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## Four Essentials Of Strength-Based Leadership



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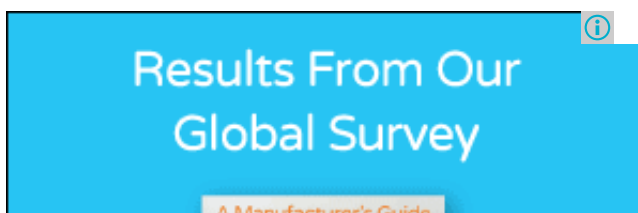
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It is in human nature to look for negative in everything first. Most of the stories on the news are negative (after all, they draw the most attention).



There are more negative words in our vocabulary than positive and happy words. When something doesn't go the way we think it should, our mind

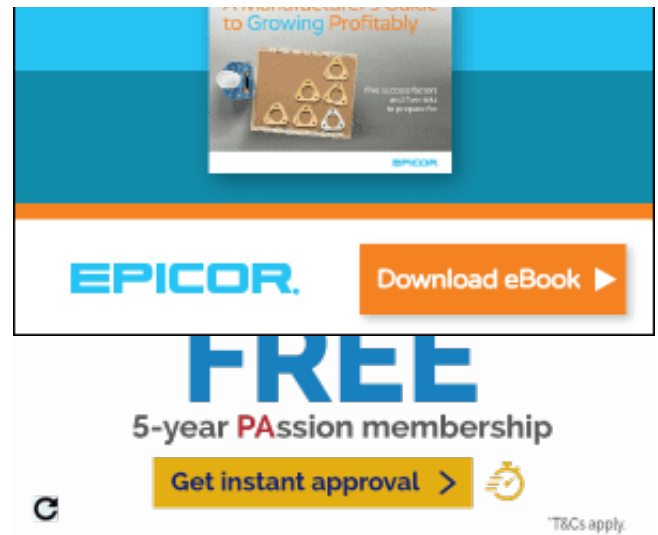


immediately jumps to negative thoughts and gloomy assumptions.

It is also in human nature to fix things. We love finding problems so that we could solve them and gaps so that we could fill them. Not only we use this approach with the projects we work on, but we also use this approach in evaluating our employees. After all, it feels natural, it feels right.

And that's where we go wrong! This approach is the reason we cannot build strong and diverse teams. This approach is the reason we are not utilizing human potential to its fullest. This approach is the reason we have more mediocre managers than we have true leaders. And at the end of the day, all that impacts our culture and ultimately our bottom line.

***The simple truth is that if we stop trying to “fix” our employees and rather focus on their strengths and their passions, we can create a fervent army of brand evangelists who, when empowered, could take our brand and our***



The image shows a promotional banner for Epicor. At the top, there is a small graphic with the text "11 Fundamentals of Success to Growing Profitably" and the Epicor logo. Below this, the Epicor logo is displayed in blue. To the right of the logo is an orange button that says "Download eBook" with a right-pointing arrow. Below the logo and button, the word "FREE" is written in large, bold, blue letters. Underneath "FREE" is the text "5-year PAssion membership" in black. Below that is a yellow button that says "Get instant approval" with a right-pointing arrow and a clock icon. In the bottom right corner, there is a small "T&Cs apply" text. A small "C" logo is visible in the bottom left corner of the banner area.

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Over the past several years a number of companies have embraced *StrengthsFinder* as an approach to evaluating individual employees and team alike. *StrengthsFinder* is a test and a guide that helps identify team's top strengths to allow management to tap into the natural talents of its employees. However, the sad part is that in most companies this is usually a one-time exercise rather than a mentality. We come to the end of every year and we still pay more attention to areas of improvement than we should to strengths of our staff.

*The companies that embrace the mentality of aligning people's strengths and passions with the right projects and teams get amazing results in both employee brand evangelism and productivity.*

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Facebook FB +1.71% is one of those companies. Facebook's culture and approach to hiring people is non-traditional. Sometimes they find the best talent in the industry and bring people on board without any particular role in mind allowing them to match up their skills with their projects of interest. Every 18 months or so, Facebook engineers are required to rotate and work on something different for a while. This requirement constantly brings new perspectives and experience to the teams and ignites new ideas. But the key is that, in doing so, they don't force unnatural talent/project pairing.



Forbes



**BETA**


Facebook also holds hackathons, monthly all-nighters where any idea or project can be brought forth for others to work on. If an employee is passionate about a feature that isn't currently on the roadmap, (s)he can bring it to light and partner with others to get it to the state of usable code. It is considered an intellectual and creative

exercise. The company provides food and beer; engineers, their ingenuity. The only rule is that during hackathons, one can work only on someone else's project. Some of the most popular site features, like chat, video messaging, and Timeline, came out of these all-nighters.



The company encourages its workers to form teams around projects they're passionate about and have the strongest skillset, because Facebook's leaders clearly understand that great work comes out of doing what you love and applying your strengths in creative ways. This also creates a rather flat environment where anyone can be a hero: whether you are a CEO or an intern, if you had the best idea or code, you are celebrated. "Pixels talk," said Joey Flynn, one of the designers of Timeline. "You can do anything here if you can prove it."

**3M** MMM +0.76% is another company that allows its employees to apply their strengths towards the projects and ideas they are passionate about. We have all heard

about companies like [Google](#)  
 allowing employees the time and encouragement to create, but it is a little known fact that 3M set the precedent for this practice years before with its “15 percent time,” a program that allows anyone who works at 3M to use a portion of weekly work time to create and develop his or her own ideas. As a matter of fact, the program has produced many of 3M’s best-selling products, including the Post-it note. In 1974, Art Fry, a scientist at 3M, came up with that simple but famous invention.

Strength-based leadership is often overlooked. Mostly because “we’ve always done it this way” syndrome. We understood the value of improvement and fierce competition, so it stood reason that we have always tried to change who we are to become, well, “better”. However, if we want to breed more leaders, not more mediocre managers, we need to revisit how we hire people, build and manage teams, and, at times, fire as well.

Here is the **ABCD of**

## strength-based leadership:

- **Align, don't fix.** Instead of forcing team-members to work on projects that need to be done, ask "Who wants to take on this one?" Look at the skillsets of your employees, talk to them, and identify the best fit. You might find that someone who isn't passionate about analytics would trade projects with someone who is and vice versa. Sometimes it's as easy as asking. And sometimes you need to reshuffle your team and fill in the gaps. But ultimately, when all the pieces of the puzzle fit well and all the skillsets are utilized in the way they should be, you end up becoming a better leader and fostering an innovative environment.



- **Build diverse teams.** Diversity of perspective, cultures, passions, ages, genders will help you build some of the most creative and innovative teams around. Building a successful team is like building a puzzle. When all of the pieces fall into place, you end up with a complete picture. Don't just hire "yes" people, hire those who will be able to bring various strengths to the team, thus



creating grounds-breaking thinking. Their success will take your success to new heights.

- **Create the culture of transparency.** When your team-members trust you, they are open about their passions, motivations, and dreams. And if you listen (not hear, really listen) they will give you their 110% and more.
- **Don't manage, empower.** Building a diverse and complete team is half the battle. The other half is to actually empower them to create art. And that requires risk-taking and unconventional thinking. As a leader you need to allow your teams to be naïve, curious, and bold. Even if sometimes it leads to a healthy conflict. A diverse team usually means strong perspectives and opinions. But that's okay, because as a leader you can guide your team and their passions in the right direction without dampening their ingenuity and enthusiasm.

**Leadership is a privilege, not a right,** and we need to treat it as such. Leadership means encouraging people to live up to their fullest potential and find the path they love.



That, and only that, will create a strong culture and sustainable levels of innovation.

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