

Now, Discover Your Strengths

In *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, Don Clifton and Marcus Buckingham present their findings on what makes people successful at work. Their counsel is based on data that Don Clifton collected over a 50 year career.

Clifton is known by many as the “father of strengths-based psychology” – a title bestowed upon him by the American Psychological Association in 2002. He began his work with a question borne out of a seemingly innocent comment from one of his mentors: What would happen if we actually studied what is *right* with people? His search was a radical departure from the deficit-based focus of most other researchers – researchers who chose to fix deficits. Over 50 years, Clifton collected data from more than two million interviews with successful working people from all walks of life. He asked open-ended questions of these people and eventually, analysis of these interviews resulted in the identification of the 34 talents identified in their book.

Each of these 34 talents is described in terms that describe typical ways that the talent is manifested. For example, the authors note that the Responsibility talent “forces you to take psychological ownership for anything you commit to” and “this near obsession for doing things right, and your impeccable ethics, combine to create your reputation: utterly dependable.” Buckingham and Clifton inform us that talents are not strengths in and of themselves. In fact, Marcus Buckingham is said to have stated that the book ought to have been called *Now, Discover your Talents* because talents are the underlying building blocks that, when combined with knowledge, skills and use, result in strengths. By identifying talents, employees, their managers and others interested in developing human capital can map out developmental courses of action that focus on enhancing what employees already do well.

One of the true values of this book is its practical, proactive ideas for managers seeking ways to more effectively work with their people. Buckingham and Clifton provide succinct suggestions that allow strengths-based managers to begin the discussion with their colleagues that result in performance enhancement. For example, they suggest that a manager place an individual strong in the Deliberative talent in situations where she has time to fully consider available options and “honor that she may be quite a private person.” Of course, their guidelines are generalizations and managers should use them as flexible tips tempered with experience, not rigid rules.

The primary focus of *Now, Discover Your Strengths* is the world of work, but the insights Buckingham and Clifton offer are clearly applicable to the development of all interpersonal relationships. For example, their suggestions for how to “manage” someone with the Achiever talent are equally useful in assisting couples, families, or community boards in understanding how to best use one another's talents for the benefit of the whole unit.