

**Focusing on strengths is naturally appealing and intuitive – and we're now seeing a distinct increase in research and work in this area, and how it applies to enhanced leadership and improved organisational and personal performance.**

*(This is a component of my positive energy workshop series. Please contact me for further information regarding workshops, coaching and advice.)*

## Quotes

“A focus on problem areas prevents companies from reaping the best performance from its people.....the alternative is to foster excellence by identifying and harnessing their unique strengths.” (1)

“Average managers treat all their employees the same. Great managers discover each individual's unique talents and bring these to the surface so everyone wins.” (2)

“Our world seems naturally predisposed to tell us in which areas we are weak. It is easy for us to notice how people are different from us and then to focus on what they lack.” (3)

“Identifying and understanding talents, for many individuals, can become positive turning points, triggering changes in how people view themselves in the context of the world around them.” (3)

“Managers with a strengths-based approach nearly double their likelihood of success.” (3)

“Top-performing managers affect engagement and productivity by understanding and positioning individual differences in their employees.” (3)

## Why Strengths?

From the fields of positive organisational scholarship (POS) we learn that positive dynamics (e.g. strength, resilience, vitality, etc) lead to positive effects such as improved productivity and performance. People progress more rapidly in their areas of greatest talent than in their areas of weakness.

A bias on weaknesses and forever finding the flaws leads to defensive behaviour, and leads to an unbalanced focus on fixing aspects of oneself that might not always be fixable. Too much negativity also results in a fight or flight response, whereas research has shown that positive approaches result in 'broaden and build' behaviours. This is not to say that corrective feedback, and adapting and improving are out of place. Rather, a balance is being sought where, because as human beings we easily and naturally look for the negative, we need to take a greater look at strengths as a way to enhance work and lives.

Research from the positive psychology field reveals that using ones signature strengths more often and in more situations brings more absorption, engagement and flow in life. Using a signature strength in a new way has been documented to raise happiness and lower depression. This impact at an individual level cascades to teams and organisations.

## Knowing your Strengths

- \* An easy way to do this is to shift your focus. Look back to past work situations, including feedback appraisals, questionnaires such as Myers Briggs, and the multitude of organisational instruments. Look at the information which shows what you're great at, and think about where you have demonstrated your strengths. As you go about your work and life, instead of thinking what needs to be better or 'fixed' to get this job done, think about how you can deploy your strengths. A new energy comes from this different perspective.
- \* Gather feedback from friends, colleagues and family
- \* Think about times you were at your best: what was it about you that caused this? How can you do more of that in the future?
- \* As a manager, spend time watching and observing your colleagues and staff, talk to them: learn what they are good at, consider how their strengths can be used better. Ask your staff: "What was the best day at work you've had in the past three months?"
- \* There are many diagnostic instruments that reveal information about you, and from which you can gain a deeper understanding of your strengths. There are also tools such as the Gallup StrengthsFinder, VIA Signature Strengths, and Reflected Best Self exercise.
- \* Knowing your strengths can help you to design your work and life to build on what you are good at.

## Notes

- (1) "How to Play to Your Strengths" by Roberts, Spreitzer, Dutton, Quinn, Heaphy and Barker, in Harvard Business Review, January 2005
- (2) "Great Managers Understand Their People" <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item.jhtml?id=4745&t=leadership>
- (3) "Investing in Strengths", Clifton and Harter; in "Positive Organizational Scholarship" (2003) by Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton and Robert E. Quinn

## About this article

My aim is to provide you with information to help you and your staff with your personal and professional development. The theme for 2005 is 'Thriving People, Thriving Workplaces'. Each month, topics covered are based on areas of interest raised by clients and colleagues. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

**Add / Remove:** Please send an email to me on: [info@amandahorne.com.au](mailto:info@amandahorne.com.au)

© Amanda Horne Pty Ltd, 2005. All rights reserved.

**AMANDA HORNE**  
Thriving , Positive People & Workplaces  
Facilitator | Coach | Adviser | Trainer  
P: +61-2-6239 4566 | M: 0402 892 698  
[info@amandahorne.com.au](mailto:info@amandahorne.com.au)  
[www.amandahorne.com.au](http://www.amandahorne.com.au)