

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".

Discover the source of your strengths

THE FOUR DOMAINS

The 34 themes can be categorized into four domains depending on what those talents allow us to achieve!

- **EXECUTING** domains focus on how to make things happen or get things done:

Achiever, Arranger, Belief, Consistency, Deliberative, Discipline, Focus, Responsibility, Restorative.

- **INFLUENCING** domains help us reach a broader audience:

Activator, Command, Communication, Competition, Maximizer, Self-Assurance, Significance, Woo.

- **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING** domains help us encourage individuals and hold teams together. It allows for creation of organizations that are greater than the sum of their parts:

*Adaptability, Connectedness, Developer, Empathy, Harmony, Includer,
Individualization, Positivity, Relator*

- **STRATEGIC THINKING** themes allow us to absorb and analyze information to help stretch our minds and our teams to make better decisions:

Analytical, Context, Futuristic, Ideation, Input, Intellection, Learner, Strategic

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Put Strengths to Work

THE QUESTIONS YOU'RE ASKING

- Are there any obstacles to building my strengths?

The main one is **our own reluctance!**

Most of us have been trained to devote all our time and energy to **our weaknesses** and the shift to strength building is not an easy one to make. It is **deeply rooted in our education and upbringing**. It is seen across every culture. Research shows that the US is the most strength based culture and even here, it's only 41% who say that knowing their strength helps them improve the most.

"The majority of the world's population doesn't think that the secret to improvement lies in a deep understanding of their strengths."

Three basic fears explain these facts:

- **Fear of weaknesses.**

"Most people assume that their weaknesses trump their strengths."

"Whatever the weakness, whatever the strength, the strength is just a strength—to be admired and then simply assumed—but the weakness, ah the weakness is an "area of opportunity"."

Marc Seligman, a pioneer in positive psychology, highlighted that there are more than 40 000 studies on depression and only 40 (at the time) studies on joy, happiness and fulfillment. Of course depression matters! But **our balance is OFF**. In his words:

"Psychology is half-baked, literally half-baked. We have baked the part about mental illness. We have baked the part about repair and damage. But the other side is unbaked. The side of strengths, the side of what we are good at, the side... of what makes life worth living."

The fact is: we can only reach excellence by understanding our strengths and cultivating them.

"[Criticism] has the power to do good when there is something that must be destroyed, dissolved or reduced, but [it is] capable only of harm when there is something to be built—Carl Jung."

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- **Fear of failure**

This one's **ingrained in human nature**. Failure can feel painful and we do not like pain. However we can reframe our relationship to shame and see it as the unavoidable learning experience that will drive us to success!

Gallup argues that building our strengths is our responsibility:

“Your natural talents are gifts from God or accidents of birth, depending on the articles of your faith. Either way, you had nothing to do with them. However, you have the opportunity to transform your natural talents through focus, practice and learning into consistent near-perfect performances.

From this point of view, avoiding your strengths and focusing on your weaknesses isn't a sign of diligent humility. It is almost irresponsible. By contrast, the most responsible, the most challenging and—in the sense of being true to yourself—the most honorable thing to do is face up to the strength potential in your talents and figure out how to realize it.”

In the end, performance is the judge of our strengths. And failure is part of the way to success.

One word of caution: we might be searching for our strengths in the wrong places! **Failure can help** us realize that and **redirect**. The goal is to act, learn, refine and start this cycle over and over again. And to learn who we truly are in the process.

*“To be what you are, and to become what we are capable of becoming,
is the only end of life—Baruch Spinoza.”*

- **Fear of one's true self:**

This is the famous **imposter syndrome**, where we discount our achievements and call them luck, while waiting the terrifying day where someone will realize we're a fraud and in no way as skilled or talented as everyone seem to believe. This drives us from our natural talents to focus on what we're learned in our lives that can be measurable and proven through some sort of award or diploma. The proof that we have improved ourselves along the way—and at least tried to compensate for our shortcomings.

However there's **a big risk in hiding from ourselves** because of how little we fear we might find: **missing the wonder of our strengths**.

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Our strengths come so easily to us that we tend to take them for granted. They cease to be precious, we don't even see them.

“Doesn't everybody do that?” is the answer people tend to give when one of their innate talent is pointed out. And the answer is no: **not everyone does**, AND not everyone does it **as EASILY**.

Why should I focus on my Signature themes?

A strength allows us to reach consistent near-perfect performance, it requires a sharp focus. It takes a lot of self-awareness and resourcefulness to develop each theme to its full potential so it makes sense to choose to prioritize those we have the best chance to develop into a strength.

Is there any significance to the order of my Signature themes?

Not really. Gallup doesn't advice putting any emphasis on this. The difference between theme 2 and 3 for instance can be only based on math and not on meaningful differences.

The important distinction therefore lies between our signature and responsive themes, not within each category. Our signature themes drive us no matter the situation; they filter our world. They lead our recurring behavior in a powerful way and they're instinctual. Our responsive themes will only come into action in particular situations.

Why am I different from other people who have some of the same Signature themes?

Because there are 33 million possible permutations in the top 5 themes of our chart! This means that the way our 5 signature themes interplay is pretty unique... and our talents build upon each other, they're **not meant to be studied in isolation**.

Are any of these themes “opposites”?

No! The test was designed in order to account for “yes/and” reality of our life and not to create any “either/or” framework which would not reflect the complexity that characterizes human beings' inner world.

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Can I develop new themes if I don't like the ones I have?

No. Our themes **do not change during the course of our life**. The correlation between two sets of results for one individual taking the assessment twice is 0.73 (out of 1). We can acquire new skills and knowledge! This can allow us to use our talents in very different ways and to create widely different careers or life situations; but our talents themselves will remain the same.

"You can't develop new themes, but you can develop new strengths"

Will I become too narrow if I focus on my Signature themes?

No, *"you will actually become stronger, more robust, more open to new discoveries and, importantly, more appreciative of people who have different themes from your own."*

Clarity creates energy. Our signature themes explain our successes and achievements, knowing then allows us to understand the course of our life and to build self-confidence. It enables us to make intentional choices fitting our innate talents and drive, and to resist the pressure to follow someone else's model or expectation of what we should do.

How can I manage around my weaknesses?

The goal is clear: **to focus on our strengths and to manage AROUND our weaknesses**. Now, what does it mean practically?

First it's important to define what Gallup means by weakness:

"A weakness is something that gets in the way of success"

It is commonly defined by a lack of proficiency in any given area, but that's not actually what managing around our weakness is about in a strength-based approach. **Our so-called weaknesses only matter if they hinder our chances to succeed**, if we find ourselves in a role which requires us to play to one of our non talents. Otherwise it simply doesn't matter. Otherwise our lack of proficiency in something is not really a weakness, it's just a not very important fact.

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So what matters is to find a way around our genuine weakness, those deficiencies which get in the way of excellence in what we want to achieve.

The first thing then is to check if it a skill weakness, a knowledge weakness or a talent weakness? The first two are easy to overcome. The third one is the trickiest.

So here are five options that Gallup offers us to manage around our talent weaknesses:

- **To stop trying to fix it and instead to manage it:** We'll never excel in those areas but we need to acquire enough knowledge to get by. Back to damage control mode.
- **To avoid working in those areas of lesser talent if we can:** We get tricked into spending a lot of time and energy towards things we don't actually need to do. It's worth checking what happens if we stop trying to "fake it till we make it". Most of our "shoulds" are rooted in limiting beliefs. Trying to be straightforward with our limitations requires courage and humility but it usually pays off in integrity and respect.
- **To use another theme of ours to make up for an area of lesser talent:** there might be another way to do what we're trying to do which plays to our strength instead of relying on one of our weaknesses.
- **To find a complementary partner:** we tend to forget that we're not lost in this world alone. We can team up with someone who's proficient where we're not and who will benefit in exchange from one of our strengths if they don't possess it. This is the classical example of creative folks finding strategic people to build their artistic careers with them. Each of them gets to do what they love and excel at, and each of them benefit both from what they give and what they receive in exchange.

"It takes a strong person to ask for help."

- **To develop a support system, support or strategy:** it can be an app, a calendar, an accountability partner... sometimes all we need is a crutch.

It's crucial to remember that the goal here is not to turn our weaknesses into strengths. It is to manage around our weaknesses so that they don't get in the way of our strengths.

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And one word of caution from Gallup:

Let's not trick ourselves into labeling a theme into a weakness. *There's no downside to our strengths!*

We can however be lacking into an area which would help us enhance the impact we have on others along the way (ex: Empathy on top of Command).

"If you assume that people struggle to excel because they have too much of a particular theme, then you will tell them to tone the theme down, to stop behaving that way and to be less of who they truly are.

This is repressive, unrealistic advice.

(...)

Conversely, if you assume that their struggles come from lacking other themes, you will offer them more positive advice.

You will suggest that they manage around those weaknesses.

(...)

It is more creative, more purposeful and more effective."

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THIS BOOK

SAVE THE DATE

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!!*
