



FOCUS ON Good Leaders Grow Their Gifts

By Ellen “Plum” Cluverius, PCC and J. Stephen Lindsey, FACHE

Most early careerists assume they have to be good at everything to be successful. Yet it is your gifts and values that will take you the farthest.

Growing YOUR Gifts

Look for
“glimpses of
excellence.”

What do you
yearn to do?

Identify what
you learn faster
than others.

Focus on
what brings
satisfaction.

Seek out
feedback.

After graduating from medical school and working,

Michelle Mudge-Riley, DO decided to diversify herself and expand her skill set outside of direct patient care. During that time, she went through a period of doubt and soul searching. As she said, “A lot of my identity was wrapped up in being a doctor.” She began speaking and writing about her experiences, and what emerged over time was a consulting practice helping physicians stretch into new areas, whether learning how to run a practice more efficiently, creating a new niche that combines their practice with an interest or hobby, or finding roles that allow them to use their medical training in a new and different career. “The reason I love what I do is that I always wanted to help people and now I can give them hope and empower them to be the best they can be,” she says.

Michelle did something that most happy and successful people do at some point. They let go of what they “should” be or “should” do and move toward work they love doing, work that allows them to use their strengths. She is like Alan Keese, an associate hospital administrator at HCA Henrico Doctors in Richmond, Virginia. Alan discovered a gift for leadership when he became president of his class in graduate school. He loves focusing on the details, prioritizing and getting things done. He spends part of his day checking on things that make life better for his staff. It may be a performance issue or it may be a new menu. Alan credits his dedication to detail and commitment as important contributors to his achieving greater success as a leader at a relatively young age.

For over 25 years the Gallup organization studied excellent performance. They conducted over two million interviews to discover what made the best teachers, doctors, housecleaners, managers, etc. Their research showed that developing your strengths and managing around your weaknesses is a key differentiator between mediocre and exceptional performance. What that means in practical terms is that it’s not important to get straight A’s – it’s important to find what you do well, develop your natural gifts through training, study and experience, and then seek out work roles that allow you to use those gifts most of the time.

However, we all have weaknesses. Isn’t it important to develop them as well? To some extent, that’s true. Dr. Donald O. Clifton, a former chairman of Gallup, Inc and co-author of many books including *Now Discover Your Strengths*, recommended focusing on your weaknesses only enough to prevent them from derailing you. A natural entrepreneur who is creative and visionary finds a partner who is good at organizing and developing systems. A results-focused manager who wants to build relationships sets a goal to connect with at least two different staff members every day so they don’t forget about it. It’s about finding partners, developing systems or learning enough so that a weakness doesn’t become a hindrance.

About the Author



PLUM CLUVERIUS

is a certified professional coach specializing in leadership and executive coaching. She has built a successful coaching practice serving leaders in organizations of all types and sizes since founding her firm, Vedere Consulting, in 2000. She is on the adjunct faculty at the Federal Executive Institute and the University of Richmond's Robins School of Business and is a coach with the University of Virginia Center for Executive Development.

How do you discover your strengths? Marcus Buckingham, in his book *Go Put Your Strengths to Work* offers some important insights.

Look for “glimpses of excellence.”

Think about the times you feel good about yourself, you feel effective, “at the top of your game.” Chances are, you are engaging a gift or talent. Identify times when others have complimented you. Often we are blind to our gifts because when things come easily to us we assume everyone can do it. For what do you tend to be rewarded? Did you win a spelling bee? Are you a champion swimmer? What was it about those activities that drew you?

What do you yearn to do?

A famous Joni Mitchell song describes a man on the street “singing real good for free.” One way to discover your gifts is to think of what you’d do even if no one paid you. Maybe like Bryan Arkwright, manager at Wake Forest Baptist Health in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, you’d head a community leadership and volunteer program, Young Leaders United. Bryan does it because he loves connecting with the community and making an impact. His parents instilled in him the value of servant leadership and he brings this stewardship to his organization and to the community as well. What aspects of your work do you anticipate with pleasure? These can point toward your gifts.

Identify what you learn faster than others.

What do you “get” before others do? Maybe you quickly grasp how one thing connects to another, so you did well on essay tests. Maybe you excelled in algebra and struggled in geometry. Maybe you can learn and retain an amazing number of facts. Think about when you seemed to be “at the head of the class,” whether it was a real classroom or real life.

Focus on what brings satisfaction.

There are things you do that are just plain fun. You feel fulfilled when you do them. You feel authentic, in the “flow.” What are those things? What makes them fun?

Seek out feedback.

Alan Keese credits a former mentor, Margaret Lewis, President of HCA’s Capital Division, for giving him specific feedback on his performance and highlighting his strengths. He believes a professional mentor is one key to success in identifying your goals.

There are a number of assessments that can help you discover your strengths. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers-Briggs_Type_Indicator), a variety of 360 assessments, the Strong Interest Inventory (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strong_Interest_Inventory), DISC (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DISC_assessment), and Strengthsfinders (<http://www.strengthsfinder.com/home.aspx>) are all tools that can indicate your gifts and passions.



About the Authors



J. STEPHEN LINDSEY, FACHE was CEO at HCA Henrico Doctors' Hospital for 16 years. He served as an adjunct professor in the MHA program at Virginia Commonwealth University for several years and is a successful healthcare entrepreneur. He is currently a principal at Ivy Ventures in Richmond, VA.

In addition, feedback from performance reviews or feedback from others can point to your talents and gifts.

It's important to remember that knowing your gifts is the first step. The next is to grow them. The only way to grow them is to focus on their development. That means picking one or two strengths and focusing on making them stronger. Look for opportunities to use that gift. Practice, practice, practice. It takes 10,000 hours (or 10 years) of practice to achieve mastery. Look for ways in your current role to do more of what you do well or find out ways to try out and expand your gifts. Alan Keesee ran for president of his class even though he had never done anything like that before because he wanted to try his hand at leadership. He credits that role for his current career success.

At some point, you will have to narrow the pool of gifts if you want to be extraordinary. Clifton cites a study begun in 1921 to track 1,470 genius-level children throughout their lifetime. "The data showed that exceptional intelligence does not guarantee extraordinary accomplishment," he says. "What distinguished those of spectacular achievement from those of low achievement and failure was 'prudence and forethought, willpower, perseverance and desire. They chose among their many talents and concentrated their efforts.'"

*What are your gifts?
How can you bring them to bear at work?
What will you do to nurture and strengthen them?
How will you be extraordinary?*

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ASSESSMENTS THAT CAN HELP YOU DISCOVER YOUR STRENGTHS.:

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers-Briggs_Type_Indicator

The Strong Interest Inventory

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strong_Interest_Inventory

DISC

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DISC_assessment

Strengthsfinders

<http://www.strengthsfinder.com/home.aspx>

This article is intended as general business and marketing information, and does not create a consulting or other legal relationship between the authors and the reader.