

DISCUSSION GUIDE

CLAIMING YOUR STRENGTHS

With Marcus Buckingham, founder of **The Marcus Buckingham Company** and author/co-author of several best-sellers, including *Now, Discover Your Strengths* and *Find Your Strongest Life: What the Happiest and Most Successful Women Do Differently*



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Key Points

Successful people have one thing in common: they focus on strengths and manage around weaknesses.

You live in a noisy world, with demands and expectations from all kinds of well-intentioned people that can pull you in the wrong direction. To make the most of your talents and abilities, you have to learn how to turn up the “signal to noise” ratio in favor of your strengths.

Strengths are not what you’re good at. Weaknesses are not what you’re bad at.

We’ve all been raised to believe that our strengths are best judged by the success we achieve. If that’s the case, then a strength is the same as performance. But we instinctively know that’s not true. If you’re like most people, you have some activities or tasks you do well, but hate doing. You have the ability; you can do it. You just wish you never had to do it again because it drains you. Such activities cannot be called strengths. They are weaknesses. The simplest and best definition of a strength is “an activity that strengthens you.” And the proper definition of a weakness is “an activity that weakens you” — even if you’re good at it.

Take responsibility for claiming your strengths by recognizing the SIGNs.

A strength is an activity that strengthens you, but it can be hard to pay attention in the course of a busy workday to how what we do makes us feel. Train yourself to notice the SIGNs of a strength:

- **Success** — When you do the activity, you feel effective and in control (what psychologists call “self-efficacy”).
- **Instinct** — Before you do the activity, you look forward to doing it. You can’t wait to do it.
- **Growth** — While you are doing the activity, you feel inquisitive and focused. You may lose track of time and two hours feel like only five minutes have passed.
- **Needs** — After you’ve done the activity, even if you’re tired, you feel fulfilled.

Key Points

You can't turn a weakness into a strength, but you can take steps to STOP or minimize the impact a weakness is having on you.

- STOP doing it and see whether anybody notices. This won't work all or even most of the time, but sometimes a process or a task has become redundant and won't be missed.
- Team Up with someone who is strengthened by what weakens you. For every person drained or bored by an activity, there is someone — believe it or not — who finds the same task invigorating.
- Offer Up a strength so deliberately, so insistently, that doing it becomes valuable enough to take up more and more of your time, crowding out time spent on weaknesses. Take the best of your job and turn it into the most of your job.
- Perceive the activity through the lens of a strength. If you hate confrontation, for example, but are strengthened by asking penetrating questions, approach a potential confrontation instead as a way to ask such questions.

Strengths and Weaknesses Inventory

Take 5 minutes to reflect on the past week. Pay attention to how the tasks you did made you feel as you were doing them. Think of the SIGNs of a strength (and note that the SIGNs of a weakness are simply the reverse) and make note of activities that energized you, and those that left you drained.

ACTION

I felt strong (energized, engaged)...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I felt weak (drained, bored)...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Share with your Circle. 1 minute each. 10 minutes total.

- Did you find that you lost track of time while doing any activities?
 - Were you surprised by any of the activities that strengthened you? That weakened you?
-

Put Strengths into Practice

Putting your strengths to work is inherently beneficial both to you and your organization, because you will experience your most sustained success when you are energized and doing what you love. There is also power in examining how you can leverage your strengths specifically to meet current challenges in your work. Pair up with a partner and help each other explore ways in which each of you might be able to leverage those strengths to achieve your outcomes. Spend 7 minutes on each partner.

1. Share with your partner:
 - The list of strengthening activities you came up with.
 - A goal or outcome you want to achieve.
 - The obstacles that may get in the way of achieving that goal.
2. Discuss strategies and options for using your strengths to achieve your goal.
 - Which strength seems most helpful for this particular goal?
 - Do you need to talk to anyone to carve out more time to use that strength?

ACTION

My Goal:

Potential Obstacles:

Strategies for leveraging my strengths:

STOP Your Weaknesses

You will not get the best results if you neglect your strengths to focus on improving your weaknesses. However, that doesn't mean that your weaknesses should be ignored. Instead, make a conscious effort to minimize the impact they have on you using the techniques in STOP.

Each partner take - 7 minutes.

1. With your partner, go through the steps of STOP and determine how you can minimize the impact of your weakening activity — something you'd really rather do less if possible.

ACTION

STOP — Can you just stop doing the activity that weakens you? If not, can you spend less time on it?

Team Up — Do you work with someone who might consider this activity a strength? Can you get help, or pointers on how to make it less painful?

Offer Up a Strength — Can you minimize the time you spend on this weakness by making the case for focusing on your strength instead?

Perceive Differently — Is there a way that this activity could become less of a burden if you viewed it through the lens of one of your strengths?

One Action

What seems good in theory often doesn't come to fruition because of all the demands our world and work place upon us. Sometimes just taking the first step can make all the difference. So, take 5 minutes to answer a simple question:

What one action are you willing to do tomorrow to start leveraging one of your strengths and/or neutralizing one of your weaknesses?

ACTION

My One Action:

Share your one action with your Circle. 1 minute each. 10 minutes total.

For your next meeting

Start your next Circle meeting by sharing the outcome of the one action you committed to.