

Companywide Communication: Key to Strengths Development

INCREASE IN PROFIT FOR MANY
STRENGTHS-BASED WORKPLACES

29%

GALLUP

by Brandon Rigoni and Jim Asplund

Story Highlights

- Internal communication about strengths should be both formal and informal
 - The most effective communication is thoughtful and strategic
 - Leaders need to regularly remind employees of strengths concepts
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This is the third article in a seven-part series.

In a global study of companies that have implemented strengths-based management practices, Gallup found that 90% of the groups studied had performance increases at or above the following ranges:

- 10% to 19% increase in sales
- 14% to 29% increase in profit
- 3% to 7% higher customer engagement
- 6% to 16% less turnover (in low-turnover organizations)
- 26% to 72% less turnover (in high-turnover organizations)
- 9% to 15% increase in engaged employees
- 22% to 59% fewer safety incidents

Even at the low end, these are impressive gains. In working with hundreds of organizations, Gallup uncovered the characteristics common among companies that have accomplished the *most* with their strengths interventions. These companies often work toward creating a strengths-based culture using seven strategies. This article focuses on the third of these seven strengths strategies: internal communication.

Generating Awareness and Enthusiasm Companywide

It's a simple notion: When companies consistently talk about strengths concepts, employees use their strengths more often. Internal communication about strengths should occur both formally and informally, with strengths infused into everything from hallway conversations to official business strategies.

Leadership's communication about strengths at a broad level is vital. For example, leaders should discuss their own performance goals in terms of their strengths. This consistent messaging encourages everyone to buy in. In addition, informal references to strengths should be an everyday occurrence. Leaders and managers are responsible for providing the resources for and enthusiasm about daily strengths conversations.

Best Practices for Powerful Internal Communication

Be strategic. Leaders with the most effective strengths communication are thoughtful and strategic, proactively considering how communication flows through the company and developing their communication plan accordingly. These leaders go beyond companywide email announcements about strengths; they enlist influential employees, high-profile teams and prominent leaders to help garner enthusiasm for strengths.

These leaders also predict and avert communication roadblocks. Optimal strengths communication is purposeful, with leaders fostering an environment in which employees discuss strengths daily.

Explain not only *what* and *why*, but also *how*. Leaders and managers should start by explaining what strengths are and why the organization is building a strengths-based culture. Then, they need to ensure employees know *how* to incorporate strengths in their day-to-day work and *how* to leverage strengths to accomplish goals.

To achieve strengths-based performance gains, employees need to bring strengths to life -- and this takes strengths education. Importantly, "what, why and how" messages should not be generic; rather, companies should individualize conversations to each employee's role. For

example, managers use their strengths for different purposes than front-line workers do and need customized strengths education.

Onboarding is a critical time for strengths education, so leaders should ensure all new employees learn about strengths starting on day one.

Make strengths memorable. Every organization has a unique culture, so it is important for leaders to communicate about strengths in ways that make sense. For some, it means incorporating elements of humor with catchy sayings or branded t-shirts; others might need a more direct, disciplined approach, such as connecting company strengths to business outcomes during investor calls.

It can be helpful to incorporate strengths as a strategy to accomplish other well-known company objectives so that leveraging strengths becomes the *how* as the company wrestles with *what* everyone knows must get done.

Communicating the benefits and importance of strengths can require consistent effort over many months. Today's busy employees have less time to focus on corporate communications, so it is important for leaders to be mindful that other organizational messages may confuse employees by competing with strengths as a strategy.

Tell success stories and recognize strengths-based achievements. Real-life examples about strengths demonstrate to employees that a strengths-based culture *really works*. For example, a manager can highlight "strengths in action" by publicly recognizing a team member for leveraging his or her strengths to make a lasting difference. Infusing strengths into employee recognition is a winning communication strategy that motivates employees to tap into what they do best.

Share positive strengths-based outcomes with credibility. Part of gaining employee buy-in for strengths involves communicating the hard facts about how strengths-based cultures realize business and customer benefits. Messages about these outcomes are often most effective when they come from very credible sources, such as a CFO or other employee whose role involves bottom-line outcomes. Trustworthy communication fosters ownership among employees and encourages them to do their part in realizing the business benefits of strengths.

Repeat, repeat, repeat. As with any company initiative, consistent communication is essential. Leaders need to regularly remind employees of strengths concepts, such as how to infuse strengths into goals, team assignments and performance management processes. Leaders

should constantly reiterate the importance of strengths and never assume employees know the "what, why and how" behind them.

The next article in this series will focus on building broad strengths communities within organizations.

Bailey Nelson contributed to this article.

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