

Productive Leaders

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Are You Focusing on the A or the F? Make the Most of Your Team's Strengths



If your 5th grader's report card shows A grades for all classes except one, and that one is a F, what do you focus on? The F, of course. You chide the child for not applying themselves, for not studying more, for not seeking help, and for not getting you involved earlier to solve the problem. You tell your child they can improve, that they need to apply themselves more diligently, and that you will now be checking their homework. You think that your "encouraging" lecture will cause them to change their behavior so that the grade improves.

Instead, what if you looked at the F and said, "Wow. It looks like that class is not working for you. You are great at English, Math, History, Computer Science, and Biology. Which of those do you like the best? History? Great! Want to go to the History Museum this weekend?"

What if we focused more on the strengths than the weaknesses?

A strong cohesive team is one of the best assets an organization can have. Making the most of individual team members' strengths is essential both to developing staff and growing a business. Here are 5 reminders how to get the best out of your team strengths.

Understand the Culture

Conduct an audit. Role and positional requirements are commonly used when formulating teams. Conducting a cultural audit goes one step further. Workplace [cultural](#) audits can be used to assess whether the values and beliefs of an organization are realized within teams and employees.

Corporate cultural consistency is crucial when implementing change across an organization, as it identifies what [changes](#) need to be made to address issues that impact the new team or project.

Encourage Constant Learning

Encourage initiative and learning. One of the best ways to grow team strengths is to actively promote learning and development on both personal and professional levels. Encouraging team members to continue their education, either formally or informally, sponsoring conference attendance, and working toward certifications all improve employee human capital that benefits the overall team

Encourage Individual Strengths

You would not substitute a Wimbledon champion tennis player as your starting NFL quarterback. They both may be fantastic athletes, but the skill sets are completely different. This should be obvious not to do this in the workplace, right?

A human resource director recently made one of the worst decisions I've ever seen. This 2,500-person organization hired 80 temporary workers for 6 months to augment the work load. In a colossal failure of leadership, the new hires were doled out to the various work areas like you might shuffle a deck of cards. The HR department randomly assigned the temporary employees to different departments. They did not consider the skills sets needed for the positions being filled, nor did they try to determine the abilities of the temporary workers. The decision created problems for both the workers and the gaining departments, and the consequences were what you would expect. The workers felt like they didn't matter - that they were a commodity that could be easily replaced, and that their contributions would not matter, so they didn't need to care about the job they were supposed to do. The managers who needed the additional help were furious that they now had employees who could not support their mission. To make it worse, when this was raised to the C-level, the C-suite ignored the problem, saying, "you have more people, so make it work."

Knowing the [strengths](#) of the people on the team is vital, and enabling people to use and hone their best qualities brings out the best in everyone. Some team members may be exceptionally creative while others are more analytical. By focusing roles around a person's strengths, they are more likely to be engaged and give their best to the team. Analyzing and using strengths in a team improves [productivity](#). It is important that team members appreciate both strengths and weaknesses within their teams, as this encourages employees to help and support each other.

Provide Important Challenges

One of the best ways to grow and develop a [team](#) is to provide a challenge. This can be a deadline-focused piece of work, a new initiative, or a complex project. By focusing on a clear outcome, the team is forced to work together and produce. A challenge gets people out of their comfort zones and creates new perspectives. It is easy to fall into a routine that is comfortable and easy, but people need challenges to maintain fulfillment. An example is the [100 -Day Challenge work](#) in healthcare, which provides focus and requires people to work together in a rapid and structured way to achieve within a specific time frame.

Position Staff for New Things

In the military, we know our people are going to move on to another position at a different location. We are expected to prepare our people for their next level of responsibility. Part of our role as leaders is finding opportunities for our people that help them grow to the next level. In the corporate world, we also need to allow employees to experience new ideas, new concepts, and help people develop their careers.

By focusing on team strengths, and strengthening and developing the skills of our employees, we create a stronger team.

We are better together.

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WANTED! Your leadership challenges

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Do you have any burning questions?

Are you looking for advice on a specific work situation?

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- David Horsager, researcher, strategist and bestselling author of *The Trust Edge*

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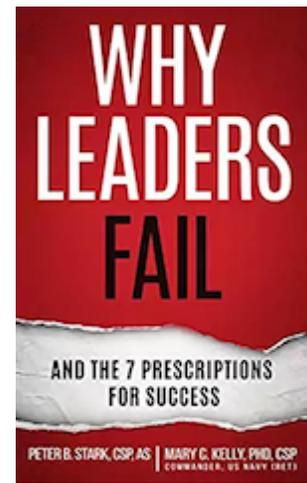
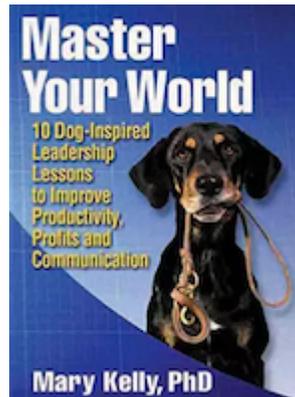
Leadership determines whether companies rise or fall. Do you want to solve your leadership challenges? Do you want your organization to operate smoother, work together, and enjoy achieving shared goals?

"Mary Kelly is a master of motivation. Mary has a wonderful sense of humor and makes a compelling case for leading productive teams in a way that really works."

- David Dye, author of *The Seven Things Your Team Needs to Hear You Say*

"After hearing Mary Kelly speak, I ran out and bought her books right away. She's smart, funny and practical -- and her books are the same. I love how she mixes her passion for animals with lessons on leadership. It makes the concepts more relatable and gives you instant ideas on how to change your leadership style for the better. Highly recommended!"

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Mary C. Kelly





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