Strengths-Based Leadership

Focus on developing people's strengths
Jeff joined your team 18 months ago, and he's proved himself to be a talented and successful salesman. He seals the biggest deals, brings in serious revenue, and builds great relationships with clients. So, when your sales team leader transferred to another department, you were confident that promoting Jeff was the answer.
However, a few weeks later, you're starting to regret your decision. Jeff's existing skills have not translated to team management: he's an impatient, highly critical perfectionist, and he fails to explain what he wants people to do.
You now realise that you focused on Jeff's successes when you promoted him, and ignored his weaknesses. You should have used a "strengths-based leadership" approach and concentrated on building his existing strengths, and promoted someone with more effective management skills to the team leader position.
In this article, we'll explore what strengths-based leadership is, and we'll see how you can use it to develop yourself and your team members. We'll also examine the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, and look at how you can identify your own strengths, so you can become a more effective leader.
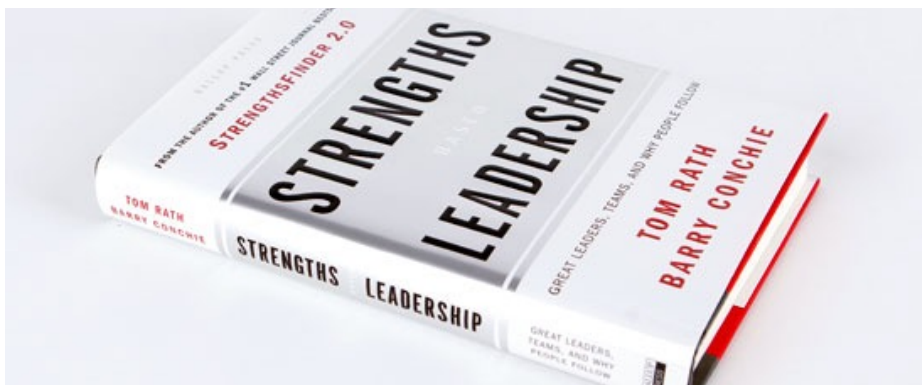
What is Strengths-Based Leadership?
Strengths-based leadership is about focusing on your strengths, and delegating tasks that you're not as good at to others who are more skilled or experienced. You can also use this approach to identify your team members' strengths, and encourage them to use these in a way that benefits everyone.START_MAIN
Leaders are sometimes expected to excel at everything, and to have very few weaknesses. In reality, though, you'll likely be an expert in a specific area only, despite your range of qualifications and experience, and this doesn't guarantee that you'll succeed elsewhere.
When you attempt to become an expert in all areas, you risk spreading yourself too thin and becoming ineffective. So, it's important to recognise your strengths and weaknesses, and delegate tasks that others could do better.

Benefits of Strengths-Based Leadership
Let's look at the benefits of using a strengths-based leadership approach. For example:
- **Improving consensus and delegation.** Working with experts in areas where you are less experienced is a sign of strength, not weakness. You're admitting where you need help, accepting others' expertise, developing a more consensual leadership style, focusing on what you do best, and promoting effective **delegation**

- **Improving engagement.** Encouraging people to focus on their strengths increases team member enjoyment and engagement. **This survey** found that only one percent of employees become disengaged if their manager actively focuses on their strengths, while 40 percent become disengaged if they are ignored.
- **Effective hiring.** You can use strengths-based leadership to develop your team. This approach encourages you to hire people based on their individual strengths, not because their skills and interests align with your own. So, you are more likely to develop a diverse team, with a range of strengths, skill-sets, attitudes, and **cultural values**
- **Encouraging creativity.** Using this approach means that you will likely be more confident in delegating and passing on responsibility to your team members, and less focused on making people "fit," which can reduce creativity and innovation.

Drawbacks of Strengths-Based Leadership
Despite its benefits, there are potential weaknesses in the strengths-based leadership approach. These include:

- **Typecasting.** This approach can increase the risk of "pigeonholing" someone. For example, if you encourage people to focus on their strengths only, they might become bored, frustrated and resentful that others are moving up and developing new areas of expertise, while they aren't.

•**Too much consensus.** If everyone focuses on their strengths and "leads" in their own areas, you might struggle to determine the group's overall direction and make final decisions.

•**Ignoring weaknesses.** This approach focuses on building talents and strengths but, in some areas, you also need to address performance weaknesses and knowledge or skills gaps. Otherwise, you and your team members are less likely to improve or develop, and your work could be undermined by a weakness that no-one has covered.

Source: Mindtools.com