

About Author/s:



In a world where efficiency and competency rule the workplace, where do personal strengths fit in?

It's a complex question, one that intrigued Cambridge-

educated Marcus Buckingham so greatly, he set out to answer it by challenging years of social theory and utilizing his nearly two decades of research experience as a Sr. Researcher at The Gallup Organization to break through the preconceptions about achievement and get to the core of what drives success.

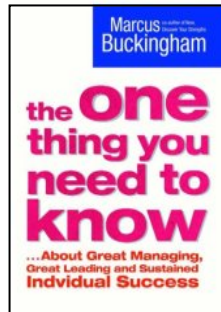
The result of his persistence, and arguably the definitive answer to the strengths question, can be found in Buckingham's trio of best-selling books, First, Break All the Rules (coauthored with Curt Coffman, Simon & Schuster, 1999); Now, Discover Your Strengths (coauthored with Donald O. Clifton, The Free Press, 2001); and The One Thing You Need to Know (The Free Press, 2005), in which the author gives important insights to maximizing strengths, understanding the crucial differences between leadership and management, and fulfilling the quest for long-lasting personal success.

To kick-start the strengths revolution, Buckingham and Gallup developed the StrengthsFinder exam (StrengthsFinder.com), which identifies signature themes that help employees quantify their personal strengths in the workplace and at home.

To know more about the author, go to: <http://www.marcusbuckingham.com/biography/index2.php>

The One Thing You Need to Know

... About Great Managing, Great Leading And Sustained Individual Success



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■ The Big Idea

Everyone wants sustained success. Unfortunately, only few are able to attain this so longed for success. This is not because of a lack of effort or lack of determination; if anything, a good number of people even expend large amounts of effort and display overwhelming determination but still don't quite make it there. A majority of people don't experience sustained success because they don't know where to focus their time, energies and resources on.

These focal points are exactly what you need to know to succeed. "The One Thing You Need to Know" will let you in on the single thing you need to know and focus on as a manager, a leader, or simply, as an individual in order to reach great heights and stay there.

The One Thing You Need to Know: Sustained Organizational Success

Managing and Leading: What's the Difference?

Leading and managing are two completely different roles altogether. But can someone be both, and be successful at that? The answer is yes. However, he or she will need certain distinct skills and talents for each of the roles in order to, at the very least, not fail in them.

Excellence is pretty much impossible to explain without noticing the role of the leader in it. According to Warren Bennis, "Leadership accounts for, at the very least, 15% of the success of any organization." And this is probably why there exists such a strong demand for "leadership training" books and seminars. Everyone wants a piece of the pie and wants the glory and recognition of having been able to bring their organizations to such heights.

Conveniently, conventional wisdom holds that everyone, that each employee, can and should be leaders. It claims that leaders, apparently, are made by training and diligence; that leader's are not born. To quote Michael Useem, director of the Center of Leadership and Change Management at the Wharton School, "everybody should be good at leading, whatever their level in the hierarchy."

However, not only is it inaccurate to say that everyone, regardless of his or her place in the hierarchy, must be a leader, it is also unhelpful. Logically, if everyone were to play the role of the leader, they will loose focus on their primary roles in the organization, and, quite quickly, the organization will crumble.

Leaders play a distinct, discreet and enormously difficult role within an organization thus certain natural talents are required and expected of them. Fact is, no matter how appealing the concept might be at first glance, not everyone can be a leader.

The same can be said for great managers.

Obviously, one can improve his or her performance as either leader or manager through practice, experience and training. But without the core talents, they won't be able to excel consistently in either.

A View From The Middle

“What do great managers actually do and what talents do you need to do it?”

The job of great managers is to excel at converting their employees' talents into performance and, at their best, speed up the reaction between each employee's talents and the company's goals.

A talent most characteristic of great managers is the ability to derive satisfaction from the incremental growth of others. They are sincere when they say that your progress is their primary goal. Great managers, as compared to mediocre ones, never see people as a means of a performance end. For them, people are always an end unto themselves. As such, the focus of great managers is the success of each and every individual working under him or her. This talent is known as the Coaching Instinct.

Although the focus of great managers is their people, they are very well aware that they are not the employees' agent; they are the company's. This is no dilemma on the manager's part. They instinctively know that for them, to serve the companies they work, for they must first, in the words of Dr. Donald O. Clifton, “get people done through work.”

Ultimately, a manager's unique contribution (and his basis for success or failure) to the company is to make other people more productive working with him or her than working with anybody else. And the only way this can be pulled off is if the employees genuinely believe that their success is their manager's primary goal.

A View From The Top

“What great leaders actually do and what talents do you need to do it?”

Great leaders rally people to a better future. They are fascinated by it: they see it so vividly, so distinctly, that they can't get it out of their heads. Leaders are restless for change, impatient for progress and deeply dissatisfied with the status quo. No matter how intense the present is, the possibilities of the future, for them, will always overshadow the intensity of the present.

Great managers start with the individual employee and focus on his success. Great leaders, on the other hand, start with his image, his vision, of the future. This future is what he thinks about and focuses on.

If the core talent of great managers is an instinct to coach others towards success, then optimism and ego are the core talents of all great leaders.

Optimism

In saying that leaders are optimistic, it means that nothing can undermine their instinct, their deep belief, and their unwavering faith that things can get better. Leaders are unfailingly, unrealistically, and even irrationally optimistic.

Like it or not, this optimism is not learnable. They are either born with an optimistic disposition or they are not. True, people can be made less pessimistic through repeated coaching and counseling, but the fact remains that less-pessimistic is not, and will never be, synonymous with optimistic. The opposite then of a leader is not a follower: the opposite of a leader is a pessimist.

Ego

A powerful ego, properly defined as a need to stake grand claims, is the second half of a leader's core talents. As such, leaders don't set humble goals, don't have humble dreams, don't have humble assessments of their abilities. Leaders not only envision a better future, they also believe that they are the ones who can make this future come true.

This, however, doesn't mean that leaders are egomaniacal. The main difference between a leader with a powerful ego and an egomaniac is how their egos are channeled. Leaders, effective ones at that, take their self-belief, self-assurance, and self-confidence, and press them into an enterprise bigger than themselves. But for the egomaniac, there is no bigger enterprise than himself; he is the enterprise.

To explain the fall of great leaders as a result of too much ego is a misdiagnosis. Leaders fail not because their egos are overwhelming but because their principles are weak. They run low on integrity.

The One Thing You Need To Know: Great Managing

The Basics Of Good Managing

"What skills will prevent you from failing as a manager?"

Here are four skills you simply must learn to not fail as a manager. Doing each of these well is no guarantee that you will succeed as a manager but it does lessen the likelihood of failing as one.

1. Select Good People

Conventional wisdom holds that the best predictor of future behavior is frequent past behavior. You should know the talents you are looking for and listen for specifics.

The old maxim “You marry as is. You get change if you’re lucky” definitely applies in hiring. Human beings are blessed with certain predictable patterns of emotion, learning, memory and behavior. If these patterns don’t suit you, you will spend enormous time and effort trying to eradicate these patterns and forge new ones.

The effort factor in hiring or changing patterns is controllable. Time, however, is non-negotiable. You will spend the time. The only variable here is whether you will spend it on the front end, carefully choosing your employees, or at the back end, desperately trying to transform them into the persons you wish they were in the first place. Do remember that good managers, in effect, say “I love you just the way you are” while mediocre ones say “I love you just the way you are going to be when I’m finished with you.”

2. Define Clear Expectations

Confusion retards everything from efficiency to focus, to team work and partnership, all the way to pride and satisfaction. How can you distinguish a shortcut from a distraction when you don’t know what the goal is? How can you value the contributions of others if you don’t know what your own contribution ought to be? If you don’t know how your success is being measured, how will you ever get to feel successful?

3. Recognize Excellence and Praise It

Every behavior has a consequence, and that consequence significantly affects whether or not a person will repeat this behavior. Consequences can either be positive/negative, future/immediate, certain/uncertain. The most powerful are consequences that are certain, immediate and positive.

Great managers are aware of the power of consequences and with that they know that praise is more of a cause to great performance than it is an effect of it.

4. Show Care for Your People

Human beings bond instinctively. Good things tend to happen as a result of bonding. So if a manager wants to see good things happening, he must set an example and forge bonds of his own. Managers should be able to keep their employees’ confidence.

Be warned, however, that if you, as a manager, don’t sincerely care for your people, then don’t fake it. Fake caring is worse than not caring.

Great Manager's Play Chess

"What is the one thing that you need to know about great managing?"

Managers are comparable to those who play checkers and chess. Great managers play chess. They know that each chess piece, like each employee, moves uniquely and has a distinct role to play. The challenge now is learning how each piece moves and incorporating these moves into his overall plan of attack.

Mediocre managers, on the other hand, play checkers. They assume or hope that all their employees move the same way and are motivated by the same things.

Great managers know that even if employees are selected against the same set of talents or competencies, the complexity of human nature is such that the differences in personalities among these employees will far outweigh the similarities.

Great Managers Are Romantics

"What are the benefits of individualization?"

Great Managers are romantics because they just can't help but be intrigued by each employee's uniqueness. To cite Theodore Zeldin, "the romantic feels the individuality of other people, and considers that individuality sacred, not because of how important or powerful its possessor is, but because it is individuality."

Great managers then capitalize on each person's uniqueness because they know that the power of individualization is extraordinarily far-reaching. Just a few benefits of individualizing:

- First and foremost, capitalizing on one's uniqueness saves time. Not even the most talented employees are perfectly well-rounded. Inefficient managers waste a whole lot of time and energy fighting against these imperfections and trying to eradicate them.
- Second, finding and capitalizing on each person's uniqueness increases each person's accountability. Great managers have their employees take ownership for their unique abilities, have them practice it, and refine it. As a result, each employee feels the pressure to demonstrate his or her abilities.
- Third, interdependency, brought about by capitalizing on what is unique about each person, builds a stronger sense of team. Each team member comes to acknowledge and recognize every other team member's talents

and areas of expertise, thus creating a need for each other. Managers can accelerate this feeling of interdependence by identifying, emphasizing, and celebrating each person's uniqueness.

- Lastly, capitalizing on what is unique about each person introduces a healthy degree of disruption into the manager's world. By shuffling existing hierarchies, existing assumptions about who is allowed to do what are also shuffled. Great managers shuffle existing beliefs about where true expertise lies.

Capitalizing on the uniqueness of each person stimulates individual excellence. But as a manager working for a certain organization, one can only accommodate the uniqueness of an individual up to a certain extent. Provided that an employee is making significant contributions to the organization, it is often worth shuffling existing arrangements to accommodate his uniqueness. After all, the point of individualizing is to help a person contribute his utmost.

If an employee, despite all positive reinforcement, isn't performing, then he just isn't performing. A manager will just have to let go of his romanticism, stop wasting everybody's time, and move the non-performer out.

The Three Levers

"What are the three things you need to know about a person in order to manage him or her effectively?"

1. Strengths And Weaknesses.

A great manager, having defined the outcomes he wants, inflates his employees' beliefs in their strengths and then challenges them to figure out the best way to use those strengths to achieve the desired outcome. As for weaknesses, here is a sequence of strategies to help a struggling employee:

- First, identify if a person's struggles are caused by his lack of skills or knowledge, rather by a lack of talent. Provide him then with training in the skills or knowledge you think he lacks, allow him to incorporate these into his behavior, and see if he improves. If he doesn't, logic concludes that he is struggling because he lacks certain talents, in which case, no amount of skills or knowledge training is going to "fix" him.
- Second, find him a partner, someone whose talents are strong in the areas where he is weak.
- Third, insert into the employee's world a technique or trick that accomplishes through discipline what the employee is unable to accomplish through instinct.

- Lastly, rearrange the employee's working world so that his weakness is no longer in play. This strategy is the most extreme as it will require you the creativity to envision a more effective arrangement and the courage to push this new arrangements.

Things won't always play out quite so perfectly and sometimes employees will resist moving into the new role you've created for them. If so, describe the strengths you've seen in them that will enact them to excel at the new role. Help them see why these strengths complement the new set of responsibilities. Challenge him/her to put these strengths to work.

2. Triggers

The recognition trigger is by far the most effective of all triggers. Still not all triggers are the same for everyone. Great managers will just have to find the precise trigger that will bring out a certain employee's strengths.

3. Style of learning

A manager should be able to figure out his employees' style of learning and customize his message to fit that learning style. Here are three types of learning styles:

- **Analyzing** – Analyzers will always need ample time to prepare. They hate mistakes and as their type implies, their most powerful learning moments occur prior to actual performance. Analyzers will just not be able to wing a new situation.
- **Doing** - Doers will only learn through action. Winging it is the only way for them; making mistakes is definitely part of learning. The only drawback with doers is that because they'd rather act, they sometimes don't give advice much credence.
- **Watching** – or imitation. Watchers learn a great deal once they are given the chance to see the total performance. They have to see someone in action and learn from there. The best way to teach watchers is to have them work with one of your most experienced performers.

The One Thing You Need To Know: Great Leading

An effective leader, while not denying the truth that each person is different, focuses on a separate but equally powerful truth: despite our differences, we all share a great deal. Leaders know that humans all share common experiences, virtues and vices, and that if they pay enough attention, they will be able to empathize with and understand one another. With this knowledge, a leader's

challenge then is to do everything in their power to get people to join together to make this future come true.

Thus the one thing every great leader knows he must do is: Discover what is universal and capitalize on it.

Extended apathy, an ability to cut through differences and fasten upon the few needs that all share, is at the core of great leadership. When a leader empathizes, people begin to feel a closer connection with him. People develop a stronger sense that his vision is in fact their vision and that together they can make this shared vision come true. Through extended apathy, a leader is able to rally people toward a better future. Without this, he loses his ability to lead.

Universals can readily be distilled down to five. The five pairings of fears and needs are as follows:

1. Fear Of Death (Our Own And Our Family's) – Need For Security
2. Fear Of The Outsider – Need For Community
3. Fear Of The Future – Need For Clarity
4. Fear Of Chaos – Need For Authority
5. Fear Of Insignificance – Need For Respect.

Among the five, one universal explicitly deals with the future: the fear of it and the need for clarity. This universal requires the greatest attention. If one can neutralize this fear and, even better, turn this fear into something positive, then he may very well have positioned himself to pull-off something truly significant as a leader.

Clarity is an antidote to anxiety. Great leaders are able to transform the fear of the unknown into confidence in the future. They are able to do so by being clear. Here are the four points of clarity that every effective leader focuses on:

1. Who do we serve? - In order to follow, the people need to know who precisely they are trying to please. Leaders must know who they serve and they must be clear about it. By knowing who the target is, leaders are able to make more focused decisions.

Although a leader must be clear, he must not be clear or detailed on all points. He should still allow a certain level of ambiguity especially in the strategies and tactics selected by his followers to encourage them to devise novel ways of serving.

2. What is our core strength? – This helps determine where a leader should spend his resources on and where he shouldn't. As for the leader's followers, identifying the group's core strength serves more of an emotional need than a rational one: the people need to be convinced of why they will triumph.

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3. What is our core score? – People need to know that one score they should be using to measure their progress into the future. After all, if it's measurable, it's comparable. If it's comparable, then people can compete. And if people can compete, they can win.
4. What actions can we take today? – Actions are clear, unambiguous and measurable. Moreover, only actions lead to impact. So if people want change and progress, they have to act. They just have to know what to act on.

The Disciplines Of Leadership: How Do Best Leaders Achieve This Clarity?

Here are the disciplines great leaders have that allow them to achieve clarity:

Discipline 1: Take Time To Reflect. Great leaders know that thinking time is valuable time. It forces them to step back and process all that has happened, sift thru the clutter, run ideas up the proverbial flagpole, and lastly, conclude. During this time, leaders think about all kinds of things with excellence always in mind. Leaders take this time to analyze why things failed and more importantly why things succeeded.

Discipline 2: Select Your Heroes With Great Care. Heroes do not pertain to the leader's own role models in this context. Here, heroes would be the employees or followers whose performances are chosen to be celebrated. Keep in mind that a leader has to be clear as to why this person is to be exalted.

Discipline 3: Practice. Leaders don't have to constantly come up with something new or great. They just have to be clear. And to be able to send their message across clearly, great leaders discipline themselves to practice delivering the words, images, and stories they use to help the people perceive the future more clearly.

The One Thing You Need To Know: Sustained Individual Success

The Gallup Research gathers that only 20% of people report that they are in a role wherein they have the chance to do their best everyday. These people are fortunate enough to experience extraordinary, repeated and sustained success.

The question then is: what is it that these people do that separates them from the majority? More than what they choose to do, the secret actually lies in what these twenty-percenters choose not to do. Thus the One Thing you need to know to sustain success is: Discover what you don't like doing and stop doing it.

Success then, according to this definition is not about accumulating more. It's about editing. What matters is not what you add but what you have the discipline to cut away. The secret to sustained success is knowing which activities engage your strengths the most, knowing which ones don't, and in having the self-discipline to reject the latter and ruthlessly eradicate them from your life.

What makes success so elusive is that unfortunately one's strengths are rarely left to its own devices. In an attempt to sustain this newly attained success, people, more often than not, tend to add more activities or processes to the act or talent that brought them to that success. As a result, they lose focus on their true goal and their strengths get downplayed by all the other supposedly complementing additions.

What Is Sustained Success?

"It's A Broad Term How Do We Define It?"

Sustained success means making the greatest possible impact over the longest period of time.

Broad as it is, this definition accommodates our diversity. Because no matter where we chose to direct our energies at, who our audiences are, or what metrics we use to measure success, our goal will always be to make the greatest impact possible over the longest period of time.

This definition requires two things:

1. First it requires that you use your natural talents and your enthusiasm in learning enough role-specific skills and knowledge to be good at something. It also means that you will have to target your learning towards areas wherein you hold some kind of competitive advantage. This is mainly because you are only good until someone else becomes better.
2. And second, that you not only have to be good at something, you have to stay good at it. Staying good at it will then require that you also get better at it.

The three main Contenders

Here are the three persuasive contenders that come close to the one thing you should know about sustained success.

- **Find The Right Tactics And Employ Them--** your talent, skill and intelligence alone cannot bring you to new heights. Regardless of your natural genius, you will still need to use strategies and tactics to make it to the top.

- **Find Your Flaws And Fix Them** – the premise is that although you possess a unique complement of strengths and weaknesses, your greatest room for improvement lies in your areas of weakness. Your weaknesses, according to this school of thought, are those things you find difficult, and in effect, challenging. Your weaknesses then cry out for attention if you do want to stay challenged. This practice is often not pursued though for two particular reasons:
 1. *Biologically, you will not learn most in your areas of weakness.* First, how and what you learn from experience is determined by genes. Your genetic structure limits your learning ability. To use an example: a human will never be able to smell as effectively as a rat because a rat has 1,036 olfactory nerves as compared to a human's 347. And second, you are most likely to see growth in your synaptic connections (synapses are responsible for the learning function of your brain as they send and receive signals between your brain cells) in those areas of your brain where you already have the most existing number of connections.
 2. *You will not feel energized and challenged when focusing on your flaws.* This is more of a psychological reason than it is biological. Your self-efficacy, which is a feeling tied to a specific memory or activity, is lowest in your areas of weakness. There is a negative stigma attached to your weaknesses most probably caused by a negative or traumatic experience. These negative moods will only activate thoughts of past failings.
- **Discover Your Strengths And Cultivate Them** – the more you investigate on your past successes, the more you'll recognize certain behavioral patterns that formed part of your successes.

How Do You Sustain Success If...?

- **You're bored** – Chances are your deep interests are not engaged. The content of the activities you do leaves you cold. So if the content of your job proves deeply uninteresting to you, change your job.
- **You're unfulfilled** – Dislike may stem from a lack of fulfillment rather than a lack of interest. This often happens when your values are not engaged. If it does happen to you, change jobs. Don't stay for the money or the perceived security: it will only get the best of you.
- **You're frustrated** – this happens when both your interests and values are engaged but your strengths are not in play. If your role represses your strengths, you may be able to contain your frustrations but only for a short while. The pressure will build and you will eventually burst. Thus you are left

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with two options: either change roles that will capitalize on your strengths or, if you are able to, tweak your role so that part of it plays to your strengths.

- **You're drained** – when this happens, you can use the same solutions first presented: change jobs or tweak your job. But in the event that you still have some room to maneuver, you could first seek out the right partners to help you or find the aspect in your role that brings you strength.

Always keep in mind that the longer you put up with aspects of your work you don't like, the less successful you will be. So as far as you are able and as quickly as you can, stop doing the