were clear giveaways. This was my first conversation with Debbie. She was a corporate trainer at one of our client companies. Debbie was preparing for the “train-the-trainer” session that we were going to conduct in two weeks for Debbie and six of her colleagues.

She had many question about our assessment reports.

“Why does the arrow go to this direction?”

“What does this graph mean?” she asked one question after another. All of them were focused on getting more specific and detailed information about the interpretation of the assessments results.

Two weeks later it was very clear Debbie was the only one of the trainers with such an analytical style. In fact, the rest of the trainers were all animated and talkative “I-styles”. They had never even given a thought to taking a look at the reports *before* the session. In terms of her behavioral style, Debbie was very different from the rest of the group.

On all of the breaks Debbie came to me and asked more questions. This time they were different.

“Should I be concerned that my style is so different from the others’ styles?” she asked with a concerned look on her face. She also pointed to specific statements in her report that were all about her various development areas. None of her questions were about her strengths.

I have seen this happen many times. So often we are focused on the things that are wrong. We overlook all the good things we have. The same often happens when we gain a deeper self-awareness to who we really are. We often focus on the “bad news” and ignore the rest.

“Yeah, yeah, I do notice the missed details as it states here, BUT I am really worried about this statement: ‘Needs lots of information to support decisions’. That could be a problem.” Debbie continued to almost exclusively focus on her development areas.

Maybe we develop this pattern of behavior in school. The bright red markings on the test paper are about the things that we got wrong. All of our correct answers are completely ignored.

“Why are you so worried about these statements?” I asked Debbie. “I know you are successful and it is obvious that your colleagues have sincere respect for you. The only time they are quiet is when you speak”, I observed out aloud.

“I am not sure. I guess I want to be more like the rest of the group.”

This is very natural. Overlooking our strengths becomes an even bigger issue when we feel we are somehow different from others. Peer pressure is not reserved for teens only. It never ends and it takes on many different forms.

“Debbie, may I take a guess how your own training sessions unfold?”

“OK”, replied Debbie.

“When you are training new material for the first time, you do not sleep very well the night before. You are worried about many things: if you know ALL of the material, if you be able to know and remember what to say and be able to answer all of the questions. You are quite nervous.

“The next day, at the end of the session you are completely worn out. After all of the participants have left the room, you begin to anxiously read the course evaluations. You notice a few things you could have done better. You feel a little disappointed. But if you really think about it Debbie, they are actually very good evaluations. There are many comments about how clearly and logically you presented the content. How

well you answered the questions. How you clearly mastered the material.”

“Yes, that is true”, Debbie said hesitantly and nodded.

“It is all because of your strengths, Debbie. Others here today struggle with all of that! Be happy that you possess these wonderful qualities.”

Debbie seemed somewhat relieved.

I promise you: many people would love to have the strengths that you have. Many times I have talked to people who were completely ignoring their valuable strengths while another person in the very same room was lamenting they lacked the very same behavioral trait.

“I need to learn to focus less on the details”, one person comments.

“Oh, how I wish I could focus more on the details. I make so many careless mistakes that cost me so much money and time”, says another, only 15 feet away.

Certainly, it is important to work on our development areas. Successful people do this consistently. However, successful people also use their existing strengths to the fullest.

Do not take your strengths for granted. Use them, capitalize on them and become even more successful. It is also more fun to use your strengths than just to work on your development areas!

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"The Best coaching You Will Ever Get"

by Marshall Goldsmith

You are now about to receive the best coaching advice that you will ever get in this—or perhaps any other—lifetime! You are about to receive advice from a very wise old person. Listen very carefully to what this wise old person says.

First, take a deep breath. Take a deeper breath. Now, imagine that you are 95 years old and you are just about to die. Here comes your last breath. But before you take your last breath, you are being given a wonderful, beautiful gift: the ability to travel back in time and talk with the person who is reading this column. The 95-year-old you has been given the chance to help the you of today to have a great career and, much more important, to have a great life.

Figure Out What Counts

The 95-year-old you knows what was really important and what wasn't; what really mattered and what didn't; what really counted and what didn't count at all. What advice does the wise "old you" have for the you reading this column? Take your time. Jot down the answers on two levels: personal advice and professional advice. And once you have written down these words, take them to heart.

In the world of performance appraisals, this may well be the one that matters most. At the end of life, if the old you thinks that you did the right thing, you probably did. If the old you thinks that you screwed up, you probably did. At the end of life, you don't have to impress anyone else—just that person you see in the mirror.

A friend of mine actually had the opportunity to talk with old people who were facing death and to ask them what advice they would have had for themselves. Their answers were filled with wisdom. One recurring theme was to take the time to reflect on life and find happiness and meaning now. A frequent comment from old people runs along the lines of: "I got so wrapped up in looking at what I didn't have that I missed what I did have. I had almost everything. I wish I had taken more time to appreciate it."

Look to the Present

The great Western disease of "I will be happy when..." is sweeping the world. You know the symptoms. You start thinking: I will be happy when I get that...BMW...that promotion...that status...that money. The only way to cure the disease is to find happiness and meaning now.

A second theme from old folks was friends and family. You may work for a wonderful company and believe that your contribution is very important. But when you are 95 and you look around your death bed, very few of your fellow employees will be waving goodbye! Your friends and family will probably be the only people who care.

Don't get so lost in pleasing the people who don't care that you neglect the people who do.

Give It a Try!

Another recurring theme was to follow your dreams. Older people who tried to achieve their dreams were happier with their lives. None of us will ever achieve all of our dreams. If we do, we will just make up new ones! If we go for it, we can at least say at the end, "I tried!" instead of, "Why didn't I at least try?"

In conducting research for one of my books, my co-author and I interviewed more than 200 high-potential leaders from around the world. A key question that we asked was: "If you stay in this company, why are you going to stay?"

The top three answers:

1. "I am finding meaning and happiness now. The work is exciting, and I love what I am doing."
2. "I like the people here. They are my friends. This feels like a team—like a family. I might make more money if I left, but I don't want to leave the people here."
3. "I can follow my dreams. This organization is giving me the chance to grow and do what I really want to do in life."

When my friend asked people who were on their death beds what really mattered in life, and when I asked young, high-potential leaders what really mattered at work, we heard about the same thing.

If you want to make a new beginning in life—look ahead to the end. Then decide what to do.

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the Business Week best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.

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