Reflection Paper on Discovering My Strengths

David Tinker, CFRE

Muskingum College, INFR607, LM1 D2
Professor Kaufmann
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Critical Analysis on Findings

Tom Rath’s Strengths Finder 2.0 identified my five greatest strengths through an on-line survey. The report concluded that my top five strengths, in order of strength, were: Learner, Belief, Connectedness, Includer, and Positivity. The goal of this type of skills testing is to identify strengths and focus on increasing those strengths rather than addressing weaknesses. I agree with each of the five themes identified as my strengths.

Addressing only strengths is a new type of skills-building style for me. Previously, I had studied and taken the DISC and Myers-Briggs tests and incorporated them into my work. I have found studying personality traits through tests such as these has been an underutilized management tool in nonprofit organizations. It benefits the person tested, the customer, and the organization. I look forward to see how I am able to build upon my strengths now that they have been identified.

Learner

My top strength was Learner. A Learner enjoys time to mull over ideas, read, and examine topics in detail. A Learner is interested in how some pieces or parts operate and are curious about each of the steps as much as the solution. A Learner wants to continuously improve and is excited by the process of learning and may learn best by teaching (Rath, 2007, pp. 133-136).

This description is an accurate accounting of what I would have stated as my strongest strength. I believe very strongly in lifelong education and being reflective in my studies and work. I enjoy studying how things work as evidenced by my studying the basic components of nature with my degree in Chemistry. I also enjoy the process of learning which is why I also majored in English and studied nonprofit management in graduate school. It is also partly why I am pursuing a new degree in the MISST program.

I also find myself seeking out opportunities to learn by doing and teaching others. In The Prelude, Wordsworth (1850, Chapter 14, Lines 446-447) wrote, “What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how.” This is reflective of me. When I enjoy something I like to teach it to others so that they may enjoy it, too. A recent example of this was during the opening weekend residency for this class I helped Mark learn to use MS Web Expression when I had never used it before. I had used other software that I knew to be similar and understood the concepts on how to use the software. I was able to work through the web design learning module while teaching Mark how to use the software. I have written numerous professional articles and I am frequently asked to be a speaker at training events for my peers. All of these traits demonstrate my Learner tendencies. I thoroughly believe this is my strongest strength.

Belief

Rath (2007, pp.57-60) describes a person who has Belief as a strength has strong core values that are unchanging. They choose a vocation that allows them to express my deepest values every day. I get to share my beliefs through my work each day. I believe strongly in helping others and believe it is my calling to be a nonprofit executive. The purpose in my life is to help others.

I am also in a field that follows high ethical standards through strict adherence to the Association of Fundraising Professionals’ Code of Ethics and the Donor Bill of Rights. Following these ethical standards allows me to help others in the careful art of giving. I take my beliefs and convictions very seriously and thus believe that the Belief theme is one of my top strengths.
**Connectedness**
I found it very interesting that I would be cited as having Connectedness as a strength. The first paragraph describing Connectedness states, “Things happen for a reason. You are sure of it.” (Rath, 2007, p. 72) Having grown up in the Presbyterian Church, USA (PC(USA)), I was taught John Calvin’s theology that all things happen because God created us for a reason. We are predestined (PC(USA), 2008). Clearly my upbringing in the Presbyterian Church has left a permanent mark on my life.

Connectedness is also described as someone who creates peace within groups and someone who is a counselor or listener. I have always been a person who moves amongst different cliques in school, work, and in other social settings. This has allowed me to be an effective leader. My peers voted me to leadership positions because I related to each of their interests even when they are all different from others in the group. I agree that Connectedness is one of my top five strengths.

**Includer**
As an includer, I am able to have something to say to anyone. Includers do well speaking on behalf of people without a voice. They also make sure people are represented and included in various processes (Rath, 2007, pp. 117-120).

Through my work and volunteer experiences I spend quite a bit of time networking and meeting new people. It is not difficult for me to strike up conversations an include people sitting at a table or who are standing nearby. I also enjoy being able to speak on behalf of people without a voice. Also in my team work I am very good at gatekeeping, i.e. ensuring the entire team participates and that they feel that they have been included in the process. I agree that I am an includer.

**Positivity**
Rath (2007, pp. 141-142) describes Positivity as someone with the strength who has an enthusiasm that is contagious. This theme will make people who have this characteristic feel better about themselves when they can analyze documents and data. This type of person does well in a teaching role, a sales role or a leadership role.

While I don’t believe my enthusiasm is always at a contagious level, I believe that I am more positive than an average person. I think the other definitions of this theme describe me in better detail. I do feel better when analyzing data and enjoy teaching others. I excel in fundraising which is a specific form of sales. I seek and enjoy leadership roles in everything I do. Therefore, this theme accurately describes me.

I believe that the five themes identified as my top strengths: Learner, Belief, Connectedness, Includer and Positivity, are indeed my five greatest strengths. Identifying these will allow me to focus on building these strengths and to be a better worker and leader.

**How you ever noticed that one of your strengths turned into a weakness? If so, reflect.**

Sometimes being an Includer causes me to make slower decisions. In some instances it even causes me angst. Often I am reflective of the tasks I must complete to ensure I have included deliberately included as many opinions and views as possible. This slows down my decision making process. My deliberate and reflective assessments of each situation don’t allow me to
easily make snap decisions without feeling a sense of regret. It is because of this that my strength can be seen as a weakness.

**How will your strengths support you in MISST?**

My strengths demonstrate that I am fully invested in learning more about many topics and spending time to study specific components of learning modules. With Learner as my highest strength, I will thoroughly enjoy the education process. I will enjoy learning about each of the smaller parts that make up a complete project.

The Belief strength means I have strong core beliefs so that I will not be unwavering in my stances. Connectedness and Includer indicates that I will work very well within a team setting. I will be a strong team member because of my tendencies to listen to and relate to others’ ideas. I will include others in the decision making process and will make sure that everyone’s opinion is considered during the different stages of the project. I will be able to include all team members, listen to their ideas and coordinate them into finish projects. Also, my Positivity characteristics lend themselves well to a team by exuding a positive energy for the team to build itself upon.

**How do your strengths support you in your career (current or future)?**

My strengths certainly have supported me in my career. In fundraising I am always learning new techniques for solicitation and nonprofit management, and have been a frequent speaker on fundraising topics to groups of my peers and volunteers.

I believe that Beliefs lends itself strongly to my profession because of the level of trust and ethics involved in fundraising. Fundraising is a critical element in the preservation of values. These values are fostered by philanthropic action (Wagner, 2002). Without steadfast adherence to ethics, fundraising professionals could easily con people in making gifts that would benefit the fundraiser’s performance measures or agencies without taking into condensation the donors’ intentions and best interests.

Fundraising is largely about Connectedness. Donors have a need to be associated with a charity or cause. In Democracy in America, Alexis deTocqueville (1983) explained the need for association that is uniquely American. It is this association, a form or Connectedness, that resonates in fundraising.

Includer means I work to make sure the unheard have a voice. My work supports advocacy efforts for people with disabilities and I am able to speak on their behalf. Finally, my Positivity traits allow donors to feel that their donations are greatly appreciated.

Because of the aforementioned items, I believe that my strengths have positioned me to excel in a career that is best suited to my values and interests.
References


