

## Leadership Essay: Strengths Found

I found the survey to be very difficult for a couple of reasons. First, I was very middle of the road about many of the questions. Words like “always” and “every” just result in my over analyzing the question, feeling rushed, and marking “neutral” as an answer nine times out of ten. The second difficulty I had was answering the questions based on my perceived educational leadership traits which are very different from my military leadership traits. I am new to the Ed Lead word but with over twenty years in the military (15 in various leadership positions) I would have answered the questions much differently. So reconciling those two distinct leadership styles in the midst of a timed survey was a challenge. Having said all that my top five Strength Finder (Rath & Conchie, 2008) themes, while wearing my Education Leadership hat, were Strategic, Maximizer, Positivity, Woo, and Communication.

### **Strategic**

As I understand it, the Strategic theme manifests itself in the form of, what we sometimes call in the Army, the “good idea fairy” (and that’s not a title that is coveted). Strategic leaders generate ideas, throw out concepts for further discussion. But unlike the “good idea fairy” a strategic leader doesn’t stop there, he/she continues to find ways to clarify and quantify those ideas for his/her colleagues. A strategic leader is comfortable speaking in groups, thinking out loud, and couching his/her words to present the ideas in the best light.

### **Maximizer**

A Maximizer does just that, maximizes the potential of his/herself and those around them. He/she builds upon strengths and encourages others to do the same. This type of leader

doesn't dwell on the shortcomings or roadblocks. He/she instead focuses on what we can do right now to take a step in the right direction. What actions maximize our effect on the goal at hand? Perhaps we won't solve *all* the world's problems at this one staff meeting. But we can all walk out of here today feeling that *something* got accomplished.

### **Positivity**

This leadership trait definitely takes a conscious effort on my part. A positive approach and poignant, specific praise, can carry the day in a school. Whitaker (2012), in his book "What Great Principals Do Differently", calls it being the "filter". But it is something I have tried to do since first stepping foot in a school as a teacher. I am positive partly because it makes my days go better, partly in an effort to raise up those around me, and in large part because my career allows me to do what I have wanted to do for as long as I can remember.

### **Woo**

If I wasn't a recovering alcoholic I'd have made a great bartender because I LOVE to strike up conversations with people, any people, any time, any place. It drives my wife NUTS. We can never make it through the store, or a line for the movies, or a stop at the coffee shop without me engaging somebody in small talk.

### **Communication**

A Communication focused leader has a good command of the English language. He/she enjoys listening to people as a way to get to really know what makes them tick. This style compliments Woo and Positivity because it allows the communicator to engage and interact with people on many levels.

I love to write. In fact, as much as I love to talk with people, I'd take the opportunity to type out a paper over talking any day. Writing (or typing) allows me time to fashion a sentence.

It affords me the opportunity to edit, and rephrase, and reshape a thought until I have conveyed *exactly* the concept I am trying to share.

## **Resources**

One of the class resources that have spoken to me and I hope will inform my leadership style moving forward is the Washington Post article, “Servant leadership: A path to high performance” (Hess, 2013). Hess’ deconstruction of what he calls the “servant leader” tears down many of the stereotypical illusions of the commonly held traits of a good leader. I want to establish myself early on as a servant leader in my learning community. I want to be a people-centered, steward of the community, that never forgets his humble roots in the greatest profession on earth.

I think the concept of the servant leader fits in nicely with the Influencing domain of leadership strength under which three of my five Strength Finder (Rath & Conchie, 2008) themes fall. Leaders that operate largely within the realm of Influencing serve to champion the team’s message. They use their strengths in communication, and winning others over, and strategic planning to stand up for team goals and needs. I see this playing out drama between the superintendent, beholden to the school board and the teachers, beholden to the students. Someone has to be responsible for and accountable to the teachers in that equation. The servant leader fill that role.

Rath, T., & Conchie, B. (2008). *Strengths based leadership: Great leaders, teams, and why people follow.*

Hess, Edward. (2013). “Servant Leadership: A Path to High Performance” in The Washington Post Capital Business, 28 April 2013.