



IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

March 2006
Issue No. 61

BOOK REVIEW: NOW, DISCOVER YOUR STRENGTHS

(Free Press 2001)

Authors Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, PhD, posit that excellence and career fulfillment are a function of using one's strengths every day. The premise of this book sounds deceptively simple. Yet most of our society and work life is geared toward remedying our weaknesses, filling the gaps through training, or "becoming whole." For the authors of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, the only reason to work on a weakness is for damage control! They urge us to play to our strengths.

What Buckingham and Clifton mean by the term "strengths" is much more specific than its common usage. For example, it's not enough to know that you are good at writing. Writing is a skill that can be learned. A strength, on the other hand, is something in which you demonstrate your excellence almost automatically. It literally comes naturally to you, a process the authors explain using current neurological science. If you make 41,000 small decisions per day and most of them are through well-worn neural pathways (i.e., your strengths), you will find work and life easier and more fulfilling. You will perform with excellence.

The authors have identified 34 different themes of strengths through interviews with outstanding, happy professionals conducted by the Gallup Organization. They give these examples of ways that individuals combine and demonstrate their strengths every day in various jobs and careers:

Activator. Your recurring question is, "When can we start?" You are impatient for action. You believe that only action can make things happen. Action and thinking are not opposites for you. You believe that action is the best device for learning. You make a decision, take action, look at the result, and learn – which informs your next action. You push yourself out there and take the next step. It pleases you that you will be judged by what you get done.

Arranger. You are a conductor, faced with coordinating a complex situation involving many variables that must be aligned and realigned until you have the most productive configuration possible. There is nothing special in your mind about what you're doing, but others will be in awe. You have effective flexibility, finding the right combination of people and resources to accomplish a project. You are at your best in dynamic situations. You devise new options when the unexpected comes up.

Communication. You like to explain, describe, host, speak in public, and write. Ideas and events are static and dry until you bring them to life and make them exciting. You turn events into stories and practice telling them. You enliven stories with images, examples, and metaphors. You believe people have a short attention span. You want your information to survive, to divert attention toward you and then capture it. This drives your hunt for the perfect phrase. People like to listen to you. Your word pictures pique their interest and inspire them to act.

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This book was written for business management, but the concepts also apply to lawyers. If you examine what you do well and what comes to you with ease, you will be able to identify your top five strengths within the 34 themes. One of the best reasons to buy the book is a Web-based interactive component that allows readers to complete a questionnaire developed by the Gallup Organization and instantly discover their own top five inborn talents. You can find the online test and purchasing details at www.strengthsfinder.com.

Whether you work in a large firm or as a sole practitioner, it can be tempting to try to “do it all” and “be it all.” This book is a useful tool that helps you find your strengths. It also serves as a good reminder that we are more effective – and our work life is more satisfying – when we draw upon our strengths.

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