

# Work / Life

Good  
Managers Focus on  
Employees' Strengths,  
Not Weaknesses

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## NAVIGATOR

Marcus Buckingham knows enough about good management to know he's not a good manager.

Before launching a career as a management consultant and author of such books as *First, Break All The Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* and *The One Thing You Need to Know...About Great Managing, Great Leading and Sustained Individual Success*, Buckingham served as head of The Gallup Organization's strengths management practice. He was a manager, and he didn't much care for it. "I wasn't terrible, but I had no appetite for it," said Buckingham, who spoke about management and leadership at the Wharton Leadership Conference.

According to Buckingham, the best managers share one talent—the ability to find, and then capitalize upon, their employees' unique traits. "The guiding principle is, 'How can I take this person's talent and turn it into performance?' That's the only way success is possible." And yet not everyone has that knack, Buckingham said. If he has learned anything from his years spent interviewing the best minds of the business world, it is this: Truly great managers, and truly inspiring business leaders, are rarer than many think. "Some of you in this room may not have that talent," he said. "If not, management can become a thankless task."

### Checkers vs. Chess

How to tell a good manager from a bad manager? According to Buckingham, it's simple: Bad managers play checkers. Good

managers play chess. The good manager knows that not all employees work the same way. They know if they are to achieve success, they must put their employees in a position where they will be able to use their strengths. "Great managers know they don't have 10 salespeople working for them. They know they have 10 individuals working for them . . . . A great manager is brilliant at spotting the unique differences that separate each person and then capitalizing on them."

It may sound elementary, but a quick glance around the business world indicates that many companies have yet to grasp this simple concept of putting people's strengths to use, Buckingham said. That's because the business world—and the world at large—is obsessed with weaknesses and finding ways to fix them. Buckingham cited a recent poll that asked workers whether they felt they could achieve more success through improving on their weaknesses or building on their strengths. Fifty-nine percent picked the former.

"A great manager sees the folly in this," said Buckingham, who has interviewed some of the business world's most successful leaders for his books. "A great manager knows he or she will get the most return on investment by working on strengths." Buckingham has seen this management style work. He just doesn't see it often enough, and he believes too many workers spend too much of their time doing things they don't like to do or simply aren't good at doing.

Buckingham co-authored his book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, in hopes of kick-starting a management revolution that will push managers to focus on strength. In the book, Buckingham and co-author Donald O. Clifton describe 34 distinct worker profiles—"Learner," "Achiever" and "Developer," among others—and offer advice on how those personalities can best be put to use. "Most people are not using their talent at work at all," Buckingham said.

So how can managers tap into the talent they have in their organizations? Buckingham said a good first step is to determine what employees are good at. The tasks they learn quickly, the talents they naturally exhibit and the jobs they feel good about doing are hints about their inherent strengths. Once those strengths are uncovered, a good manager will put them to use. "You can only win as a company when you get your people into positive numbers," Buckingham said.

### Optimism and Ego

Managing employees successfully is a rare talent. Even rarer, Buckingham said, is the ability to lead. And all good managers are not necessarily good leaders.

"I do think there is a rather keen and distinct difference between managing and leading," Buckingham said. The chief responsibility of a leader, for example, "is to rally people for a better future. If you are a leader, you better be unflinchingly, unfailingly optimistic. No matter how bleak his or her mood, nothing can

undermine a leader's belief that things can get better, and must get better. I believe you either bring this to the table or you don't."

Along with that optimism, great leaders can also bring big egos—and that's not a bad thing. While some have blamed the business world's recent string of scandals—Enron, WorldCom, and others—on bloated executive egos, Buckingham disagrees. It's not ego that ruined Ken Lay, but rather a lack of ethics. There's a big difference, Buckingham said. And considering the responsibility facing business leaders to build a future for their companies, a big ego might be what is needed.

"If you are going to lead, you better have a deep-seated belief that you should be at the helm, dragging everyone into that better future," he said. "Virtually nothing about a leader is humble. I'm not saying they are arrogant, but their claims are big." Buckingham said successful leaders must find a "universal truth" to rally their followers. These universal truths stem from the basic human needs, fears, and desires that unite all people, across all cultures. They also happen to be great tools for leadership.

Take, for example, one of the great human fears—fear of the future. "We all share a fear of the unknown," Buckingham said. "The problem for the modern-day leader, of course, is that you traffic in the future." Buckingham says some of the best leaders can overcome this fear—and build confidence among their followers—with a weapon of their own: clarity.

By presenting a clear message, and backing up their message with actions that support it, top managers of such companies as Tesco, Best Buy, and Wal-Mart have rallied employees to their cause and enjoyed bottom-line success as a result, Buckingham noted. "The best way to turn anxiety into confidence is this: Be clear. Clarity is the antidote to anxiety. If you do nothing else as a leader, be clear." Former New York City Mayor Giuliani provided a good example of effective leadership through clarity, Buckingham said. When Giuliani took office in 1993, he could have turned his attentions just about anywhere; America's largest city certainly had its share of problems.

But Giuliani set one specific, clear, and focused goal for his administration. He would reduce crime and improve quality of life for residents. Then he laid out three simple ways he was going to start making that happen: He announced he would get rid of the window washers who pestered New York City drivers; clean subways of graffiti and then keep the vandals away; and make all cab drivers wear collared shirts. The issues were, on their surface, minor. But they

were relevant to his citizens. And by setting three immediate goals—and then achieving them—Giuliani was able to build trust among residents and respect among his workers. That trust carried over as he tackled larger challenges, and within a few years of his arrival, the FBI named New York the safest big city in America. "You can do a lot worse than pick just a few areas you want to take action on right now," Buckingham said.

Clarity of purpose has also been a driving factor in the success of Tesco, the British food giant that has more than 2,000 stores and 360,000 employees worldwide. When Terry Leahy took over as CEO in 1997, he decreed the company's focus would be, from that point forward, to serve the housewives of the world. Then he went out and did something to prove he believed in his focus: He added more checkout lines in all his stores, a move that led to significantly higher labor costs but also won over his customers and sent a message to his employees that they were there, as Leahy had proclaimed, to provide courteous, efficient service.

"That kind of clarity builds confidence in people," Buckingham said. Today, Tesco is one of the three largest retailers in the world, and Leahy's success provides a handy leadership lesson. "When you want to lead, start with the future," Buckingham said. "Get specific. And get vivid."

(Source: Leadership and Change, Wharton University of Pennsylvania, <http://www.wharton.upenn.edu>)

## WEB SITE PICKS

### [www.sorryGottago.com](http://www.sorryGottago.com)

Ever really wanted to get off the phone with someone, but just couldn't think of any reasonable way to do it?

SorryGottago.com lets you download sounds that you can play as background noises to give yourself an excuse to hang up!

Sounds are available for use at home, at the office, with telemarketers, and in other situations, and include:

- My ride is here (honking horn)
- I have a customer (cash register)
- There's my pager
- The baby is crying
- I've got to feed the cat
- The tea kettle is boiling over



## TRAINING TIP

### How to Handle Conflict with a Coworker

**Question:** How do I handle conflict with a coworker?

**Answer:** Use this basic opening: "I sense that we disagree, and as a result, we're not working together. If I'm right, I'd guess that you're as uncomfortable as I am. I'd like to work with you to find an alternative to what exists now." With this opening, you aren't pointing the finger of blame. And most people will respond positively to such an invitation.

(Source: The editors of *Communication Briefings*, Sept. 2005)



## HUMOR

### Flight Announcements

Here are some real examples that have been heard or reported:

1. On a Southwest flight (SW has no assigned seating, you just sit where you want) passengers were apparently having a hard time choosing their seats when a flight attendant announced, "People, people we're not picking out furniture here, find a seat and get in it!"
2. On a Continental Flight with a very senior flight attendant crew, the pilot said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we've reached cruising altitude and will be turning down the cabin lights. This is for your comfort and to enhance the appearance of your flight attendants."
3. On landing, the stewardess said, "Please be sure to take all of your belongings. If you're going to leave anything, please make sure it's something we'd like to have."
4. "There may be 50 ways to leave your lover, but there are only 4 ways out of this airplane."
5. "Thank you for flying Delta Business Express. We hope you enjoyed giving us the business as much as we enjoyed taking you for a ride."
6. As the plane landed and was coming to a stop at Ronald Reagan National Airport, a lone voice came over the loudspeaker: "Whoa, big fella. WHOA!"
7. After a particularly rough landing during thunderstorms in Memphis, a flight attendant on a Northwest flight announced, "Please take care when opening the overhead compartments"

because, after a landing like that, sure as heck everything has shifted.”

8. From a Southwest Airlines employee: “Welcome aboard Southwest Flight 245 to Tampa. To operate your seat belt, insert the metal tab into the buckle, and pull tight. It works just like every other seat belt; and, if you don’t know how to operate one, you probably shouldn’t be out in public unsupervised.”

9. “In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the mask, and pull it over your face. If you have a small child traveling with you, secure your mask before assisting with theirs. If you are traveling with more than one small child, pick your favorite.”

10. “Weather at our destination is 50 degrees with some broken clouds, but we’ll try to have them fixed before we arrive. Thank you, and remember, nobody loves you, or your money, more than Southwest Airlines.”

(Courtesy of <http://www.homeholidaysfamilyandfun.com>)

Cherish your visions and your dreams, as they are the children of your soul, the blueprints of your ultimate achievements.

—Napoleon Hill

## WORDS FOR REFLECTION

### Handwriting on the Wall

A weary mother returned from the store, Lugging groceries through the kitchen door. Awaiting her arrival was her 8-year-old son, Anxious to relate what his younger brother had done.

While I was out playing and Dad was on a call,  
T.J. took his crayons and wrote on the wall  
It’s on the new paper you just hung in the den.  
I told him you’d be mad at having to do it again.

She let out a moan and furrowed her brow,  
Where is your little brother right now?  
She emptied her arms and with a purposeful stride,  
She marched to his closet where he had gone to hide.

She called his full name as she entered his room.

He trembled with fear—he knew that meant doom

For the next 10 minutes, she ranted and raved

About the expensive wallpaper and how she had saved.

Lamenting all the work it would take to repair,

She condemned his actions and total lack of care.

The more she scolded, the madder she got,

Then stomped from his room,  
totally distraught.

She headed for the den to confirm her fears.

When she saw the wall, her eyes flooded with tears.

The message she read pierced her soul with a dart.

It said, I love Mommy, surrounded by a heart.

Well, the wallpaper remained, just as she found it,

With an empty picture frame hung to surround it.

A reminder to her, and indeed to all,  
Take time to read the handwriting on the wall.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### Being Frank

#### *Constructive Confrontation*

Pointing out a fault or misstep in someone is often uncomfortable, draining, or stressful. It can be easier to overlook a problem than to confront the individual behind it. But just as everything in the universe has a positive and negative side, confrontation can be beneficial when handled one way or detrimental when handled another way. If you accept that there is no winner or loser in a confrontation, and that it is merely a step in reaching a constructive solution, you can harness confrontation as a means of inspiring positive change. Sometimes the only way to show a person how they are doing you or themselves harm is to candidly express the consequences of their actions. In fact, confrontation, when handled in a calm and timely fashion, can be an act of caring.

If you find you shy away from confrontation, seeing it as an opportunity to help someone else may make it more bearable. To be willing to confront someone demonstrates your desire to maintain an open discourse with them, even if they don’t initially see it as such. Naturally, in con-

fronting someone, you run the risk of offending them because you are openly discussing negative aspects of their behavior. But there are steps you can take to remove the sting from a confrontation. Remember that confrontation is nothing more than an opportunity for frank communication. Prepare beforehand by compiling a mental list of the facts surrounding the issue behind the confrontation. You may want to rehearse your opening statement to yourself, if it will make you feel more at ease. Finally, after discussing the behavior you are unhappy with in clear terms, give the other person a chance to respond without interrupting.

Maintaining a calm demeanor can turn a confrontation into a constructive conversation. Positive confrontation can be a learning experience for both parties, because it involves openly and bravely facing an issue. When most effective, both parties will come away from a confrontation feeling satisfied that they can move forward, changed for the better.

(Source: [www.dailyom.com](http://www.dailyom.com))

## HEALTH AND FITNESS

### Hip Strength and Golf Scores

Golfers with the best game appear to have the strongest hips, pointing to the importance of exercising hip musculature to better coordinate a golf swing.

Golfers were divided into three groups based on their golfing



handicaps. The greater the hip strength during exercises in which the hip moves the leg out and away from the body, the better the handicap. And the best players—those with a “scratch” or better handicap—tend to be stronger in all hip movements tested.

Serious golfers have a high incidence of hip injuries. Muscle strength is critical for the prevention of hip injury.

Researchers conclude that improving strength and flexibility in the hips and torso can add 20 yards to a golfer’s driving distance.

(Source: Meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine, Indianapolis, June 2004)

## THOUGHT DU JOUR

**“Your vision is the promise of what you shall one day be; your ideal is the prophecy of what you shall at last unveil.”**

—As A Man Thinketh

In the original *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Jack Canfield tells the story of Monty, who was the son of an itinerant horse trainer of little means. During his senior year, he was assigned a writing project to describe what he wanted to be when he grew up. His 7-page essay minutely detailed the 200-acre ranch he wanted to own. It included a diagram of the ranch and a detailed floor plan of his 4,000-square-foot home.

Despite the passion and effort Monty put into his paper, he received it back with a large “F” written on it and a note to see the teacher after class. The teacher told Monty that the reason he had given him that grade was because his paper was unrealistic. He went on to cite all of the reasons why, and told Monty that if he would rewrite the paper with a more realistic goal, he would reconsider the grade. After considering it for a week, the young man turned in the same paper with no changes, along with the remark, “You can keep the F and I’ll keep my dream.”



The conclusion of the true story has the teacher bringing 30 students for a summer campout at the 200-acre ranch of the now grown (and successful) Monty, who lives in his 4,000-square-foot dream home.

If it worked for the son of an itinerant horse trainer, it will work for you. The principle is simple: (1) create a dream that is so big that it will keep you excited, (2) define the dream in minute detail, (3) live in the dream so that it becomes real to you on the inside, (4) and then hold on to it so tightly that no one can take it away from you.

James Allen goes on to offer this great wisdom, “Cherish your visions; cherish your ideals . . . for out of them will grow all delightful conditions, all heavenly environment; of these, if you but remain true to them, your world will at last be built.”

But Monty, perhaps, offered the greatest wisdom, “You can keep the F and I’ll keep my dream.”

And that’s worth thinking about.

(Source: Copyright (C) 2003-2005 Vic Johnson—As A Man Thinketh, <http://www.AsAManThinketh.net>)

Yesterday is dead. Tomorrow hasn’t arrived yet. I have just one day and I’m going to be happy in it.

—Groucho Marx

## FINANCES

### Privacy Planning

It’s difficult to go anywhere these days without hearing something about the new privacy laws. We’ve all been asked to sign disclosure forms in the doctor’s office or received information through the mail about how our privacy is being protected.



The new protections are the result of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, more commonly referred to as HIPAA, enacted by Congress in 1996 and phased in gradually since that time. All in all, this would seem to be a good thing, but unfortunately it’s causing some problems for those of us who are acting on someone else’s behalf as a health care decision-maker, through the authority given in a document known as an Advance Directive for Health Care, Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, or, as it is sometimes called, a living will.

Some health care providers, nervous about violating the terms of the new law, are erring on the side of caution when it comes to releasing records to a health care decision-maker. Take the example of Auntie M, a nursing home resident who needs to have a new set of dentures made. In 1991 (pre-HIPAA), Auntie M executed an Advance Directive naming her niece, Dorothy, as her health care decision-maker and stating her wishes for the kinds of treatment she would like to receive in the event she could not make decisions for herself. Dorothy has been acting in this capacity with no problems for several years, ever since Auntie M became incompetent. Dorothy contacts Auntie M’s dentist to ask that records be released to her so she can provide them to the dentist near the nursing home who will be making the new dentures. She provides the dentist with a copy of Auntie M’s health care directive, which unfortunately does not specifically state that Dorothy is to be considered Auntie M’s “personal representative” for the purposes of HIPAA. Unsure of what to do, the dentist refuses to release the records.

If you haven’t executed a health care directive that names at least two people to make medical decisions for you, consider doing so now! Make sure the document contains language referring to HIPAA. If you’ve already executed a health care directive that doesn’t contain a reference to HIPAA (and the document still reflects your wishes), you don’t need to start all over again in order to eliminate any ambiguity as to whether you want your proxy to be able to request and receive privacy-protected health information. A simple addendum will suffice. The addendum, which states that you intend your decision-maker to be considered your personal representative, can be signed in the presence of witnesses and simply attached to the health care directive you currently have in order to forestall any problems. Contact your estate-planning professional for assistance.

(Source: Heather L. Wirth, [www.wirthlaw.com](http://www.wirthlaw.com))

### Questions/comments to:

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