

Friday, August 31, 2007

Book Review

Book Title: Soar with your Strengths

Author: Clifton, Donald O. and Nelson, Paul ISBN: 0-385-30414-5

Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 1992 Publisher: Delacorte Pages: 193 Cost: \$19.00 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$10.20 (new) \$0.55 (used) - \$2.75 at eBay(TM) The Books' Topics: Our national obsession with weakness

Focus on strengths, manage weaknesses

Do more of what you do well

Stop doing what you don't do well

Strengths and weaknesses are only relative

Ways to recognize good work The central themes of this book are: We waste time and people's lives by focusing on remediating weaknesses instead of building upon strengths.

We also seem obsessed with the negative, the bad, with weaknesses; as though these weaknesses are our enemy

We force children into boring and stress-filled remediation instead of letting them "take off and soar" with what they are good at. Children (and adults) enjoy, like, and flourish when they can be successful. Being successful is much easier if the success activity is a strength

Keywords: Strength Theory

Managing Weaknesses

Great Expectations

Right Expectations

Closing the Gap Main Idea: Strengths are relative skills and abilities that we all have. We enjoy what we are good at, and we don't enjoy doing what we are not so good at.

We waste too much time and human resources by trying to rid our children (and ourselves) of weaknesses. We would be much better off as a society, and as individuals, if we focused on strengths.

There are also a lot of myths associated with eradicating weaknesses, and these have wreaked untold havoc upon the lives of children. These affects linger in the psyche of us as adults. Quotes: Here are some useful quotes …

"Like a trap set for a mouse, our national system is rigged to catch people's weaknesses rather than to build on their strengths." (p. - 9)

"We continue to focus all our energies on fixing weaknesses while ignoring strengths. Why do we continue to work at some activities without getting much better at them? Why do 80 percent of our New Year's resolutions stay on our lists year after year?" (p. - 10)

"This myth takes many forms: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Practice makes perfect. If you can conceive it, you can achieve it. If I can do it, you can do it." (p. - 15)

"When we focus on weaknesses, it takes on a life of its own and begins to smother our strengths." (p. - 17)

"The study of strengths creates a new theory of what people are like." (p. - 22)

"Great teachers show an ability to work with children as equals, even in preschool. Poor teachers present information to be memorized." (p. - 25)

"For example, a study of a sample of teachers shows they have problems with discipline. So many administrators want to require these teachers to take additional courses in school discipline. Look what happens: The college courses on discipline encourages teacher to develop more rules and ultimately become more controlling, making them less effective in the classroom. On the other hand, we found that outstanding teachers spent time working on their relationships with the students. They thought about how they could help the students grow rather than control them, which inspired the students to cooperate." (p. - 26)

"Success has its own rules, and highly successful people look at the world in a different way." (p. - 29)

"As you will discover, the Strengths' Theory applies on three different levels: as a philosophy for guiding your personal life, as a strategic tool for decision making, and as a system for developing those around you." (p. - 36)

"Many people, intrigued by the theory, ask if we're promoting the development of strong people over those who are less talented and are, therefore, promoting an elitist concept. That would assume that there are 'less strong people.'

Strengths' Theory is based on the premise that every person can do one thing better than any other 10,000 people." (p. - 36)

"It may take a while to sort your strengths because invariably you will have to let go of one activity or another that you dearly love. But when the decision is made, you will go for your goal now matter what. All at once, your questions and doubts are gone, and the past is cleared to move forward. This decisiveness nearly always follows a time of musing, tossing around the pros and cons. But soon you will be the manager, go for the promotion, tryout for the play, or launch a company. You will often feel fear, but fear with an interesting quality to it … It's the moment that fear, while still exciting, is superceded by the excitement of your new commitment — when you strike a direction and "go for it."" (p. - 61)

"When we speak of weakness, we do not mean everything that you don't do well, only what intrudes on your area of productivity or lessens your self-esteem; When you unearth a weakness, you must manage it and never think that it can be turned into a strength. True, some apparent weaknesses can be corrected with an extraordinary amount of time, energy and money, but there is no alchemy for weakness. The can be removed, but they cannot be transformed into strengths. The goal, therefore, is to manage weaknesses so the strengths can be freed up to develop and become so powerful that they make the weaknesses irrelevant." (p. - 72)

"Teachers weak in teaching skills pin the blame on the students." (p. - 77)

"It is one thing to write about weaknesses, but another to claim them." (p. - 85)

"Quickly admitting weak areas is an act of courage and growth. Those who embrace their nonstrengths are those who move on with developing their strengths." (p. - 89)

"Holding on to something that doesn't work is not an act of strength, it is an act of blocking. It is perpetuating a weakness that stands in the way of strength." (p. - 92)

"Goals die; Mission lives on" (p. - 113)

"The goal is not to proselytize or convert, but to express your true desires without regard to what others will think." (p. - 117) Here are the myths: Fixing weaknesses will make everything all right

Let strengths take care of themselves

Success is the opposite of failure

Anyone can do anything they put their minds to The ways that you uncover your strengths are to: Listen to your yearnings

Watch for satisfactions

Watch for rapid learning

Catch glimpses of excellence

Look for total performance excellence The ways to uncover weaknesses (as if they weren't apparent because of our obsession with them) are: Look for performance that we feel defensive about

Find areas where we learn slowly

Examine areas where we don't profit from repeated experience

Consider skills where we have to consciously think through the process

Experiences that reduce our confidence

Experiences where we don't perceive the activity in our future (we don't look forward to it)

Experiences where we feel "burnout" from practicing Issues Addressed by the Book: If we would adopt the theory presented in this book, we would; Learn how to find out how good people can be

Stop wasting our time working on weaknesses

Learn to double or triple productivity by working on strengths

Make more effective decisions by studying what is right instead of studying what is wrong Rules for improving and increasing our strengths include: Practicing a strength to perfect it

Enjoy and relive your successes

Picture and visualize your successes

Write and talk about your successes

Sticking to it and keeping on the path to self-improvement The Book's Shortcomings: This book is right on, but it is strange that the authors have made such little impact in the 15 year that have passed since the book was first published. Even with the support of the Gallup organization, this book has create little stir, hardly a ripple in our educational system or our society.

Perhaps this is because human nature changes so slowly.

Or perhaps there is an intrinsic "survival benefit" of focusing on weaknesses.

On the other hand, the authors fail to note that many of the current practices inherent in our form of education are artifacts and carryovers from a "factory model of education." In this model, quality control, making all products the same, takes precedence over making unique and individual products with qualities that are better in some areas but not uniform. Of course; modern, Information Age survival depends upon building those unique strengths.

Perhaps our society will catch on to the ideas that these authors present. Comments: We enjoy doing what we are good at, and we don't enjoy struggling with what we are not good at. This make sense, and this coincides with teachers' observations or children who are learning in the real world.

This may also explain the reason that the United State has so many "Learning Disabled" children, while Japan has none. In the United States, we create them.

By focusing on weakness (the disability), we integrate and solidify incapacities, while preventing the children that we have singled out from focusing on the activities and learning capacities that they enjoy (their strengths).

Wouldn't school be a nicer place if we didn't stratify children as "smart and talented, over achievers, average, under achievers, slow learners, dyslexic, Learning Disabled, Mentally Retarded, etc.

Ignoring these "technical definitions and jargon-based verbal shortcuts to understanding," we might be forced to celebrate children for who they are instead of for how they can perform on a battery of high-stakes tests. Summary:

Teachers who want to excel must take put this theory into practice. Master Teachers already focus upon the strengths of their students and themselves. Every teacher needs to do likewise. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4
Innovative - 3
Original - 2
Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00