

## views you can use

Leadership, Motivation & Productivity – By Linda Tennant



# Assessments – Accentuate Strengths!

Everyone is unique and has a distinctive set of strengths, and we have often heard that we should “staff for strengths.” So how do we determine what others’ characteristics and strengths are as they apply for a job? How do even we know our own characteristics and strengths? As we go on in life, we usually get clearer about these things, but wouldn’t it be nice to accelerate this learning process?

What motivates individual people to perform at a high level can be a big mystery, and assessments are a window into the often mysterious human psyche. They are a tool to help you learn what everyone’s strengths and characteristics are, and how they might be most effective. It’s not a perfect science, to be sure, but you may be surprised how well modern assessments identify important characteristics.

### Types of Assessments

Throughout my 30-year career, I have taken many different kinds of assessments. In our business, I now get to be on the opposite side - providing assessments for others. Each type of assessment has a specific function. They vary from the somewhat lighthearted and fun to the highly validated and serious. Some assessments tell what social type or leader you tend to be. Others tell your task versus people orientation. And certain ones can match personality traits and mental aptitudes to the job for placement purposes.

### Hiring Assessments

Hiring assessments are important tools in selecting people who are the best fit for an organization. Considering how valuable finding a good-fitting employee is, and how expensive people are to replace, hiring assessments are an excellent first investment in talent management. An important thing to note: if you use a hiring assessment, be sure that it is one that is legal and validated. Only the most vigorous and extensive assessments are approved by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). We believe that a good hiring assessment should be one-third of the hiring decision, along with the application/interview process and background checks.

Personally, I have found various assessments to be good tools in learning about what makes others tick, and also

myself. I can better predict how individuals will behave in certain circumstances. I also have a much better idea of my own strengths and the jobs I am best suited for, and I know more about managing the personal areas I’m not so strong in. Additionally, this knowledge helps others to know how to most effectively interact with me.

### Assessment Success Story

Recently a major division of Dow Chemical (Polyolefins and Elastomers R&D Group) was turned around through the use of assessments. The division had been strongly considered for sale. It was stagnant without significant new ideas for several years. An assessment tool showed that people with characteristics more suited to maintaining, rather than innovating, were in key places. Dow corrected this, and matched people to positions that better suited their strengths. Within a very short time, the division was highly profitable again, with numerous new patents being developed.

### Assessing for Strengths

For a simple but highly effective strength assessment, I recommend the book, *Now Discover Your Strengths*, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton (note: not to be used for hiring purposes). This exceptional book gives you an access code to go online and take the distinctive StrengthFinders assessment tool. You will discover your top five inherent strengths and how to better apply this unique set of talents. Knowing our key strengths, through this tool, has significantly helped my partner and I learn how to maximize our efforts together. This has made things more effective and enjoyable!

So consider using assessments to clarify and focus on everyone’s strengths. This will help you avoid the trap of foolishly trying to improve people’s weaknesses. *Learn to manage around a weakness effectively, instead of trying to “develop” it.* Focusing on and developing everyone’s true strengths will always pay a lot greater dividends. ■

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