

every
woman
WORKBOOK

KNOWING YOUR STRENGTHS



CONTENTS



About this workbook	3
Section 1: Uncovering your strengths	4
The difference between talents, skills and strengths	5
Recognising your dominant strengths	6
The benefits of playing to your strengths	13
A word about weakness	13
Section 2: Communicating your strengths	14
Communicating your strengths	15
Utilising your dominant strengths for best effect	16
Being known for your strengths	18
Your strengths action plan	21
Further reading	22

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

EVERYWOMAN IS AN ORGANISATION that works to advance women in business.

Over the years through our work with women in business, we have observed that many women are very aware of their weaknesses or lack of skills and quite often tend to focus on the small amount of a job or role they can't do, rather than what they have achieved and where they add real value. So many of us do not promote our strengths.

This is a key issue. If you know your strengths and communicate them effectively, it can support you to build your reputation and propel your career forward. On the flip side, if you don't know what you're good at, how will other people?

Successful people know their strengths and capitalise on them. It is worth taking time to fine-tune how you communicate and demonstrate yours. This short workbook will help.

You'll find exercises and insight that will help you dig deep to uncover and identify your strengths, and you'll also find advice and exercises that will help you articulate and communicate your strengths for professional success.

It is truly empowering to be able to speak confidently about what you are good at and the value you bring, so good luck and we hope you enjoy this workbook.

SECTION 1: UNCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS



The difference between talents, skills and strengths

OFTEN THE TERMS 'TALENTS', 'SKILLS' AND 'STRENGTHS' are used interchangeably, when in reality they mean quite different things:

Talents - those things we are innately drawn too, we have a natural ability at, can be productively applied, and which energise us. They are effortless to perform for the individual. And they cannot be taught.

Skills – these are the “how to’s” of a role. They can be broken down into the component parts and then learned by others.

Strengths – those things which give us the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance. They are a combination of talent and the investment we make in them through education, experience and time.

So how do talents come about? Developments in neuroscience and psychology have shown us that we all have a ‘filter’ through which we experience the world. This filter tells us which stimuli to notice and which to ignore; which to love and which to hate. It creates our innate motivations (our drives towards and away from things). It defines how we make decisions – primarily with our head (using rational processes) or with our heart. It defines how we take in information – primarily using our gut or intuition (where we prefer the big picture, concepts and possibilities) or using our five senses (where we prefer to see it before we believe it, have details, and deal with the here and now).

This unique combination of how we make sense and respond to the world is the source of our talents.

Recognising your dominant strengths

IT IS HARD TO KNOW EXACTLY WHEN WE WERE URGED to play to our strengths rather than fix our deficiencies but the strengths movement has certainly gathered a pace - and is proving to be having a powerful impact on personal, organisational and economic results.

And no wonder. If you have just 10% of extra effort to give, it makes sense to recognise that this effort will have a bigger impact when applied to your strengths than it will to fixing your weaknesses.



(Adapted from Tom Rath, Strengthsfinder 2.0)

According to a leading author in the strengths movement, Tom Rath, when we invest in our basic skills, this simply adds to our skill set and so we develop greater skill in this area. Whereas, when we invest in a talent it has a multiplier effect and so builds a strength.

So it follows that in order to build a strength, we must first identify our talents.

EXERCISE

Step 1:

Take a few moments to identify which activities energise you. What do you find effortless? What activities at work energise you?

Step 2:

Over the next week or so, keep adding and refining this list. After a few weeks you will see a pattern emerging. Take the activities that keep appearing on your list and pay particular attention to the context in which this activity is most energising. For example:

Activities that energise

What is it about this activity that particularly energises you? e.g. who you do it with, when you do it, why you do it?

Training

I'm energised because the people I am training are motivated to learn and there is a clear learning objective. Also, because it makes a difference to how people interact with each other in the long-term.

Developing strategies

I feel energised when I can build on the ideas of others and help them think more strategically. I also really like pulling together wide ranging ideas to create a final strategy that supports the business.

Developing my team

I'm energised when I work with my team members who are highly motivated and want to learn new ways of working. I'm also energised when I learn new things from them.

Now write down the activities that energise you and why.

Activities that energise	What is it about this activity that particularly energises you? e.g. who you do it with, when you do it, why you do it?

Step 3:

Check the effectiveness of this strength by asking for feedback from others. Does using this strength deliver desirable results? What do you consistently get positive feedback on? For example:

Strength	Evidence
<i>Training people</i>	<i>Feedback from delegates. Feedback from the delegates' managers. Appreciation from individuals that the course they attended made a difference and they are using the skills they learned.</i>
<i>Developing strategies</i>	<i>Being told by team members that my contribution really helped take the ideas forward.</i>
<i>Developing my team</i>	<i>Motivation levels staying high and retention rates staying high. A real sense I have a succession plan for my team.</i>

Now write down your strengths and the evidence to support them.

Strength	Evidence

Step 4:

You will need to articulate your strengths in a succinct way when you start communicating them to others. For example:

Strength No. 1

Being able to train people in a way which is effective, engaging and flexible

Strength No. 2

Helping a team to think strategically

Strength No. 3

Motivating and developing my team for success

(Adapted from Marcus Buckingham, Go Put Your Strengths To Work)

Use the boxes below to set out your current list of strengths.

Strength No. 1

Strength No. 2

Strength No. 3

Strength No. 4

Strength No. 5

Strength No. 6

Strength No. 7

Strength No. 8

The benefits of playing to your strengths

TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS MORE, list all the benefits that could come from focusing on your strengths. Some examples include:

- Looking forward to going to work more
- Easier work relations- having more positive than negative interactions with colleagues
- Customer feedback becomes more positive
- You feel proud to work for who you do
- You'll achieve more on a daily basis
- Having many positive and creative moments
- Being more successful

Write your own list below:

A word about weakness

In this workbook we are focusing on strengths and how, by utilising these more, you can become more successful at work. However, it would be remiss of us to ignore weaknesses. After all, we all have them!

Ask most people and they will easily identify their weaknesses. They are:

- Those activities which are effortful, sap our energy and which we least look forward to
- Those activities for which we get poor feedback about our effectiveness in undertaking them

Once you have identified your weaknesses (and do ask others for feedback about these), look for which ones are important. Which ones could potentially derail you? Which ones have a negative impact on how you do your job?

Once you have identified your key weaknesses decide to do one of the following:

Improve - find ways to improve your skills in this area by getting training, coaching or some other form of targeted development. Remember, you are not intending to turn the weakness into a strength, but simply neutralise any negative effect.

Avoid - find ways to limit or preferably remove this aspect of your job role.

Find a work around - such as partnering up with someone in your team or network that has a strength in this area.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATING YOUR STRENGTHS



Communicating your strengths

MANY PEOPLE HOLD BACK FROM COMMUNICATING THEIR STRENGTHS for fear of appearing to brag or being seen as egotistical or self-serving. Perhaps this is because they have heard it done badly in the past?

Successful people know to take responsibility for their strengths. They don't wait around for others to notice them. They don't wait for their managers to put these strengths to work. They don't shy away from communicating these strengths to colleagues for fear of being big-headed. They recognise that by communicating their strengths in an appropriate way to their manager, their peers and their direct reports it will enable them to become the best they can be.

The key to communicating your strengths is in the HOW. And here are some tips to doing it effectively:

Use emotional language - discussing our strengths is about what drives us, our passions, what we love doing and so it follows that we need to use emotional language (rather than business language). This means using phrases like "I love it when..." or "I really look forward to..."

Be purposeful - be clear what your purpose is in using your strengths. Think about the impact you want to have and what effect you will have. How, exactly, do you see yourself using your strengths at work?

Practice, practice, practice - since you may not be used to having this type of discussion with your manager and peers, practice with a friend first. It is very different saying the words out loud, to hearing them in your mind or even seeing them scripted on paper. When you hear yourself actually say the words, you can make some changes before you say it for real and when it matters.

Put yourself in their shoes - think of the benefit to the person you are sharing your strengths with. This could be your manager, direct reports, peers, senior-level management, clients etc. The benefits could be better business results, increased team effectiveness, faster working etc. Think about what they need to hear in terms of outcome so they are willing to help you play to your strengths.

Be explicit - be very clear on the strengths you are describing and be as specific as you can be. Only describe one or two strengths at a time.

Ask for their thoughts - the intention is that this is a dialogue and not a monologue and so ask for their thoughts.

Agree actions - once you have their agreement, develop ways in which you can use your strengths more at work.

"People don't change that much. Don't waste your time trying to put in what was left out. Try to draw out what was left in. That is hard enough."

MARCUS BUCKINGHAM AND
CURT COFFMAN

Utilising your dominant strengths for best effect

KEY TIPS FOR UTILISING YOUR DOMINANT STRENGTHS for best effect include:

Take steps to shape your job around your strengths

There are few jobs these days which can't be tweaked in some way to better suit the strengths of the individual. But it does take commitment, communication, and planning:

Commit to making small changes each week in how you do your job so you can use more of your strengths. Ask yourself: how will I use more of this strength this week?

Communicate with your peers, direct reports and manager about the benefit of working in this way - and be prepared to make adjustments yourself to take account of their respective strengths

Plan how you will use your strengths more in your role. It won't just happen; you need to actively seek out opportunities.

Keep getting feedback

Using strengths blindly without seeking feedback on their usefulness can lead to problems. Ask for feedback on a regular basis and look at the results you are achieving in both WHAT you are doing and HOW you are doing it. Ask yourself: how am I using my strengths for best effect? How else could I use them?

Be aware that strengths can become weaknesses

Most of the time, strengths do deliver powerful results. However, there are times when strengths work against us. For example, someone who is adept at presenting their views powerfully and motivationally may be caught short when in a situation which calls for more listening and empathy. In a sense the strength becomes a weakness. In these situations, tone down these strengths to allow other skills to come to the fore. What are the possible liabilities of your strengths? How will you avoid these from happening?

Develop skills that enhance your strengths

As we saw above, a talent can only become a strength if it is nurtured, invested in and built upon. To further build strengths, find new skills which further enhance the strength. For example, if you have a strength in coaching individuals you could develop the skills in coaching teams and so find a new outlet for your strength. Check to make sure that this additional outlet is one you find energising. What additional skills could you learn?

Update your strengths list

New situations, a change of environment and new colleagues can all unveil new strengths - ones we may not have known we had or ones we hadn't fully appreciated the value of. For this reason, it is important to regularly review your strengths to make sure you still find those on your current list effortless and useful, AND to add new strengths to your list as you develop them. Set a date now to review your strengths list - perhaps for a year's time.

Avoid 'should'

There are a lot of 'shoulds' that surround the world of work. For example, 'you should become an accountant because your parents want you to be' or 'I should take the higher paying role as others will expect me to'. To be successful you will need to stop using 'should' and instead accept what and who you are meant to be. Which 'shoulds' do you need to eliminate? What will you do instead?

Being known for your strengths

ONCE YOU KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS, the next step is to become known for them. This will give you more opportunities to put these strengths to work and so enable you to be even more successful - and energised.

Follow these tips to become known for your strengths.

Slowly, slowly - gradually build up your reputation for these strengths. If you suddenly start broadcasting your strengths out of nowhere, people will show a natural cynicism.

How will you do this?

Use your network - who in your network can tell others about your strengths? Once you identify them, talk to them about your strengths and remember to do this in a way which takes account of what's in it for them.

How will you do this?

Act 'as if' - when you talk convincingly as if you already have a reputation for the strengths you want to be known for, people will believe you. Also you will start acting differently yourself as a result.

How will you do this?

Remember, actions speak louder than words - it is not enough to tell people what your strengths are, you need to demonstrate them.

How will you do this?

Be consistent - we all have bad days, after all we are human. However, when it comes to our strengths we need to demonstrate that even on a bad day that strength will see you through. As the saying goes, smooth seas do not make a skilful sailor!

How will you do this?

Be passionate - when you love what you do, it makes other people want to know you and be around you. Your passion becomes contagious. When you say you love your work, people take notice.

How will you do this?

Be relevant - demonstrate how your strengths are relevant to the person you are talking to and the environment you are in. Strengths can become outdated if they are not applied to relevant situations.

How will you do this?

Differentiate yourself - make it your business to know how your strengths differ from others so you can stand out from the crowd. This is particularly important in a recruitment situation. What is your uniqueness?

How will you do this?

Give examples of your achievements - it is all very well having a strength but unless you can demonstrate what you have achieved as a result of the strength, it will count for nothing.

How will you do this?

Your strengths action plan

USE THIS ACTION PLAN to note what you plan to do as a result of reading this workbook.

What will you do?	By when?	What support do you need?

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This workbook has been produced and edited by everywoman, with content commissioned from associate expert Kate Turner. It is part of the everywoman portfolio of resources that have been specially created to support and develop women as they advance their careers and businesses.

everywoman Expert



Kate Turner is an expert in the field of enhancing personal performance. In her work as a leadership development coach, Kate has gained valuable insights into the mind-set of high performers and their motivators, and the impact of both of these factors upon personal success.

She is passionate about helping people ‘get out of their own way’ and so truly embrace their full potential. She has worked with ITN, JP Morgan, Fidelity Investments, John Lewis, HSBC and numerous other organisations.

Further reading

- Marcus Buckingham, *First Break all the Rules – What the world’s greatest managers do differently*, (Cox and Wyman, 2005)
Marcus Buckingham, *Go put your strengths to work – Six powerful steps to achieve outstanding success*, (W S Bookwell, 2007)
- Chuck Martin, *Smarts – Are we Hardwired for Success*, (Amacom, 2007)
- Tom Rath, *Strengthsfinder 2.0*, (Gallup Press, 2007)

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