

Character Strengths in Practice

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BUSINESS

Engaged employees are involved, enthusiastic, and further their organization's interests. Survey research finds that the majority of employees are disconnected or disengaged from their work. Disengagement leads to poor performance and lower productivity while employee engagement leads to higher performance and productivity. A 3-year analysis of employee engagement by Crabb (2011) found that one of the primary drivers of employee engagement in organizations is the deployment of character strengths. Crabb refers to the practice as focusing strengths and explains that the key strategies for employers are to assess employee strengths, have a conversation with the employee regarding their agreement or disagreement with the findings, find ways for the employee to use their strengths in the organization, and create ongoing support in the organization. Employers are encouraged to ask the question: "What opportunities are there within the employee's job and the organization to foster his or her character strengths further?"

Other recent studies have found that workers who apply four or more of their signature strengths experience more positive experiences at work and are more likely to experience work as a calling, compared with those who use less than four of their signature strengths at work (Harzer & Ruch, 2012a). This echoes research by Littman-Ovadia and Steger (2010) who found that it is important for workers to not only endorse but also deploy strengths at work. These studies also support the practice of strengths alignment in which employees are encouraged to explore ways of aligning their signature strengths with current tasks and projects.

Business consultants and executive coaches can also consider these promising paths:

1. *Target specific character strengths relating to well-being* (referred to as "building up" strengths). Gander, Proyer, Ruch, and Wyss (2012) found that healthy and ambitious work behavior is predicted by the character strengths of zest, perseverance, hope, and curiosity. Peterson and colleagues (2009) also emphasize the strength of zest in terms of workplace satisfaction and the experience of work-as-a-calling. They suggest zest can be targeted in workers by enhancing their physical activity, optimism, and hope.
2. *Boost existing signature strengths* (referred to as "building upon" strengths). Harzer and Ruch (2012b) found that employees who apply their signature strengths to their unique work circumstances experience greater job satisfaction, pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

To view the full list of references visit: http://www.ippanetwork.org/newsletters/volume5/issue4/character_strengths_application/