

This Is What Happens When You Focus on Employees' Strengths

Employees are more engaged and motivated doing work that falls right into their wheelhouse.

Andre Lavoie Published 7:00 pm, Tuesday, July 26, 2016



Focusing on strengths is a strength in and of itself. Companies experience more success when they concentrate on developing an employee's best skills, instead of just trying to fix his or her weaknesses. Proof? A July 2016 survey from **Gallup** found that strength-based companies realized better sales, profit and customer engagement.

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This concept of strength-based employee development stems from the idea that some people are better at some things than others. Employers are realizing that employees tend to be happier and more productive when they are performing a task or project they are well equipped for.

Here are the steps to take to create a culture where your managers and employees focus on developing those employees' strengths rather than just targeting their weaknesses:

1. Align projects with best fits.

Focus on assigning projects to those employees with the skills and knowledge to succeed at executing them. Recognize, however, that it can be difficult to find the best fit for projects if you don't know each employee's unique skill set. The [2015 Talent Mobility Research Report](#) by Lee Hecht Harrison found that only 42 percent of companies surveyed said they understood their employees' unique skills and experience.

Perform assessments and surveys to identify how each person performs the best and what he or she succeeds at. Employees will be more engaged and motivated doing work that falls right into their wheelhouse.

They may also become more engaged -- a requirement for keeping performance and productivity high.

Gallup created its Strengths Orientation Index in February 2014 to analyze just how engaged employees were when they felt their employers focused on their strengths as opposed to their weaknesses. The study found that 37 percent of the 1,003 employees surveyed felt their employer focused on their strengths, which led to 61 percent of that group of employees saying they felt engaged in their work.

Align the right employees to each task to improve engagement; then measure how well they perform. Analyze their performance metrics to see how they succeed, which will help inform future project assignments.

Related: [This Country Has the Happiest Employees in the World](#)**2. Build a diverse team.**

Just as what happens with a puzzle, a successful team requires all kinds of different sizes and shapes to fit together for a complete picture. Recruiting diverse employees is crucial.

A team of "yes" people leads to stagnant companies. Like-minded employees are less prone to ask the right questions or explore creative solutions that are innovative. If, however, your workforce comes from different backgrounds, each person will offer a unique perspective and think differently.

Search for a diversity of perspective so everyone can bring his or her unique strengths to the table, and innovate. A team of different skill sets forces questions that lead to important problem-solving.

With diverse cultures in the office, meanwhile, it's important to keep the potential for friction low. Educate employees on how to set their assumptions aside and, instead, listen intently and be open to different ideas.

3. Encourage outside-the-box thinking.

Creativity in the office leads to risk-taking and inventive thought. This may help employees uncover strengths they aren't aware of.

Host fun team-building events that allow employees to be themselves. The less formal they are, the more open they are to brainstorming.

For example, have your team members attend boot camps or seminars to get them out of the office and engage in enjoyable activities. Those activities can help with defining team goals, emphasizing the importance of individual roles and responsibilities, encouraging self-leadership and building stronger relationships based on trust and respect.

Encourage brainstorming sessions that are collaborative and engaging. Create an environment that gets creative juices flowing. Don't let people hold back -- encourage them to share all ideas, including bad ones. Sharing throwaway ideas can create a playful vibe, but can also lead to more meaningful, better solutions.

Getting employees out of their own heads, and exploring new ideas, leads to strong team rapport and creates an inviting culture that makes it comfortable for employees to be themselves. This may lead people to discover new talents and skills they didn't know they had.

4. Adopt a transparent policy.

Transparency allows people to speak their minds. When communication is open, employees and employers alike can provide and receive important feedback. Plus, there's a lot of trust and respect in a transparent culture.

Employees are more engaged and open about what they're passionate about and what motivates them. This will help them hone in on their own strengths and help employers guide them more effectively.

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In a culture that favors each person's strengths and positive characteristics, management sets realistic expectations, and employees are confident that they can succeed. A team of diverse people who bring in unique insights from other cultures or industries covers all the bases. A transparent culture fuels an open work environment meant to facilitate creative thought and innovative problem-solving that results in improved company performance.

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