
Gene Babon

Strengths-Based Leadership Guide

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The Four Domains of Leadership Strength

As Gallup studied and worked with thousands of leadership teams, we began to see that while each member had his or her own unique strengths, the most cohesive and successful teams possessed broader groupings of strengths. So we initiated our most thorough review of this research to date. From this dataset, four distinct domains of leadership strength emerged: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking.

EXECUTING

Leaders with dominant strength in the Executing domain know how to make things happen. When you need someone to implement a solution, these are the people who will work tirelessly to get it done. Leaders with a strength to execute have the ability to "catch" an idea and make it a reality.

INFLUENCING

Those who lead by Influencing help their team reach a much broader audience. People with strength in this domain are always selling the team's ideas inside and outside the organization. When you need someone to take charge, speak up, and make sure your group is heard, look to someone with the strength to influence.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Those who lead through Relationship Building are the essential glue that holds a team together. Without these strengths on a team, in many cases, the group is simply a composite of individuals. In contrast, leaders with exceptional Relationship Building strength have the unique ability to create groups and organizations that are much greater than the sum of their parts.

STRATEGIC THINKING

Leaders with great Strategic Thinking strengths are the ones who keep us all focused on what could be. They are constantly absorbing and analyzing information and helping the team make better decisions. People with strength in this domain continually stretch our thinking for the future.

Gallup found that it serves a team well to have a representation of strengths in each of these four domains. Instead of one dominant leader who tries to do everything or individuals who all have similar strengths, contributions from all four domains lead to a strong and cohesive team. This doesn't mean that each person on a team must have strengths exclusively in a single category. In most cases, each team member will possess some strength in multiple domains.

According to our latest research, the 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder themes naturally cluster into these four domains of leadership strength. See below for how your top five themes sort into the four domains. Then, use the chart at the end of this report to plot your team members' top five themes and see how their strengths sort into the four domains as well. As you think about how you can contribute to a team and who you need to surround yourself with, this may be a good starting point.

YOUR TOP FIVE CLIFTONSTRENGTHS THEMES

EXECUTING	INFLUENCING	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	STRATEGIC THINKING
Focus	Significance		Learner
			Strategic
			Analytical

FOLLOWERS' FOUR BASIC NEEDS

Followers have a very clear picture of what they want and need from the most influential leaders in their lives: trust, compassion, stability, and hope. On the next several pages, for each of your top five Clifton StrengthsFinder themes, you will find a brief definition of the theme, strategies for leveraging that theme to meet followers' four basic needs, tips for leading others who are strong in that theme, and illustrations of what that theme sounds like in action.

Learner

LEADING WITH LEARNER

People who are especially talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

BUILD TRUST

Be honest enough to admit that you're still learning. Being vulnerable and open about your own learning puts you on par with others and indicates a mutual, not a one-sided, expectation.

Respect knowledge that is superior to your own. Some leaders feel the need to be more "advanced" than their followers in every area. This is unrealistic and unproductive; it impedes progress. Show your respect through your interest and appreciation of what others know and are capable of knowing. Listen to them, and trust them to be experts in these topics.

SHOW COMPASSION

Co-learning creates mutual vulnerability and discovery. When you "sign up" for learning, always consider whom you can invite to learn with you. When you care enough to ask someone else to join in your learning, you create a shared memory and a common opportunity that forges a bond.

Appreciate and celebrate others' learning, be it a project completed, a certification, a good spelling test, or an improvement on a report card. Let others know that you understand the hard work and effort that goes into personal growth. Emphasize that the outcome is exciting, but you recognize the merit of their journey as well. Affirm that learning has value, as does the learner.

PROVIDE STABILITY

When you invest in another person's growth, you're saying, "You matter. You are here for the long term. You are worth my investment." This helps others know that you expect an enduring — not fleeting — relationship with them. Confirm that sentiment by saying it out loud. Tell people that you're committed to them for the long haul.

Learning takes time. Your patience with others as they learn conveys to them that they're not disposable,

but rather that you believe in their value and will stand beside them as they develop.

CREATE HOPE

Recognize that your enthusiasm for learning may be shared by many in your organization. Ignite this passion by creating an ongoing, organization-wide learning program.

Research supports the link between learning and performance. When people have the opportunity to learn and grow, they are more engaged, more productive, and loyal. Look for ways to measure whether people feel their learning needs are being met, to create individualized learning milestones, and to reward achievements in learning. These rewards and seeing measurable progress can inspire others to even greater learning goals.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG LEARNER

Position this person in roles that require him to stay current in a fast-changing field. He will enjoy the challenge of maintaining his competency.

Regardless of this person's role, he will be eager to learn new facts, skills, or knowledge. Explore innovative ways for him to learn and remain motivated, or he may start hunting for a richer learning environment. For example, if he lacks opportunities to learn on the job, encourage him to take courses at the local college. Remember, he doesn't necessarily need to be promoted; he just needs to be learning. It is the process of learning, not necessarily the result, that energizes him.

Encourage this person to become the master or resident expert in his field. Arrange for him to take the relevant classes to accomplish this. If necessary, help him secure financial support to continue his education. Be sure to recognize his learning.

Have this person work beside an expert who will continuously push him to learn more.

Ask this person to conduct internal discussion groups or presentations. There may be no better way to learn than to teach others.

LEARNER SOUNDS LIKE THIS

Annie M., managing editor: "I get antsy when I am not learning something. Last year, although I was

enjoying my work, I didn't feel as though I was learning enough. So I took up tap dancing. It sounds strange, doesn't it? I know I am never going to perform or anything, but I enjoy focusing on the technical skill of tapping, getting a little better each week, and moving up from the beginners' class to the intermediate class. That was a kick."

Miles A., operations manager: "When I was seven years old, my teachers would tell my parents, 'Miles isn't the most intelligent boy in the school, but he's a sponge for learning, and he'll probably go really far because he will push himself and continually be grasping new things.' Right now, I am just starting a course in business-travel Spanish. I know it is probably too ambitious to think I could learn conversational Spanish and become totally proficient in that language, but I at least want to be able to travel there and know the language."

Tim S., coach for executives: "One of my clients is so inquisitive that it drives him crazy because he can't do everything he wants to. I'm different. I am not curious in that broad sense. I prefer to go into greater depth with things so that I can become competent in them and then use them at work. For example, recently one of my clients wanted me to travel with him to Nice, France, for a business engagement. So I started reading up on the region, buying books, and checking the Internet. It was all interesting and I enjoyed the study, but I wouldn't have done any of it if I wasn't going to be traveling there for work."

Strategic

LEADING WITH STRATEGIC

People who are especially talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

BUILD TRUST

When making decisions, discuss options candidly and thoroughly with those involved. Help them learn to trust your process of examining all alternatives and then working toward the optimal solution.

Be aware of your own biases. Are you weighting possibilities objectively or leaning toward personal desires and comfort levels? Give each option its due. Enlist the help of a good thinking partner to ensure that your decisions are made for the right reasons. Others will respect your integrity and your desire for objectivity.

SHOW COMPASSION

Apply your strategic thinking to your relationships. Write down a list of the people who have the most positive influence in your life, and then map out specific things you can do to reinvest even more time and effort in each relationship.

What are your goals for family? Close friends? What are their goals? Turn your strategic thinking talents toward these intimate partners in your life. Does someone have a dream but is seeing only obstacles? Does someone feel stuck somewhere with no options? You can help others circumvent a rocky path by pointing out alternate routes. Show that you care by helping them discover the possibilities.

PROVIDE STABILITY

Take time to study the strategies employed by effective leaders you respect or admire. Input equals output; the insights you gather are likely to have a stimulating and resourceful effect on your own strategic thinking. Make others aware that you are not bound by your own thinking and that your options and choices are supported by research. When they see the historical perspective and outside counsel you value, they will appreciate the stable foundation upon which your ideas are built.

While others may consider only the tried-and-true route, you also see the many possibilities that could

result from taking a road less traveled. Set aside time specifically for considering “what ifs,” and position yourself as a leader in that area. Explain your belief that focusing only on what has gone before may be more limiting than it is enlightening, and help others understand that all options will be carefully weighed. Your open-minded consideration will give others a sense of certainty that you are always on the lookout for the best path to take.

CREATE HOPE

Make sure that you are involved on the front end of new initiatives or enterprises. Your innovative yet methodical approach will be critical to the genesis of a venture because it will keep its creators from developing counterproductive tunnel vision. Broaden their view and increase their chances for success.

Your strategic thinking will be necessary to keep an achievable vision from deteriorating into an mere pipe dream. Lead people and organizations to fully consider all possible paths toward making a vision a reality. Wise forethought can remove obstacles before they appear and inspire others to move forward.

Make yourself known as a resource for consultation with those who are stumped by a particular problem or hindered by an obstacle or barrier. By naturally seeing a way when others are convinced there is no way, you will encourage them and lead them to success.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG STRATEGIC

Position this person on the leading edge of your organization. His ability to anticipate problems and their solutions will be invaluable. Ask him to sort through all of the possibilities and find the best way forward for your department. Suggest that he report back on the most effective strategy.

Recognize this person’s strong Strategic talents by sending him to a strategic planning or future-oriented seminar. The content will sharpen his ideas.

This person is likely to have a talent for putting his ideas and thoughts into words. To refine his thinking, ask him to present his ideas to his colleagues or to write about them for internal distribution.

STRATEGIC SOUNDS LIKE THIS

Liam C., manufacturing plant manager: “It seems as if I can always see the consequences before anyone else can. I have to say to people, ‘Lift up your eyes; look down the road a ways. Let’s talk about where we

are going to be next year so that when we get to this time next year, we don't have the same problems.' It seems obvious to me, but some people are just too focused on this month's numbers, and everything is driven by that."

Vivian T., television producer: "I used to love logic problems when I was a kid — you know, the ones where 'if A implies B, and B equals C, does A equal C?' Still today, I am always playing out repercussions, seeing where things lead. I think it makes me a great interviewer. I know that nothing is an accident; every sign, every word, every tone of voice has significance. So I watch for these clues and play them out in my head, see where they lead, and then plan my questions to take advantage of what I have seen in my head."

Simon T., human resources executive: "We really needed to take the union on at some stage, and I saw an opportunity — a very good issue to take them on. I could see that they were going in a direction that would lead them into all kinds of trouble if they continued following it. Lo and behold, they did continue following it, and when they arrived, there I was, ready and waiting. I suppose it just comes naturally to me to predict what someone else is going to do. And then when that person reacts, I can respond immediately because I have sat down and said, 'Okay, if they do this, we'll do this. If they do that, then we'll do this other thing.' It's like when you tack in a sailboat. You head in one direction, but you jinx one way, then another, planning and reacting, planning and reacting."

Analytical

LEADING WITH ANALYTICAL

People who are especially talented in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.

BUILD TRUST

Think about what you endorse. Because others trust your analytical mind, they may follow your recommendations without investigation of their own. This may be just fine, but at times, others may need your help to realize that what's right for you may not be what's right for them. Help them sort out the factors that make an action or product likely to be successful for their individual needs and desires rather than allowing them to base their analysis on yours. Help them know that you want what's best for them, and they will trust you even more.

You automatically uncover what's real, true, and honest. Others will count on you to be the "truth finder" in any information that may conflict or confuse. Think of this as a way you can support others, and don't wait for them to ask for help. Extend yourself; they will respect and trust your proactive analysis.

SHOW COMPASSION

Others who love to scrutinize ideas will be drawn to your analytical, truth-seeking approach. Stimulate debates, the tug-of-war of ideas that challenge one another. Make it fun to explore new ideas and sort out what is fact and what is conjecture. When you find a kindred spirit, take a gamesman's approach to discussion and debate, and forge a relationship that you will both enjoy.

Responding to people in crisis is an obvious way to extend compassion and caring. When others are overwhelmed by data and decisions, you can step in to help sort what's real and what can improve their odds in a difficult situation.

PROVIDE STABILITY

Data are a source of security for many people; if the research backs it, then they are willing to accept a plan and its consequences. Because you carefully examine all possibilities and non-possibilities, you provide the sense of security that many people seek. Do your homework carefully, and know that others

are looking to follow your lead.

Your endorsement can be a source of confidence that allows others to trust their own judgment. Thus empowered, they can move forward and make things happen. When you believe others are making good decisions, tell them. Your belief in their opinions and reasoning can give them the certainty and strength they need to proceed.

CREATE HOPE

Cheer for others when they are doing something difficult that you believe is right. They may be trying to guess how you feel or what you would do. Give praise for wise judgment, and offer encouragement that they can face what's ahead. If you believe they will be successful, tell them.

If others seek you out for advice in making decisions, offer to break down your thought process, and show them how it helps you sort information. Be aware that many people may not be capable of following suit. However, some will want to be students of your approach. Though it may be so well-practiced that it's automatic for you, try to articulate the steps you use for analysis. If you have a willing student, teach.

Guidance can be a mutual endeavor. Partner with someone who has action-oriented talents. You can help them make wise, considered decisions. They can help you turn your analysis into action. Both of you will benefit and be inspired to grow.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG ANALYTICAL

If you are explaining a decision that has already been made to this person, remember to lay out the logic of the decision very clearly. To you, it may feel as though you are overexplaining things, but for her, this level of detail is essential if she is to commit to the decision.

Every time you have the opportunity, recognize and praise this person's reasoning ability. She is proud of her disciplined mind.

Remember that this person has a need for exact, well-researched numbers. Never try to pass shoddy data to her as credible evidence.

Discovering patterns in data is a highlight in this person's life. Always give her the opportunity to explain the pattern in detail to you. This will be motivational for her and will help solidify your relationship.

You will not always agree with this person, but always take her point of view seriously. She has probably thought through her points very carefully.

ANALYTICAL SOUNDS LIKE THIS

Jose G., school system administrator: “I have an innate ability to see structures, formats, and patterns before they exist. For instance, when people are talking about writing a grant proposal, while I’m listening to them, my brain instinctively processes the type of grants that are available and how the discussion fits into the eligibility, right down to the format of how the information can fit on the grant form in a clear and convincing way.”

Jack T., human resources executive: “If I make a claim, I need to know that I can back it up with facts and logical thinking. For example, if someone says that our company is not paying as much as other companies, I always ask, ‘Why do you say that?’ If they say, ‘Well, I saw an ad in the paper that offers graduates in mechanical engineering five grand more than we are paying,’ I’ll reply by asking, ‘But where are these graduates going to work? Is their salary based on geography? What types of companies are they going for? Are they manufacturing companies like ours? And how many people are in their sample? Is it three people, and one of them got a really good deal, thus driving the overall average up?’ There are many questions I need to ask to ensure that their claim is indeed a fact and not based on one misleading data point.”

Leslie J., school principal: “Many times, there are inconsistencies in the performance of the same group of students from one year to the next. It’s the same group of kids, but their scores are different year to year. How can this be? Which building are the kids in? How many of the kids have been enrolled for a full academic year? Which teachers were they assigned to, and what teaching styles were used by those teachers? I just love asking questions like these to understand what is truly happening.”

FOCUS

LEADING WITH FOCUS

People who are especially talented in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track. They prioritize, then act.

BUILD TRUST

Others will respect you because you know what's important, and you keep your attention there. Make sure that you're not delegating non-essentials. Before you ask someone to do something, ask yourself if it affects ultimate performance. If it's not worth your time, perhaps it's not worth anyone's time, and you don't even have to ask. Others will trust your judgment.

As a person with strong Focus talents, you know that life is about choices. Remember that everyone is responsible for their own decisions. Demonstrate to others that you understand and respect their choices in life.

SHOW COMPASSION

Take a step back and think broadly about the priorities in your life. Use your Focus talents to target not only the projects that are important, but also the people. Set goals and strategies for giving those people the time and attention they deserve as partners in your life. Include these goals on your daily to-do lists, and check off what you accomplish.

In whom should you be investing at work? Who makes your life better every day through their efforts on the job? Show appreciation to those who enable you to be so efficient. Acknowledge their role in your effectiveness, and don't forget to reach out when they need your help too.

PROVIDE STABILITY

Expand the effects of your Focus talents by extending the period of time you usually plan in advance. For example, if you typically plan one year ahead, try planning three years out. Gradually increase the length of time you encompass in your forecasting. Share your thoughts with others. Knowing that you are focusing on and thinking about the long term will give them security now.

When you share long-term goals with your family and your work teams, tell them that they are part of your future projections. Give them the assurance that they are valued and needed and will be there with you.

CREATE HOPE

Over a lifetime, we accrue responsibilities and tasks that may have ceased to have meaning for us. Help others clear some of the accumulated clutter of their lives. Ask questions like “What are the most important priorities in your life and your work?” “What do you love about doing this?” and “What would happen if you stopped doing this?” By tackling these questions, you can help people focus — or refocus — their energies and offer them a fresh outlook on the future.

Invest in your organization by guiding the career trajectories of your company’s most promising protégés. When mentoring others, you can assist them in crafting well-defined career paths and action plans to secure their major aspirations.

Having measurable, specific, and tangible performance objectives is critical to your effectiveness. You relish setting regular “mini goals” for yourself because they keep your Focus talents sharp. Share your goals, measurement systems, and performance objectives with associates. In doing so, you will increase the sense of “team” and inspire them to track their personal progress in relation to the larger organizational objectives.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG FOCUS

Set goals with timelines, and then let this person figure out how to achieve them. He will work best in an environment where he can control his work events.

Check in with this person on a regular basis — as often as he indicates would be helpful. He will thrive on this regular attention because he likes talking about goals and his progress toward them. Ask him how often you should meet to discuss goals and objectives.

Don’t expect this person to always be sensitive to the feelings of others; getting his work done often takes top priority. If he also has strong Empathy talents, this effect will obviously be lessened. Nonetheless, be aware of the possibility that he may trample on others’ feelings as he marches toward his goal.

This person does not thrive in constantly changing situations. To manage this, when describing the change to him, use language that he will be more receptive to. For example, talk about it in terms of “new goals” and “new measures of success,” giving the change trajectory and purpose. This is the way he naturally

thinks.

Arrange for this person to attend a time management seminar. He may not naturally excel at this, but because his Focus theme pushes him to move toward his goals as fast as possible, he will appreciate the greater efficiency that effective time management brings.

FOCUS SOUNDS LIKE THIS

Nick H., computer executive: “It is very important to me to be efficient. I’m the sort of guy who plays a round of golf in two and a half hours. When I was at Electronic Data Systems, I worked out a set list of questions so that I could conduct a review of each division in 15 minutes. The founder, Ross Perot, called me ‘The Dentist’ because I would schedule a whole day of these in-and-out, fifteen-minute meetings.”

Brad F., sales executive: “I am always sorting priorities, trying to figure out the most efficient route toward the goal so that there is very little dead time, very little wasted motion. For example, I will get multiple calls from customers who need me to call the service department for them, and rather than taking each one of these calls as they come and interrupting the priorities of the day, I group them together into one call at the end of the day and get it done.”

Mike L., administrator: “People are amazed how I put things into perspective and stay on track. When people around the district are stuck on issues and caught on contrived barriers, I am able to pole-vault over them, reestablish the focus, and keep things moving.”

Doriane L., homemaker: “I am just the kind of person who likes to get to the point — in conversations, at work, and even when I am shopping with my husband. He likes to try on lots of things and has a good time doing it, whereas I try one thing on, and if I like it and it is not horribly priced, I buy it. I’m a surgical shopper.”

Significance

LEADING WITH SIGNIFICANCE

People who are especially talented in the Significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.

BUILD TRUST

Share your desire for achieving big goals. Be very candid about what motivates you, and ask the same of others. This will lead to shared trust.

Your impact on the world is almost entirely dependent on the number of people who believe in you as a leader. Always be true to who you are, on and off the stage, and people will see your authenticity.

SHOW COMPASSION

Your aspirations will usually be higher than other people's. During the long, steep climb toward the summit, be sure to reward yourself and others by recognizing and celebrating milestones. Reiterate the significance of the goal and the importance of each individual's contribution to it. Tell them what valued partners they are in this venture, and back up those words by giving them a stake in the prize. If your partnership is successful, you may be together for a long time.

Applause, appreciation, and affirmation from a valued audience will push you to ever-higher levels of performance. Whose approval you do most value? A parent, a sibling, a teacher, a boss? Your significant other? Have you told them how critical their approval is to your very existence? Let them know how much you care about their opinions. Share with them the moments that mattered. Make sure that they understand the power of their perception and the valuable role they play in your motivation and in your life.

PROVIDE STABILITY

Lasting impact matters to you. You want to build something that makes a difference beyond the immediate moment. Share that desire with others. Help them know that your vision is not for immediate glory but for the long haul. They will feel better knowing how deep your commitment goes.

Leading crucial teams or significant projects brings out your best. Your greatest motivation may come when

the stakes are at their highest. Let others know that when the game is on the line, you want the ball. They will be comforted by your confidence to take big risks and carry the responsibility on your own shoulders.

CREATE HOPE

You spend time thinking about the heft of what you will achieve and what it will mean to the present as well as to the future. Help others consider their legacy. Ask them what they are all about. What do they want to be known for? What do they want to leave behind? Give them a vision that looks past the moment and helps them assess the choices they are making every day.

Your Significance talents often put you in the spotlight. Use this opportunity to direct positive attention toward others. Your ability to champion others and set them up for success may be the best measure of your Significance.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG SIGNIFICANCE

Arrange for this person to stand out for the right reasons, or she may try to make it happen herself, perhaps inappropriately.

Position this person so that she can associate with credible, productive, professional people. She likes to surround herself with the best.

Encourage this person to praise other top achievers in the group. She enjoys making other people feel successful.

When this person makes claims to excellence — and she will — help her picture the strengths she will have to develop to realize these claims. When coaching her, don't ask her to lower her aspirations; instead, suggest that she keep benchmarks for developing the relevant strengths.

Because this person places such a premium on the perceptions of others, her self-esteem can suffer when people don't give her the recognition she deserves. At these times, draw her attention back to her strengths, and encourage her to set new goals based on them. These goals will help reenergize her.

SIGNIFICANCE SOUNDS LIKE THIS

Mary P., healthcare executive: "Women are told almost from day one, 'Don't be too proud. Don't stand tall.'"

That kind of thing. But I've learned that it's okay to have power, it's okay to have pride, and it's okay to have a big ego — and also that I need to manage it and drive it in the right directions.”

Kathie J., partner in a law firm: “Ever since I can remember, I have had the feeling that I was special, that I could take charge and make things happen. Back in the '60s, I was the first woman partner in my firm, and I can still recall walking into boardroom after boardroom and being the only woman. It's strange, thinking back. It was tough, but I actually think I enjoyed the pressure of standing out. I enjoyed being the 'woman' partner. Why? Because I knew that I would be very hard to forget. I knew everyone would notice me and pay attention to me.”

John L., physician: “All through my life, I felt that I was onstage. I am always aware of an audience. If I am sitting with a patient, I want the patient to see me as the best doctor he or she has ever had. If I am teaching medical students, I want to stand out as the best medical educator they have ever had. I want to win the Educator of the Year award. My boss is a big audience for me. Disappointing her would kill me. It's scary to think that part of my self-esteem is in other people's hands, but then again, it keeps me on my toes.”

Team Name: _____
Custom Team Distribution Chart

TEAM MEMBERS	EXECUTING	INFLUENCING	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	STRATEGIC THINKING