



StandOut

Find Your Edge. Win at Work.

by Marcus Buckingham
Copyright © 2011 by One Thing Productions, Inc.
Used with permission by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
223 pages

Focus

Leadership & Management
Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
► **Career & Self-Development**
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- All companies search for employees with amazing abilities.
- Personal abilities fall into nine distinct “strengths roles”: “adviser, connector, creator, equalizer, influencer, pioneer, provider, stimulator” and “teacher.”
- You may have difficulty identifying your strong suits because they are so familiar to you.
- Personal strengths are unique to certain areas; for instance, basketball skills aren’t helpful in baseball.
- Identify your most powerful qualities and hone them to perform at your best.
- When you begin a new position, exploit your strong points to succeed.
- To excel, expand your interests within your areas of strength.
- You offer your workplace full value when you maximize your strengths.
- People who succeed use their strengths beyond their set roles.
- Your individual strengths give you “innate genius,” but just having abilities doesn’t mean you know how to employ them.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
8	6	8	8

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How to use your strengths; 2) How to employ those strong points to lead and manage others, to increase sales and to connect with clients; 3) How to avoid negative behaviors that weaken your strengths; and 4) How to define your “strength roles.”

Recommendation

The good news is that management consultant Marcus Buckingham, a perennial best-selling author, offers a very useful pep talk about putting your best foot forward. He urges readers to identify and maximize their strengths to move ahead in their careers. His profiles of various roles exemplifying personal strength provide great information that you can use to make a more meaningful impact at work and to live more fully. Alas, the bad news – or at least the commercial news – is that the author says you need help identifying your strengths, and for that, you need to buy the book to get the one-time code for taking a “strengths profiles” quiz on his website. Once you learn your category with this assessment, you can use more of the book’s information. Welcome to the innovative world of interactive media. Of course, you can try to figure out your strong points yourself, but Buckingham cautions, “It is hard to see your own uniqueness. Your strengths are a part of you whether you’re conscious of them or not. And because they’re so woven into the fabric of who you are, they can actually be quite difficult to pinpoint.” With or without the code, *getAbstract* believes you’ll find real value in this common sense text if you accept that the strengths you think you have may not match those the author would cite.

Abstract

“We each have specific areas where we consistently stand out, where we can do things, see things, understand things, and learn things better and faster than ten thousand other people can.”

“Sustained success comes only when you take what’s unique about you and figure out how to make it useful.”

“How to Accelerate Innovation”

Early X-ray machines were hard to use because patients didn’t stand still long enough for doctors to take quality pictures. The Mayo Clinic’s Dr. Henry Plummer solved the problem by asking his patients to hold their breath. This directive, which any medical staffer can issue, immediately makes patients freeze in place. This innovative request made X-rays a valuable diagnostic tool.

Ralph Gonzales’s whistle transformed his low-ranking Best Buy store into a top location. He had employees blow whistles when they spotted a co-worker doing something correctly. Soon, to the customers’ delight, whistle sounds were everywhere. Unlike Dr. Plummer’s simple directive, “Please hold your breath,” the whistle idea didn’t work in other Best Buys. Less-innovative managers added cumbersome rules and regulations mandating when to whistle, when not to whistle, and so on. One person’s innovative idea may not work for someone else. Picture how presidential George W. Bush looked as he stepped onto the aircraft carrier wearing a flight suit. Contrast that with Michael Dukakis [former Massachusetts governor and the 1988 Democratic candidate for president] riding on a tank. What worked so well for Bush was an awkward failure for Dukakis, who just looked silly. You must understand which actions fit your strengths.

“The New StandOut Strengths Assessment”

Identify the profiles that fit your two strongest points – the ways you can best serve as a “contributor” and as a “multiplier” – and use them to accomplish your “greatest contribution.” The nine “strength roles” are:

“The StandOut assessment measures you on nine strength Roles and reveals your top two.”

“These two strength Roles are...your edge – where you will have a natural advantage.”

“StandOut measures which way you instinctively react to the scenarios, your results reveal how you come across to others.”

“As oblivious as we can be to our own strengths, it’s even easier to ignore the particular and unique strengths of others.”

1. **“Adviser”**– You’re happy when others turn to you for help. You are “confident that you always have the right solution.” You like to divide challenges into parts and solve the issues one by one. You see yourself as someone your teammates turn to when they are in a jam. To make a strong impression, take your team’s most complex challenge and resolve its parts. To get people to pay for your guidance, hang out with professionals and “become a credentialed expert.” Just don’t solve every problem you see. Be a little humble and ask a lot of questions. Lead by example and clearly explain your suggestions. As a manager, use your common sense. Encourage workers to take courses and share the information. Tell them to come to you with possible ways to attack problems. Enter sales meetings with several solutions for clients, and tell them why your choices are best. Confront client issues directly. Anticipate what they need. If you don’t know something, admit it. Use language clients understand.
2. **“Connector”** – You inspire other people. You are “really good at figuring out who should work together and why they would work well together.” You put the right folks together on great teams. Watch for connection opportunities, but “ask permission before you connect people.” Send a daily email that opens, “I thought of you when I read this”; then, add a few words on how the recipient might benefit. Go on an annual group trip – a hike or charitable walk – and meet new people. Don’t forward mass emails; that’s annoying. Don’t take it personally if people don’t return your calls. You lead because you identified other people’s strengths and talents. You attract co-workers’ loyalty because they believe you can help them do meaningful things. You are a team builder. You know people and help others appreciate different points of view. Do not compare staffers; instead, highlight their individual strengths and appreciate their unique abilities. Introduce clients to those who can assist them. Personalize your communications. Remember names; refer often to past interactions so clients feel important.
3. **“Creator”** – Private time helps you create and contemplate how things work, but make sure that your people see enough of you. You like concepts and patterns and ideas, but you dislike surprises. Your “flashes of insight” help you identify better ways to do things. You describe yourself as being good at “analyzing what happened and why it happened.” It takes time for you to impress people. Don’t ask why too often. If people reject your first suggestion, search for another way they could use your idea. Keep up with “new trends, research and practices” in your field. Devise ways to showcase your talents and to review what you know. Connect with those who have different perspectives, but don’t become an idea’s sole defender. Others may become impatient, so show them every effort has value even if the end result falters. You consider situations carefully and “excel at keeping things simple.” Clarify each goal’s purpose to those around you. As a manager, always acknowledge staffers’ contributions and problem-solving efforts. Keep your expectations “crystal clear and consistent.” Invite clients to share their thoughts and take time to understand their needs. Trust your own instincts and reach their own conclusions. Analyze what is working as often as you analyze what is not. Impress co-workers with your ideas on how to perform better.
4. **“Equalizer”** – You seek balance. You detest it when other people don’t come through. You have an active moral compass and like to protect everyone’s personal rights. You would describe yourself by saying, “I’m totally transparent. What you see with me is what you get.” To make a memorable impression, follow through on what you commit to do. Help other people identify the best way to solve their problems. Become a mediator – you would be good at this. Always clarify your definition of

“Your real-world performance for any given day is the sum of all the moment-by-moment choices you make.”

“Only innovation will keep us relevant...allow us to keep thriving, only innovation can get us ahead and keep us there.”

“Invention is an idea, a novel idea, and, like all ideas, a novel idea is transferrable from person to person...if the person you are delivering the innovation to has the same strengths as the person who created it in the first place.”

“What is effective and authentic in the hands of one person looks forced, fake and foolish in the hands of another.”

fairness to other people. Remember that other people count on you to act correctly in all situations, since you are reliable in an unreliable world. To impress customers, don't disparage your competition. Clients trust you. To keep them loyal, “admit when your product or service has missed the mark.”

5. **“Influencer”** – You lose your patience when the time comes to make decisions. You listen to others to help identify what to do next. You have charisma and can charm people, because you know that “people are willing to do more for those they like.” You are at the top of your game when trying to encourage people to do “something they didn't necessarily intend to do.” To impress others, be clear about your plans. Thank those around you. Be inquisitive, but wait for responses. Jot things down during conversations to signal that you value others' thoughts and to help you build relationships. Hone your sense of humor, one of your strengths. People enjoy hearing what you have to say, particularly if you share self-deprecating tales. To build relationships, remember everyone's name. When you sell, stick with a clear message. If you try to woo buyers with too many tactics, you can irritate them. As you influence others, you tend to make errors and create hard feelings. Apologize.
6. **“Pioneer: What's new?”** – A true optimist, you love new challenges. Glitches don't faze you; they are fun. To describe yourself, you'd say, “I'm one of the most resilient people I know. I bounce back fast.” To move up, highlight your “natural optimism.” When others balk at change, help them see new possibilities in a nonthreatening way. Ask, “If we had already changed it, what would the new way look like?” You can provide a safe environment for young individuals to transform their dreams into reality, so be a mentor. You move on quickly when things fail, but other people don't, so give them time to “sift and reflect.” Don't jump from one idea to the next. You are fine with the unknown, but people will feel unsure if you dismiss their worries by saying, “Trust me. It'll be great.” Infuse your ideas with fun. Provide games or activities at meetings so people attend enthusiastically. Team people with unfamiliar co-workers to develop friendships and cooperation. Tell clients real tales about how past “risk-taking has paid off”; they need such evidence to feel confident about you.
7. **“Provider”** – You care how others feel and want to “give them a voice.” You bristle when you feel no one listens to you, but your ability to listen without judging helps workplace troublemakers drop their guard and become more productive. You believe that others depend on you, and you enjoy that. Use your intuition to assess how team members relate. Your rare gift for keeping secrets may enable you to become an “agent of transformation” in difficult situations where co-workers distrust one another. However, don't let your own issues build up until you explode. You are politically naive and expect others to “be as responsible and inclusive as you are.” Before you defend people, confirm their stories. Remember, egotistical people who disappoint you can still have a good side. To lead others and hold their loyalty, adapt to challenges and share success stories. You care about your clients, but don't offer more than you can give or they will exploit you. If something goes awry, don't talk about it; just repair it.
8. **“Stimulator”** – You “focus on what is right with people.” You may be emotional, but you bring positive energy to every situation. Being with lots of people energizes you, and you'd describe yourself as “fun to be around.” To get noticed, offer carefully thought-out feedback. Dispel the notion that you give insincere compliments. To move forward, “set clear boundaries.” You can't lift everyone's spirits all the time, but you can help turn around difficult workers. Search for ways to inspire others effectively.

“They say that burnout happens the same way that bankruptcy does: gradually, gradually, then suddenly.”

“What your organization wants are many practical innovations and a way to deliver these innovations to those few people who share the strengths of the person who dreamed them up.”

“The most dominant – the most frequently recurring patterns – are the source of your strengths.”

“The responsibility falls to you to apply your strengths consciously every day.”

Take some time to recharge your batteries. Don't take problems to heart or fret about others' opinions. When you lead, use your sense of humor and make fun of yourself. Don't be a “yes-man or yes-woman.” Agree only with ideas you accept, and promise only what you can deliver. Encourage your staff to leave the office and visit clients. When you feel positive, your good mood is contagious, but your foul moods spread easily, too. If you have a rough day, take time to regroup. Sell with sincerity. Back up your positive attitude with facts, so others don't dismiss you as overly optimistic.

9. **“Teacher** – You care how well others comprehend issues. You believe everyone is a “work in progress.” People work better with you, and you give them a chance to learn and grow. You are “always looking for how each person's mind works.” Enter every situation ready to learn. “Listening shows respect” since people are glad when you validate their ideas. During the first days in a new role, share “at least one new idea.” Offer to tutor your co-workers. Stay in touch with people you have mentored. If you recommend someone, describe his or her value clearly. Don't share your thoughts as soon as you enter a new situation or others will see you the wrong way. “Ask your questions, take notes” and soon people will value what you have to say. You are a great leader because you believe everyone can succeed. You try to see things from others' perspectives. Your questions motivate people because you value their answers. Be available to meet personally with those you lead. “Set up a regular coffee or lunch.” Your workers like your performance reviews because you find innovative ways to help them grow. You treat each person distinctively. When you sell, you tailor your approach to each person. You love to demonstrate products, but be more aware of when your prospect has had enough. Share what you know in a newsletter or blog. You have great expertise, and others want to learn from you.

“The Three Strengths Principles”

Your individual compilation of strengths gives you “innate genius,” but just having abilities doesn't mean you know how to employ them. Follow three principles to use your strong suits:

1. **“Your genius is precise”** – When you operate in your “strengths zone,” you are outstanding. You can accomplish anything. But step out of that zone and you immediately become average. Consider how Michael Jordan soared as an NBA player, but not as a professional baseball player. Don't be afraid to try new areas, but know that your gifts will shine most brightly under certain conditions or in certain roles. When you begin a new position, tap into your strong points to succeed.
2. **“You can't respect what you don't remember”** – As long as you are aware of your strong points, you can use them. If your strengths remain lodged in your subconscious, you will not be able to pull from them when you need them. Use your strengths; build them up.
3. **“You must reach beyond your roles”** – Those who excel often “push themselves within their strengths zone.”

About the Author

Marcus Buckingham developed the unique strengths approach. He followed his initial bestseller, *First, Break All the Rules*, with several other best-selling books. He consults for international companies.