

NOW, DISCOVER

THIS DIGEST

REMINDER

It is unclear who actually wrote this updated edition of the book, so I'll be referring to the author as Gallup, the organization built to honor and spread the work of Don Clifton, a man who made it his life's mission to write "the taxonomy of human strengths" and creating "a movement to help people spend less time fixing what's wrong with them and more time building on what's right with them".

The anatomy of a strength.

Here are some helpful definitions to understand Gallup's philosophy.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: "WHICH ASPECTS OF YOU CAN YOU CHANGE?"

- KNOWLEDGE

There are two distinct kinds of knowledge:

- Factual knowledge (content)
- Experiential

Factual knowledge is needed for existence, but it doesn't guarantee it. It gets us through the front door.

Experiential knowledge is what we pick up along the way, once we're in. Some of it is **practical** and some of it is **conceptual**. For the practical part, every environment offers us an opportunity for learning that it is our responsibility to harness in order to build our strengths. On the more conceptual side, we need to tune to our values and hone our self-awareness.

"Often when someone says "So-and-so has changed", they don't really mean that their underlying personality has changed but that their value system has changed or that their comfort with who they are has changed."

The authors highlight the fact that **our behaviors are driven by what we choose to put our focus on**. Our engagement with life doesn't have to change and most of the time, it won't: our nature dictates it. But we can refocus our focus by **clarifying our values** which will in turn **shape our goals**. This is how we then **naturally redirect our talents** towards more positive ends.

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“Talents, like intelligence, are value-neutral.

*If you want to change your life so that others may benefit from your strengths, then change your values.
Don't waste time trying to change your talents.”*

Self-awareness allows us to become more and more **who we truly are** over time. It prevents us from getting stuck in situations we are not meant to be a part of:

*“If you have ever found yourself in a role that required you to be something you are not,
you know how this feels.”*

Self-awareness allows us to understand **what drives and fuels us** and to **adapt our lives accordingly**.

“And their friend, impressed by all the good things that happen as a result—their productivity increase, their attitude improvement—look at them and say “wow, look at you. You changed.” Actually, the exact opposite has happened. What looks on the surface like transformation is actually acceptance of something that can never be transformed—talents.

*These people didn't change. They simply accepted their talents and refocused their lives around them.
They became more self-aware.”*

And this is what we will need to do also in order to build our strengths!

- **SKILLS**

They bring **STRUCTURE** to our **experiential knowledge** and turn what we learn instinctively into a roadmap with a **series of steps to follow to achieve** what we're trying to do. They must then be **learned** and **practiced**. However, they will help us **PERFORM**, but they will **NOT** allow us to **excel**:

“Without underlying talent, learning a skill is a survival technique, not a path to glory.”

On top of that, skills **cannot make up for talents** because not every activity can be broken down into steps (ex: true empathy!).

So here's **Gallup's bottom line on skills**:

“A skill is designed to make the secrets of the best easily transferable. And therefore a skill will help us a little where we lack talent and prove most valuable when combined with one of our talents!”

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TALENT: “WHICH ASPECTS OF YOU ARE ENDURING?”

Gallup’s definition of a talent is “ANY recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be **PRODUCTIVELY** applied”, which means that **both positive and seemingly negative traits can be called talent...** as long as they can be **productively** applied:

Gallup takes the example of being nervous. Usually seen as a weakness, it can become a talent if we use all our “what ifs” to design contingency plans ahead of time!!

It’s important also to note that **our talents grow more and more stable with time**. Even though our brain retains a lot more of its neuroplasticity than what was previously believed, our strongest neuronal connections endure with age, and we lose billions of neurons before reaching 15 yo.

And interestingly, because of how natural our talents feel to us, **we can mistake them for common sense** and convince ourselves that **everyone sees the world the way we do** and make instinctively the same connections and decisions we make.

However, **our sense of the world is deeply individualized** and rooted in our unique mental network. We see the world through a **filter** which makes us zero in on some stimuli and completely miss others. This is why interpersonal relationships feel so valuable! And it can have practical implications at work we need to be made aware of.

Here’s why:

“Have you ever tried and failed to persuade someone, using simple and easy-to-understand language, to see things your way? It can be very frustrating. (...) Weren’t they listening? If they didn’t agree, why didn’t they just say so? Maybe they simply couldn’t look through your eyes. Their filter didn’t allow them to. They understood your words, but they couldn’t see your world. Imagine trying to explain the color purple to someone who is color-blind (...). No matter how eloquent your description of purple, they will never see it.”

There are perceptions we all share. Studies show that independently of cultural heritage, we can relate to one another and all understand emotions such as fear, pain, shame or pride and read those on each other's faces.

“The boundaries of the human experience are finite, but within these boundaries, there is a significant range and diversity.”

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TALENT AND STRENGTH BUILDING

Without being really aware of them, we make thousands of decisions every day. We make **thousands of decisions** every **HOUR**. And **our talents and mental connections drive our decision-making**. We cannot intellectualize everything and perform normally in the world, so **most of what we do, say and think** is automated and rooted in an **instinctive reaction**. Nature always chooses the **path of least resistance** and therefore our brain relies primarily on **our talents!** Learning skills can help us interrupt some of these patterns, but not all of them and certainly not at all times. Weakness fixing is needed in certain situations obviously, but as Gallup puts it:

“You should see it for what it is: damage control, not development. (...) Damage control can prevent failure, but it will never elevate you to excellence.”

**“Skills determine if you CAN do something, whereas talents reveal something more important:
HOW WELL and HOW OFTEN you do it.”**

“Without underlying talent, training won’t create a strength.”

And the **risk** with repetitive training meant to **overcome our weaknesses** is to **burn out** BEFORE we can yield any improvement. Improvement requires persistence. Persistence requires fuel to fight the temptation to give up. So we need the process to also provide energy and not only deplete us.

**“Mending a broken connection can quickly become an alienating, thankless task.
Most organizations with their heavy emphasis on fixing weakness, ignore how deadening it can be.”**

Talents protect us because we are both **driven to** do the activities they represent and **feel very good** when we do them. A win-win situation. It feels good to do what we are uniquely good at, Nature made sure of it.

“By giving talents their own built-in feedback mechanism, Nature has ensured that you will keep trying to use them”.

So our role is to **identify our talents** (or at least to do the test which will help us learn about them!) and to then **hone them with skills and knowledge**. Our talents can be so interwoven in our daily life and identity that we don’t know they’re there, and yet they are and **chapter 3 will help us find our way back to them.**

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CLIFTONStrengths

So how do we spot our talents? Our [top-of-mind reactions](#) provide the best trace of them!

And besides those spontaneous reactions, Gallup urges us to look for our yearnings, rapid learning and satisfaction:

- [Our yearnings](#), and especially those we had at our earliest age are a great indication of where our talents lie. And no matter how restrictive our external conditions will be and how far away from our yearnings our conditioning takes us, our talents will keep on calling us our entire life and demand to be heard. They give a lot of very late blooming artists as a case in point.
- [Rapid learning](#) is enabled by talents, which is why if we follow any skill we acquired rapidly, it will lead us back to where our talents await us.
- And [satisfaction](#) is as previously mentioned always a part of performing an activity which builds on our talents.

So in a nutshell, let's all turn our attention towards positive activities that seem to bring us psychological strength and satisfaction, especially if we feel drawn to them and if we learned how to do them fast!

Not sure [how to define satisfaction](#)? Gallup has a clue: If you keep on asking yourself "when will this be over?" while doing something, that's probably not it... But if you're wondering "when can I do this again?" before you're even finished? That's a very important clue.

And if we [need a little more help](#)? Well, we're covered: [it's time to do the Clifton strength assessment!](#)

Even though they urge us to also monitor our behavior and feelings over an extended period of time, because it will give us even more awareness of what our talents and strengths truly are, they understand that not everyone has the bandwidth or perspective to do so. And therefore Gallup designed [a test which will rank our 34 themes for us](#).

What is a theme?

A talent, and [the promise of a strength](#) if we give it the care, energy and attention it requires!

ENJOY

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THIS BOOK

SAVE THE DATE & REGISTER

(and please **fill out this form** if you're
NOT planning to attend a meeting **this time around**)

TO MEET US ON ZOOM

EITHER ON

TUESDAY JULY 25th at 7 pm

OR

FRIDAY JULY 28th at 12 pm

*We'll discuss the main themes of the book,
and reflect how to build on our assessment results!!*