

PUTTING STRENGTHS TO WORK

6 POWERFUL STEPS TO ACHIEVE OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

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WE would all love to achieve higher levels of performance and understand how to develop our strengths while maximising them in the workplace as well as in our personal lives.

Marcus Buckingham guides us through six practical steps on how to achieve this in his book *Go Put Your Strengths To Work*.

STEP 1: BUST THE MYTHS

Myth: As you grow, your personality changes.

Truth: As you grow, you become more of who you already are.

It is our instinct to judge a person's character by the way he or she behaves. As explained in this book, our personality in fact does not change. However, we develop who we are as we grow.

Buckingham states, "Your values, your skills, your self-awareness, and some of your behaviours may change. But the most dominant aspects of your personality will remain the same."

Myth: You will grow the most in your areas of weakness.

Truth: You will grow the most in your area of greatest strength.

A person will always have areas they need to grow, improve and get better at – but you will grow and develop the most in the area of your greatest strengths.

"Your strengths are your multiplier. Your strengths magnify you... you will be most inquisitive, most resilient, most creative and most open to learning in your areas of strength."

Myth: A good team member does whatever it takes to help the team.

Truth: A good team member deliberately volunteers his strengths to the team most of the time.

Is finding your weaknesses and fixing them the best way to improve your performance?

Many times people believe that by finding ways to improve your weaknesses, you will excel. But as cited, we become more of who we are and excel the greatest when we focus on our strengths instead of trying to battle our weaknesses.

As Buckingham says, "A great team member is not well-rounded. The great team is well-rounded, precisely because each great team member is not."

STEP 2: GET CLEAR

Do you know what your strengths are?

He states that a common misconception about what determines our personal strengths are the results we get from personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. However, he mentions that those may be mere signposts of a person's area of strength but not the actual strengths of a person.

He began to say that a person's strengths are found in the "consistent, near perfect performance" activities he does. By looking beyond the personality labels and identifying the real world, specific activities you are good at, you will have a clearer idea on what your strengths are.



STEP 3: FREE YOUR STRENGTHS

How can you make the most of what strengthens you?

In the book, he mentions that when people are asked if they play to their greatest strengths at work, most of them reply with, "There's a reason why it's called 'work'", or "The world isn't made for my happiness", and they move on to contrast how some other job like performing arts or journalism are probably likely to do that.

It seems that people have "lost hope" and given up on the belief that work can equate to being able to express one's strengths.

In the book, Buckingham explained that when you were a child, you knew which strengths drew you back again and again. You knew who you wanted to hang out with, which subjects interested you, and which teachers you really wanted to teach particular subjects.

Somewhere between then and now, that clarity has faded and your strengths have to a certain extent, become almost irrelevant.

Too often we are more concerned with our weaknesses. A research was done to ask the American workforce what they talk about when they meet their managers: their strengths or their weaknesses.

Thirty-five per cent of them answered with their weaknesses. Forty per cent said that their managers don't talk to them about it. And only 25% said "strengths".

This result proves that the world around you may not be concerned with your strengths which leaves us with a choice. Should we surrender to a life that does not view strengths as relevant or should we find a way to make them relevant?

STEP 4: STOP YOUR WEAKNESSES

How can you cut out what weakens you?

Many believe that when faced with our weaknesses, we need to work to improve them. Often times, we may even be commended for suffering through it and "not giving up".

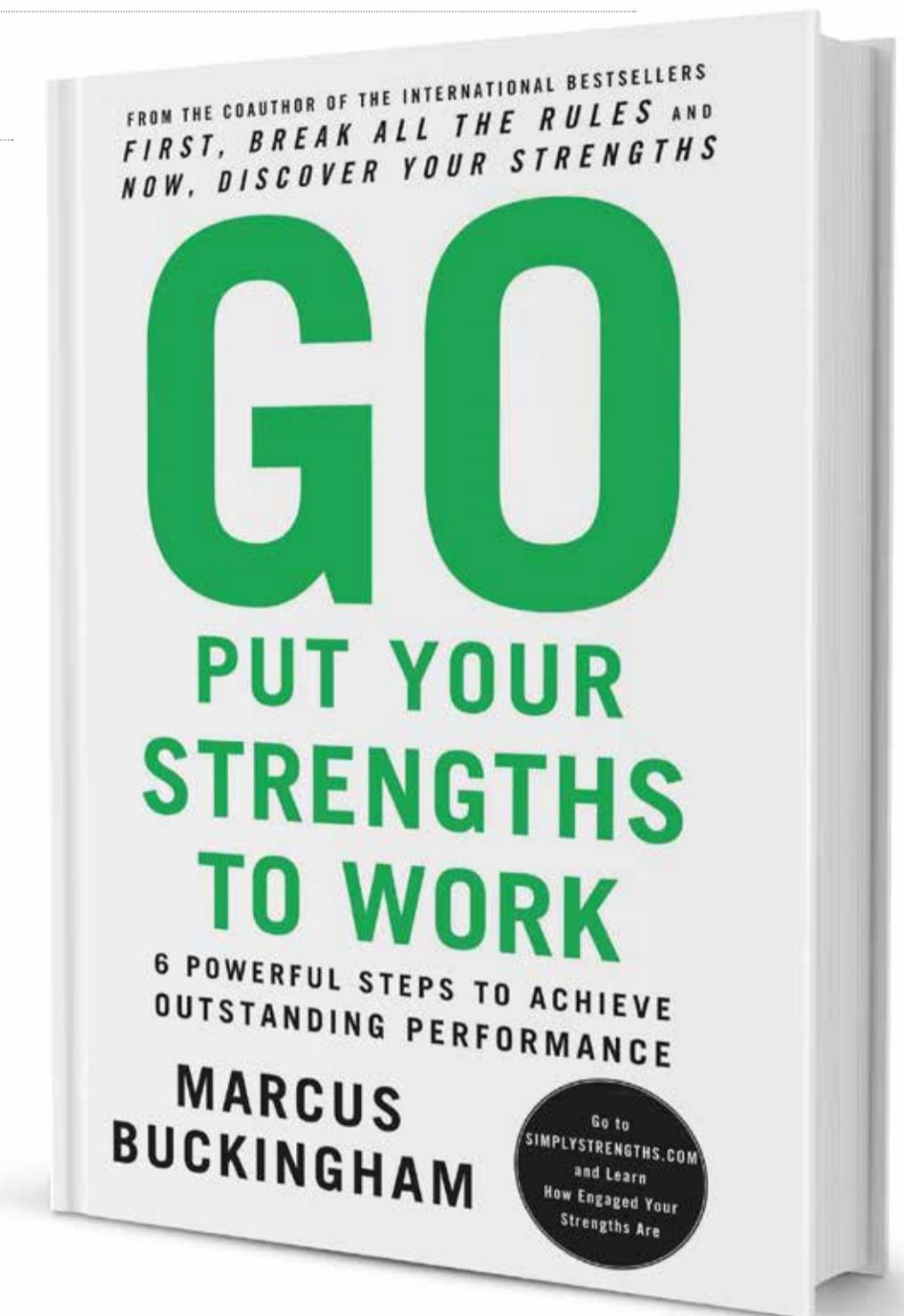
But by lessening the focus on your weaknesses and instead focusing on your strengths, it gives you room to excel. Buckingham addresses strategies which he labels as 'STOP'.

- Stopping the activity and seeing if anyone notices or cares.
- Teaming up with someone who is strengthened by the very activity that weakens you.
- Offering up one of your strengths and gently steering away from your weak areas.
- Perceiving your weaknesses from a different perspective.

STEP 5: SPEAK UP

How can you create strong teams?

Learning how to talk about your strengths and weaknesses without sounding like you're bragging or feel-



ing incompetent is another lesson learnt from this book. One of the tips he includes for strength-based managers is to listen to what the employee is saying and offering ideas for action.

You may feel that as a manager, you know the strengths and weaknesses of your employee, but this may or may not be true. Listen to what your employee has to say because he knows what strengthens or weakens him far better than you do.

Sometimes, an employee may just want to stop doing a lot of activities to get out of his job. If you have evidence to back up the fact that your employee may be lazy, then perhaps you might need to remove him from his current role or off the team.

If you really can't remove your employee from doing a particular activity, then perhaps you can explain how you need him to be in this certain role for the time being. However, you will be open to discuss ways on steering him away from those activities slowly, while still making sure the work gets done somehow.

STEP 6: BUILD STRONG HABITS

How can you make this last forever?

To be able to do a job day after day, week in and week out, will require you

to have strong habits that will push you towards what strengthens you.

Writing out strength and weakness statement cards and creating a strong week plan are just some of the ways that will help you build strong habits.

MY THOUGHTS

This book addresses questions we all may have had at some point in life.

What do I do when I burn out? What if I have a manager who doesn't understand me? What if I don't think I'm as good as everyone says I am?

The best part about this book is that it does not just give theories or "nice to hear" statements. Instead it gives you practical ways to discover your strengths, focus on them and not just learn from mistakes.

Buckingham includes activities in the book for you to immediately apply these principles. The principles are clear-cut and not just "airy fairy" ideologies on how we can improve ourselves. He also breaks down false perceptions we might have resorted to in our work life.

I recommend this book for anyone, whether you are a manager, an employee, or a full-time mother, as this book will give many pertinent insights for your personal development.

■ Tamara believes that learning never ends. She believes in constantly improving oneself. She is inspired by C.S. Lewis, Max Lucado, and Calvin & Hobbes. To engage with her, feel free to write to tamara.jayne@leaderonomics.com