

COACHING TIP

From Rex C. Houze

FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

From early childhood, we are conditioned to “fix” our weaknesses. When adults are asked to list their strengths, most of the time it is a struggle for them to list more than a few. When those same adults are asked to list their weaknesses, a much longer list is usually forthcoming.

Most adults have been exposed to numerous people in positions of authority who were determined to help them fix what was wrong with them. In other words, fix their weaknesses. Most managers spend an inordinate amount of time working with weak performers and focusing on mistakes. It is a myth to think that fixing weaknesses makes everything better. The best way to drive excellence is to focus on strengths and manage weaknesses.

Instead of focusing on weaknesses, determine the strengths of your team members and determine ways for them to spend more time in these areas and less time in their areas of weakness. Look for ways to offset weaknesses in one team member with the strengths of another. People are energized when they are working in their areas of strength. And, they are more motivated about their work. In the process their self-esteem is enhanced.

You can start an epidemic of positive energy on your team by making a conscious effort to seek out and acknowledge the strengths of your team members. Start by observing working behaviors in broad categories and then get more specific. Make a list for yourself and each team member. Look for how active each of you is or how much energy each of you has. Then, determine who has strengths in the following areas:

Attention to detail	Friendliness	Creativity
Follow-through	Helpfulness	Customer-oriented
Community-minded	Dedicated	Enthusiasm
Experience	Maturity	Organization
Patience	Punctual	Reliable
Sensitive	Self-starting	Stable
Thoughtful	Tolerant	Trustworthy
Versatile	[If these descriptions don't work for you, create your own list.]	

Create situations where you can spend a high percentage of your time in your areas of strength. Then, give your team regular feedback to reinforce the behaviors you want repeated. Doing this on a regular basis will produce an accumulative effect that will have a major impact on your performance, productivity, and results.

ACTION STEPS:

1. Have high expectations for yourself and your team members.
2. Find out what you and team members do well and do more of it.
3. Find out what you and team members do not do well and stop doing it.
4. Manage your weaknesses and help your team members manage theirs.