STRENGTH TOOLBOX
Giving you the tools to lead engaged employees

Bob Van Baren
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Who is Bob Van Baren?

Bob is the owner and president of Vision 2-10 coaching and consulting company, that helps individuals and organizations better leverage their CliftonStrengths assessment for long-term success.

The CliftonStrengths assessment helps identify the areas where people have the greatest potential for building strength.

Bob holds a Master of Arts in Transformational Leadership from Bethel University and is a double certified strength-coach through Gallup and Strength Strategy.

During his 18 years of professional church and non-profit career, along with his personal life, Bob has learned how strengths could positively impact individuals, couples, teams, and organizations.

Bob knows how to unlock passion, leadership and strengths in individuals and teams.

When not working, Bob loves spending time with his family and watching the Chicago Cubs. Learn more at www.vision2-10.com.
Introduction

People are your greatest asset, right? Maybe you have heard that before, but is it true for a business or non-profit? Organizations need people, but they are costing companies $9 trillion (Gallup) in the United States. One of the biggest costs is disengaged employees. According to Gallup, only 33% of employees are engaged in their jobs.

Your employees do not need a manager, they need a coach. I want to help you become a good coach. Through this e-book I want to help you grow as a leader and help you engage your employees’ hearts, minds and strengths. You do not need to find the “right” employees, but you need to maximize the ones you already have.

I hope this e-book begins to help you create a vision of what you can do with the talent you and your employees have been given.

Are you ready to be a transformational leader that leads engaged employees? Do you desire greater productivity, lower turnover, and increased profit? It is time to get started!
Chapter One

Three Reasons Leaders Need a Strength Toolbox

Occasionally, I enjoy a good house flip show. Since I am not a handy guy I get impressed with how they instantly know the right tool for the problem. It amazes me that they don’t even have to think about it; they react and make it happen. This is what makes them so successful. I believe good leaders can become great by developing this same ability with their strengths.

Tom Rath says, “What great leaders have in common is that each truly knows his or her strengths - and can call on the right strength at the right time.” Life and conflict come at leaders fast; are you ready to react to the pressure?

Today, I want to share three ways leaders can create a strength toolbox.

**First, use an assessment like the CliftonStrengths as a springboard towards creating your strength toolbox.** CliftonStrengths magnifies your unique combination of talents. Before builders become experts, they must buy the correct tools and be taught how to use them. Your Clifton StrengthsFinder report will begin to give you the tools you need to start transforming your talents into strengths. Creating a strength toolbox starts with a basic understanding of your talents and this will begin to give you a new self-awareness. Many people stop at self-awareness, but to become a great leader it is going to take a hard-work and an action plan.

**Second, hire a coach.** A terrific way to create an action plan is to hire a coach. The greatest athletes in the world know that if they want to succeed they need a coach. Why is becoming a great leader different? It is not! I was really convicted of the importance of a coach when I saw Bill Gates and Eric Schmidt talk about the importance of coaching. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R1pHd4niLD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R1pHd4niLD).” Bill Gates says, “We all need people who will give us feedback.” Everyone needs help seeing their blind spots. Coaches have been able to help me understand my core strengths and how they affect me and others. They have been a tremendous unbiased resource for me.

**Third, you need to be deliberate about your practice.** House flipping professionals do not become experts at their work overnight, but it takes years of deliberate practice. They focus on mastering one trade at a time. If you want a strength toolbox you must do the same thing. You have multiple talents but start by picking one that you want to become a strength. Which talent should you start with? Choose the one that resonates the most with you, and start practicing

It is time to start creating your strength toolbox. Are you ready to use your strength to help with conflict management? Are you ready to become a great leader? Let’s get started!

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Chapter Two
3 Simple Ways to Improve Employee Engagement

People are your greatest asset, right? Maybe you have heard that before, but is it true for a business or non-profit? Organizations need people, but they are costing companies $9 trillion (Gallup) in the United States. One of the biggest costs is disengaged employees. According to Gallup, only 33% of employees are engaged in their jobs. I believe employees start with being frustrated, but when that frustration does not improve they transition to disengaged.

Before I give you some tools to lower frustration and improve engagement, it is important to define the two levels of disengaged employees. The first, is the regular disengaged employee who does the very bare minimum of their job. Do not expect them to help outside of their job area or go above and beyond for a customer. The second, is the actively disengaged. They are the employees who are costing you money because they may be trying to hurt your company in some way. It may be the employee who is rude to a customer or constantly shows up late for work.

Now that you have a better understanding of disengaged employees, here are three ways your employees go from frustrated to fulfilled, not frustrated to disengaged.

First, show your employees some positive attention. This is such a simple one, but it is often neglected by managers. Stop ignoring your people. Employees that are ignored are 58% disengaged, 40% actively disengaged and only 2% engaged. (Gallup) This simple fix can pay big dividends for your company.

Second, stop only focusing so much time on weaknesses or negative characteristics. This one is harder because we have been raised to emphasize fixing weaknesses. Sadly, this mindset is still part of our culture despite its proven ineffectiveness. Employees who are part of a weakness-focused culture are 33% disengaged, 22% actively disengaged and 45% engaged. (Gallup) This is not as bad as being ignored, but it is still hurting the bottom-line of your company.

Third, focus on strengths or positive characteristics. Every one of your employees has natural talents, why not focus on turning those into strengths. If people are going to be your greatest asset you need to start treating them that way. When there is a strength-based culture, employees are 61% engaged, 38% disengaged and 1% actively disengaged. (Gallup) This change in a culture could dramatically boost a company’s overall health and success. What are you waiting for?

Einstein once said, “Everybody is a genius. But If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” Managers, you might not even realize it, but this is what you are doing when you ignore or constantly focus on the weaknesses of your employee. Managers, if you want your employees to go from frustrated to engaged, rather than frustrated to disengaged, it must start with your leadership. However, you do not have to figure this out on your own. That is one of the reasons Vision 2-10 exists. We want to partner with you to begin creating a strength-based culture, which will mean more engaged employees and a bigger return on your investment.
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Chapter Three
Decrease Turnover while Improving Productivity

I am sure you have heard many times what causes organizations to have high turnover rates. Here are few that are common: Poor hiring process, toxic culture, underpays and poor leadership. Today I want to talk about a reason for high turnover that is often ignored; lack of focus on strength-based development.

I use the word development, because many organizations have their employees take assessments like CliftonStrengths, but then do nothing to understand and apply the results. I think this approach makes managers feel good that they are doing something to develop their employees, but in the big picture this is not helping. Have you worked somewhere that has done this? What have the results been? Most likely you looked at the outcome of CliftonStrengths and said, “That is interesting,” and then filed it away never to be seen again. This is not going to help with employee commitment and better results for your, organization.

If you want real change, you need a culture of strength-based development. CliftonStrengths needs to become a daily part of your organization. According to Gallup, teams that use

Are you ready to improve turnover CliftonStrengths experience 72% lower turnover and 29% increased profit. Teams that focus on their strengths are 12.5% more productive. Just taking the test will not produce these statistics but an active use of StrengthsFinder can have a drastic impact on turnover and your, bottom-line.

Here are three simple ways CliftonStrengths can become a part of your culture:

1. Hire a consultant and coach. The one-day workshops are great start but consider hiring that consultant as a coach to work with your employees. According to the International Coach Federation, professional coaching produces results:
   - 70% improved work performance while 61% improved business management
   - 57% improved time management
   - 51% improved team effectiveness

2. Have time in every meeting to discuss strengths. This helps keep it fresh and on everyone’s mind.

3. Make it part of the annual review. This can help to make sure the people you have on your bus are in the right seat.

Give your best employees a reason to stay for the long-term and end the hassle and cost of having to constantly train new people.

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Chapter Four
*The Key to Developing Others*

There are many good reasons why you should develop your strengths. Here is some proof of that from Gallup.

**People who use their CliftonStrengths are:**

6X as likely to be engaged in their jobs.

6X as likely to do what they do best every day.

3X as likely to have an excellent quality of life.

**Teams that use their CliftonStrengths experience:**

10-19% as likely to be engaged in their jobs.

14-29% increased profit.

14-29% increase in engaged employees.

26-72% lower turnover

Using your strengths, whether as an individual or team, brings amazing results. The research does not lie! Today, I want to discuss another benefit of using your strengths that is even greater than the ones listed in the image. **When you know and use your strengths, you see the strengths of others.** I may not have statistics on this statement, but I have seen it happen in my life and while working with others as a strength coach. If you make it a priority to know and use your strengths daily, your eyes will be opened to the strengths that surround you.

I think this is important for all people to know, but it is crucial for leaders to understand: If you are not using your strengths, you will not be able to fully develop your people. Do you want the people you lead to experience the benefits that are listed above? If yes, then you must prioritize the development and use of your own strengths.

I want you to think about baseball for a moment. It is on my mind with the playoffs (go Cubs!). Specifically, I would like you to think about pitching coaches. Who make the best pitching coaches? Former pitchers, because they pitched every day for years. They understand pitching! This gives them the ability to see what the pitcher they coach does well, and how to build on their strengths, and how to manage their weaknesses.

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Chapter Five
Runaway Train

One of my favorite movies of all time is The Fugitive with Harrison Ford. If you have not watched this movie since they came out with Blu-ray, you have homework to do ASAP. Why is that? The epic train crash near the beginning of the movie is a must-see on Blu-ray with surround sound. It is that scene that has me thinking today.

In the movie, the freight train is derailed after it hits a prison bus, and it causes an unbelievable path of destruction. The train, bus and surrounding area are ruined. If this event happened in real life it would take many months to clean up the mess. This movie made me reflect on how human beings can be runaway trains at times that cause destruction that takes more than months to fix. How does this happen?

Each human being is blessed with talents, but these talents come with both a good and bad side. When they our giving life to our self and others, they are operating as they should, as strengths. When they are doing the opposite, they are out of alignment and our talents may appear as weaknesses.

Talents operating as weaknesses (Runaway Train):

1. You feel everyone should approach life and work like you.
2. People run when they see you coming.
3. You always must be right.
4. Drama follows you.
5. You do not have time to rest.

Talents operating as strengths (Giving Life):

1. People become better people by being around you.
2. People enjoy being around you.
3. You will be approachable.
4. You balance work and play.
5. You can delegate and are okay if someone does the job different than you.

It is our responsibility to be good stewards of our talents. It reminds me of the often-used quote, “With great power there must also come–great responsibility!” Why is this? Because our talents can do so much good or so much damage in this world. This world needs more people developing their talents into strengths that build up rather than tear down.

Are you your talents giving life to self and others? Take a risk and ask those around you for feedback. Check out the Johari Window (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johari_window) as a resource and get input from others. Hire a coach is a great neutral person to help you with this.

Chapter Six

How to Realign Talents

In last week’s blog I showed you how talents can be perceived as weaknesses or operate as strengths. Today I want to focus on how to get your talents back on track and working as strengths. This is important because when your talents are functioning as strengths you have the best chance at success in life. Here is a review:

Talents perceived as weaknesses:

You feel everyone should approach life and work like you.
People run when they see you coming.
You always must be right.
Drama follows you.
You do not have time to rest

Talents operating as strengths:

People become better people by being around you.
People enjoy being around you.
You will be approachable.
You balance work and play.
You can delegate and are okay if someone does the job different than you.

We have all been blessed with multiple talents. **It is important because sometimes we need to use another talent to fix a misaligned talent.** This is how it has worked in my life. My number one Gallup CliftonStrengths theme is Responsibility. According to CliftonStrengths, “People exceptionally talented in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.” This describes me well and I take great pride in this talent. However, when my Responsibility gets derailed I tend to become a micro-manager. I will delegate a task and then I fight the impulse of taking it back if it is not being completed according to the way I would have done it. This is not healthy for me or those working with me. When this happens, it can hurt another person’s development, cause trust issues and distract me from other work that needs completing. Therefore, it is so important to understand your talents, because you can learn to adjust.

Before I did CliftonStrengths and learned about my talents I would have been ignorant to this behavior, and even if I had an understanding I would not have known how to change it. **Through CliftonStrengths I can see my stronger and weaker themes of talent and how to leverage my strengths and manage my weaknesses.** I now understand that I can use my Belief theme, which is my number five theme, to keep Responsibility working as strength. According to CliftonStrengths, “People exceptionally talented in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their lives.” This description fits me very well. One of the purposes in my life is leadership development. I love growing as a leader and helping others grow too. When I begin to micro-manage, I remind myself of my values and life purpose and it wakes me up refocuses my Responsibility.

Leadership development and micro-managing do not work well together. This is one simple way that I keep my talents moving forward as strengths and you can do the same.

So now what? It must start with you learning your top five themes from CliftonStrengths. If you
have not taken the assessment you can purchase it here. Once you have your results it is important to start learning more about those and a coach is a great way to do that. A coach can really walk with you as you discover how to turn your talents into strengths.

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Chapter Seven
Strengths and Trust

In Patrick Lencioni’s book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, he focuses on five elements that cause problems on a team that directly impact the effectiveness of an organization. The dysfunctions are: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to results. In the next three blogs I am going to address how strength-based leadership training can improve trust, conflict, and commitment. This week will be looking at the most essential element a team needs for success: trust.

According to Lencioni, one of the reasons teams struggle with trust is that they, “Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another and fail to recognize and tap into one another’s skills and experiences.”

So why do so many people conceal their weaknesses? It is all about the culture that has been established. If the culture is about focusing on what is wrong with people rather than what is right, then people will constantly feel they are not good enough. There will be a pressure to be well-rounded and seeking help for weakness will be perceived as failure. How would it look instead to have a culture where people celebrate what they do well and a safe place to admit weakness? Your organization will start to build a culture of trust, which is the foundation to being healthy and more productive. It will also help people recognize what others do well.

So many organizations have hidden gems within them, but the need to hide weakness and be the most well-rounded leads to a culture of self-preservation, where all that matters is surviving the annual review. When this happens, there is hesitation to recognize the skills of others in fear of losing one’s own place. When there is a shift to an emphasis on celebrating strengths, trust will grow because people will no longer fear elevating others. Their motivation will shift to the greater good of the company, rather than self-preservation. This will lead to healthier teams and a better organization that will have a competitive advantage over the competition.

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Chapter Eight
Strengths and Healthy Conflict

Last week we looked at how a culture focused on strength-based leadership development can create better trust within a team. Today’s blog looks at how teams can use strengths to transform conflict into a positive. According to Patrick Lencioni in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, “Teams that fear conflict create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive and fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members” (204). There are two words that I want to focus on to show how Strengths can create a healthier view of conflict in an organization: Celebration and Awareness.

Celebration

Don Clifton, the father of Strength-based Psychology, once said, “What will happen when we think about what is right with people, rather than fixating on what is wrong with them?” How would the culture of conflict change in your organization if your focus shifted from fixing weaknesses to celebrating what people did well? One of the greatest benefits of StrengthsFinder is that it shines a light on the best of people. Many people get frustrated and gossip about a co-worker because they do not understand why they approach a task differently than they do. When you understand someone’s strengths, you begin to see that differences are not bad but can benefit your team. When a culture becomes more strength-focused, celebration will replace unhealthy conflict.

Awareness

How can a team have healthy conflict if they do not know what everyone “brings to the table?” Most teams are ignorant to the potential of their teammates and this can lead to: apathy, back-room politics and fear in dealing with conflict.

Apathy: When someone’s strengths are ignored, and they have no voice, they will see times of conflict as a time to survive and not engage. Just surviving is the core of apathy.

Back-room politics: if someone is constantly underestimated and has no voice, it can cause people to begin to share their frustration in divisive ways. When there is back-room politics, there is always triangulation. This is when the conflict is discussed with everyone but the person who the conflict is with. When this happens, the conflict is only shared but never solved. This creates a toxic environment for everyone.

Fear of conflict: In a culture where few voices are valued, the meetings get dominated by a few. When this happens, whether they realize it or not, it creates a dictator type environment, and some will be afraid to share their thoughts.

I believe when organizations begin having an awareness of strengths they will realize what each team member can offer and how their feedback could benefit the organization.

How do you see strength-based leadership helping your organization create a culture of healthy conflict?
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*Strengths and Commitment*

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2. Have time in every meeting to discuss strengths. This helps keep it fresh and on everyone’s mind.

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Testimonials

“I really appreciated my coaching time with Bob. He was able to utilize a wide variety of tools, ideas, and perspectives that made a long-lasting impression on how I view myself in my relationships and career. Thanks to Bob, I’ve been able to draw on less-obvious strengths to accomplish goals with ease that would have otherwise been more challenging. If you are wanting to take the next step in your career, or want to better understand how you are wired for the sake of growing and succeeding in life, I would highly recommend working with Bob.” - Steve, Project Manager, Davenport Iowa

"Bob spent a day with our staff and powerfully had us uncover things about ourselves that will help us better serve - one another and our students at Calvin. Ultimately, Bob helped us understand how we have been uniquely created by God, to better know and embrace our callings. And our journey will continue as we continue to invest in understanding ourselves and others.” - Randy Moes, Principal at Calvin Christian School of South Holland, IL

"Bob did an amazing job sitting down with me and explaining my strengths, the strengths of my team, and how we should utilize those strengths moving forward to meet our goals. I would recommend Bob’s services to anyone who is looking to further their own personal development, or even to increase the development of their team on a small business or corporate level.” - Tim Verduin, Region Insurance

"Bob came out and did a workshop with my staff, and it was an eye-opening experience and a great encouragement to recognize and build on the diverse strengths of our team. Our team had done the StrengthsFinder assessment previously, but Bob took that information to the next level and helped us apply it to our thinking in very practical and useful ways. I highly recommend Bob’s expertise to anyone interested in the professional and personal development and growth of your team!” - Ryan Zantigh, Financial Aid Director at Trinity Christian College

"The training that Vision 2-10 provided was a very worthwhile seminar. Everyone enjoyed Bob’s presentation and the group activities. The individual strengths report helped all our employees better understand themselves and each other. This has helped build more teamwork and boost our employee morale.” - John Dolan, Thermosystem Inc.
Are you ready for greater productivity, lower turnover and increased profit?

Contact us today!

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