

# Management Matters



SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY

Human Resources

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## Put Your Strengths to Work



### Natural Strengths

I recently attended a lecture given by Marcus Buckingham and his message to us is an important one. He believes that we do our best work when we are working from our natural strengths. This is certainly true for me.

I'd like to recommend that you consider the DiSC Behavioral Style assessment, available through HR. It will provide you with a **starting point** for identifying your own natural strengths, but you will need to spend time on reflective thinking to see beneath the surface traits. It's not a quick and easy process.

Your strengths invigorate you, not deplete you. They are strengths for you because they help you to reach success. Though your strengths may not appear on an official job description, they are your distinguishing characteristics – they are what make you unique. Thanks for bringing your strengths here to Suffolk University.

Enjoy the spring!

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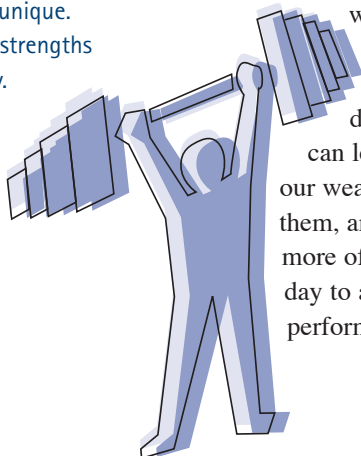
Think back to when you were a child... do you remember hearing from your teachers, your parents, and well-meaning family members that you need to be well rounded? Those of us who excelled at academics were told we also need to be good at athletics – and vice versa. A's and B's on your report card earned congratulations, but C's and D's got the most attention. Is it possible to be good at everything?

### Strengthen Your Strengths

Marcus Buckingham has spent his career learning about natural strengths and how they contribute to our success at work. An author of several books and a well-known leader in management research, Buckingham tells us that our greatest potential for improvement lies with *strengthening* our strengths. Our natural strengths are things we do well and – rather easily. That's what makes them second nature for us – these things are not effortless, but the effort we expend is pleasurable to us. And we draw great satisfaction from them.

### Manage Around Your Weaknesses

We live in a world where most people believe we need to focus on our weaknesses and improve them so we are “well rounded.” Marcus disagrees. He says we can learn to manage *around* our weaknesses, not ignore them, and use more and more of our strengths every day to achieve our very best performance.



### What are Your Natural Strengths?

How might your work life change if you used your strengths 75% of the time? Can you identify your own natural strengths – what you are good at, what you are drawn toward, what engages and challenges you, and what fills an innate need of yours? You might look back to your childhood years for some clues.

### An Attitude of Curiosity?

One assumption we can make is that by choosing to work in higher education, you have certain natural strengths that are a good match for this environment. As you reflect on your own unique strengths, among them may be a desire to learn or teach, an attitude of curiosity, and openness to new information. In contrast, someone who has chosen to work in a research laboratory may find among their natural strengths a preference for clarity, specificity, and an ability to persevere over time. Marcus Buckingham believes we gravitate to a certain field or industry that is right for us, though we may need to find the precise job match for us within that particular field.

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## Read This...

In his book, *Go Put Your Strengths To Work*, author Marcus Buckingham provides ideas for getting clear on your natural strengths and he presents methods for putting those strengths more centrally and firmly into your workday.

## And, Read This...

A second recommendation for your reading list is *12: The Elements of Great Managing* by Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter. This book is one of a series of books from the Gallup Organization (where Marcus Buckingham was a researcher) and is based on the “largest worldwide study of employee engagement.”

## Q12

From that study has come twelve statements called Q12. These statements are protected by strong copyright, so we cannot print them here, but you can find them in this book and on the Gallup website ([www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)). One of the Q12 is central to the work Marcus Buckingham has done in the past two years after leaving the Gallup Organization.

## What's On Your Bookshelf?

*12: The Elements of Great Managing* is based on *implementing* the Q12 statements called “the core of the unwritten social contract between employee and employer.” Sounds a bit dry, but truly this is important information for all managers. Even just a quick scan will give you helpful information that will help you to grow as a manager. Both of these books need to be on your office bookshelf.

## Make a Quality Difference

It is hard to find the time to read management books when each day is filled with challenge. You don't have to become an expert at the principles in either book – though their messages are compelling. Doing one thing – just one – that makes a quality difference for you and for members of your team will have a positive impact that ripples outward.

## HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

1. Get to know the people who work for you. Make the time to find out what is important to them. Give them feedback on their work and ask for their opinion. Learn what their strengths are and how they like to use them at work.
2. At your staff meetings, get people talking about their ideas for improvements and ways to implement those ideas. Try out new ideas as a pilot program and evaluate after a month or two whether the change is an improvement. Determine your measurement for success before you launch the pilot.
3. Meet one-on-one with each person who reports to you to have big-picture conversations about how things are going. Listen. Let them know what you appreciate about their work.
4. When you have identified a natural strength of yours, make a reminder card or note to yourself and place it where you will see it daily. It is a visible affirmation of something important about you that you want to demonstrate more often. Put your strengths to work more and more each day by reminding yourself of their importance.

In his studies of outstanding performance, Buckingham looked for the differences between good performers and great performers. He learned a simple truth: outstanding performers use their strengths about 75% of each day. “We all have things we must do every day that do not play to our strengths and we can't avoid those tasks. But we can limit them so most of the time we put our strengths to work.”