

## Managing for Strengths Bringing out the Best in Your Employees

Think back to the last performance review you received. How did the conversation go? Maybe you spent a little time at the beginning hearing about your strengths and the things you do well – just enough time to feel a little boost of self-confidence, until wham! Your reviewer has moved onto your weaknesses, perhaps described as “opportunities for improvement.”

How much time did you spend talking about those opportunities for improvement? And how did you feel walking out of the door after your performance review? Probably not great. It’s funny how you can receive both positive and negative feedback, yet the negative feedback can linger a lot longer, can’t it?

We’ve all probably been in this position, yet as managers, many of us approach performance reviews in the exact same way. Sure, we let our employees know what they’ve done well – briefly. And then we try to think of the most effective way to hammer home that they must improve upon X, Y and Z behaviors if they want that next raise, career break, or your approval on their performance. Behavior change is hard enough as it is. Is it any wonder that this approach can lead to dissatisfied employees instead of better performance?

[Marcus Buckingham](#), former Gallup guru and author of many business bestsellers including *First, Break all the Rules*, has written and spoken extensively about the idea of focusing on strengths instead of weaknesses as a way to find more happiness in life and generate better business performance. The key, he says, is to figure out how to focus more of your energy on your strengths and minimize time spent on weaknesses, or activities that don’t bring out the best in you.

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Buckingham offers a [simple acronym](#) to help you recognize a strength, SIGN:

- S Success:** Do you feel a sense of accomplishment about finishing this task?
- I Instinct:** Do you instinctively look forward to this task?
- G Growth:** Are your synapses firing? Are you mentally focused?
- N Needs:** Does this task fulfill one of your needs?

Managers can apply the same approach when working with employees to encourage them to do their best work. Here’s how:

- Make sure you know your employee’s growth goals, so that you can play an active role in helping him/her achieve success.
- Take notice of the areas where your employees excel. Can you maximize their time spent in these areas? If you have varied skill sets on your team, perhaps it’s a matter of shifting the workload among a few individuals.
- Ask your employees what tasks they enjoy doing most and least. Then, challenge them to help you figure out a way they can spend more time on the more rewarding tasks and less on those they don’t enjoy.
- Praise, praise, praise! Constructive criticism will always be useful, but step up your efforts to reward a job well done, especially in high priority areas for you and your employee.

Does this mean employees shouldn’t have to do any work they don’t enjoy? Nope. We all have tasks we don’t find particularly pleasant or rewarding. But by zeroing in on employee strengths, you’re guaranteed to have more purpose-driven, inspired employees – the kind of employees who create meaningful business results.

