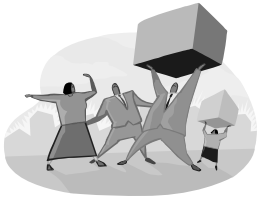


STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPMENT



You've heard about it; perhaps even read the book. Strengths-based professional development has become a popular approach in helping managers become better leaders. The idea is to "find" your strengths and maximize these rather than invest time in correcting weaknesses. Overlooked in this popular admonition is the well-worn adage, "Too much of a good thing...."

Because a little of something – behavior; competence – is good does not mean more is better. Emphasizing strengths can, ironically, turn them into weaknesses through overuse. Consider, for example, the well engaged, detail-oriented project manager who can evolve into a meddlesome micro-manager. Or the "soft glove" manager who is good with people, caring and supportive to the extent that timely discipline is lacking.

Strengths becoming weaknesses actually entered into the managerial lexicon in the mid-1980s when researchers (McCall and Lombardo, 1983) noted that qualities once regarded as strengths evolved into glaring weaknesses. Often it was such "derailing" factors that truncated a manager's career.

For you, this means that when conducting a performance review, 360° feedback evaluation or similar ratings activity in an effort to develop staff, do not automatically assume more is better. That is, do not assume higher scores are always good. It is better to maintain a holistic or balanced approach to individual development by focusing on strengths, weaknesses and strengths overused, which can become weaknesses. After all, it is by leveraging strengths that managers get ahead, but it is weaknesses that get managers fired.

Many assessment tools do not make a provision for strengths overused; for talents that tip to weakness in certain situations. Most often we see these situations occurring when an accomplished specialist is promoted to manager. The skills that get them promoted are no longer the skills needed to succeed at this new level of responsibility (The thesis of another book: *"What Got You Here Won't Get You There"* (Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007).

This is why the VRH coaching process with executives emphasizes feedback around strengths, strengths overused and shortcomings as a more encompassing and effective strategy. In fact, as a data-gathering and feedback tool when coaching executives, Peter Drucker's (1967) recommended approach – simple but inclusive of the point being made here – focuses on learning what a manager should "start," "stop" and "continue" doing. Feedback around what a manager should stop doing can be an indication of strengths overused, providing further insight that can guide coaching and development conversations.

VRH provides tailored professional development coaching for managers in organization's large and small using this same holistic process. Contact us with questions you might have on coaching managers within your organization.