



## WORKING RESOURCES

Dr. Maynard Brusman

Consulting Psychologist & Executive Coach  
Trusted Advisor to Senior Leadership

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*Strategic Talent Management Solutions to Select and Develop Emotionally Intelligent Leaders*

**Working Resources** is a Strategic Talent Management and Leadership Consulting Firm Helping Inventive Companies and Law Firms Assess, Select, Coach, and Retain Emotionally Intelligent Leaders; Executive Coaching; Performance-Based Interviewing and Selection; Competency Modeling; Succession Management; Career Coaching; Corporate Culture Surveys and Leadership Retreats

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## Discover Your Talents and Strengths: Strategies for Self-Leadership

*"Most Americans do not know what their strengths are. When you ask them, they look at you with a blank stare, or they respond in terms of subject knowledge, which is the wrong answer." — Peter Drucker*

**Most of us have a poor sense of our talents and strengths.** Throughout our education and careers, there is a lot of attention paid to our weaknesses. We are acutely aware of our faults and deficits, our "opportunities for development," or whatever euphemism is popular for naming them.

**Parents, teachers and managers are all experts in spotting deficits.** In fact, most parents, teachers and managers consider it their *responsibility* to point out flaws and try to help us correct them.

**We have become experts in our own weaknesses and spend our lives trying to repair our flaws, while our strengths lie dormant and neglected.** The research, however, is clear: we grow and develop by putting *emphasis on our strengths*, rather than trying to correct our deficits.

**Most people don't concern themselves with identifying their talents and strengths.** Instead, they choose to study their weaknesses. A Gallup poll investigated this phenomenon by asking Americans, French, British, Canadian, Japanese and Chinese people of all ages and backgrounds the question: "*Which do you think will help you improve the most: knowing your strengths or knowing your weaknesses?*"

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### **The Path to Improvement: Strengths or Weaknesses?**

**The answer was always the same: weaknesses, not strengths, deserve the most attention.** The most strengths-focused culture is the United States, but still only a minority of people, 41 percent, felt that knowing their strengths would help them improve the most. The least strengths-focused cultures are Japan and China. Only 24 percent believe that the key to success lies in their strengths.

**The majority of people in the world don't think that the secret to improvement lies in a deep understanding of their strengths.** Interestingly, in every culture the older people (55 and above) were the least fixated on their weaknesses. Perhaps they have acquired more self-acceptance and realize the futility of trying to be what they are not.

### **Why are Weaknesses so Attractive?**

**Why do so many people avoid focusing on their strengths?** Weaknesses may be fascinating and strangely mesmerizing, like watching soap operas and Jerry Springer shows. But the attraction lies in the fact we deeply fear our weaknesses, our failures and even our true self.

**Some people may be reluctant to investigate their strengths because they may fear there isn't much in the way of real talent or strength inside them anyway, or that they are just average (again, ingrained from education models).** Or, maybe there is a feeling of inadequacy, an "imposter syndrome," and an underlying fear of being found out.

**Despite your achievements, you may wonder whether you are as talented as everyone thinks you are.** You suspect that luck and circumstance may have played a big part in your getting to where you are today.

**However, if you do not investigate your strengths, for any of the above fears and feelings of insecurity, you will miss out on discovering more of who you really are.** You will miss out on becoming who you are really meant to be.

### **Too Close to See?**

**You are probably not as cognizant of your strengths as you could be because most of us take them for granted.** We are so embedded in our strengths, we are not aware of them as strengths. We think everybody is that way too. It never occurs to us to be any other way; it is just natural for us.

**This way of thinking excludes developing our strengths and becoming even stronger and more brilliant.** You can't develop what you don't recognize. You can't expand what you are not aware of.

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**Building on your strengths is also about responsibility.** You probably don't take pride in your natural talents any more than you would take pride in your sex, race, or hair color. Natural talents are gifts from God and your gene pool.

**However, you have a great deal to do with turning your talents into strengths.** You can take your talents into the realm of excellence. It involves becoming acutely aware, developing an action learning plan, and "practice, practice, practice". Viewed in this light, to avoid your strengths by focusing on your weaknesses is almost a sign of irresponsibility.

### **The Courage to Be Brilliant**

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure... We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world."* — Marianne Williamson

**The most responsible, yet the most challenging, thing to do is to face up to your natural talents.** It is an honor to have such blessings. Do not waste them. Step up to the potential inherent in your talents and find ways to develop your strengths. Be true to yourself by becoming more of who you really are.

**This advice is easy to give and difficult to put into practice.** It is easier when working with a trained professional coach. Working with your coach can make it easier for you to identify your talents and strengths. There are also a number of online self-assessments available to help. Once your five top strengths are identified, you can examine how they show up in your life.

**It is a process of a few steps back, a few steps forward, and learning as you go.** It is not the same as book learning. The only way to learn about your strengths is to act, learn, refine, and then act, learn, refine. Open yourself to feedback. This means you must be strong and courageous. Personal development is not for sissies.

**Discovering your true strengths is the path towards improvement and success.** When you pay attention to your deficits and try to overcome them, you are placing emphasis on becoming what you are not. You wind up living a second-rate version of someone else's life rather than a world-class version of your own.

### **Resources**

<http://www.gallup.com>

<http://www.authenticchappiness.org>

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