

## Talking Points on Research Findings for Strengths-Based Development

- Over 3.3 million people worldwide have completed the Clifton StrengthsFinder.
- Initial strengths research was inspired by Elizabeth Hurlock (1925) who found that students who were praised for their good work in a math class improved performance by 71%, in comparison to only 19% improvement in the group that was criticized. This led to the basic formation of this hypothesis: *Individuals, and possibly organizations, have more potential for growth in areas of strength than areas of weakness.*

### *Strengths in Business*

- In the 1980's the strengths hypothesis was tested at an organizational level. Gallup challenged a large food service chain in the United Kingdom to put just as much investment into refurbishing 8 high-performing pubs as they traditionally put into the 8 lowest performing pubs. The outcome was that the 8 high-performing pubs had the greatest percentage increases in profitability. On average, they were seven times as profitable as the lower performing pubs given the same amount of cost and effort in refurbishment.
- In a 2002 study of more than 2000 managers, Gallup found that in comparison to poor-performing managers, top-performing managers were more likely to indicate spending time with high producers, match talent to the task, and emphasize individual strengths versus seniority in making personnel decisions. Probability of success was 86% (1.9 times) greater for managers with a strengths approach (Clifton & Harter, 2003).
- From Gallup workplace research on employee engagement, we know that people who report "having the opportunity to do what they do best every day" have a 44% higher probability of success on customer engagement and employee retention, and a 38% higher probability of success on productivity measures. These differences in probability of success can amount to millions of dollars to any large organization (Harter & Schmidt, 2002).
- Jim Asplund's (2008) research demonstrates that organizations offering a strengths intervention (vs. those that do not) have less turnover (15%) and generate more productivity (12.5%) and company profit (9%). Furthermore, a study of salespeople revealed that one strengths feedback session administered by a manager can have a profound effect on sales.

### *Strengths in Education*

- David Austin (2006) found that using a strengths-based intervention with high school students resulted in a significant increase in self-efficacy and self-empowerment, as well as self-perception, when compared to a control group.
- Chip Anderson found that strengths-based development in college students increase self-confidence, direction, hope, and altruism (Hodges & Clifton, 2002).
- Linda Cantwell (2008) demonstrated that students learn more when taught using a strengths-based approach. Teaching from a strengths-based perspective increases students' levels of academic engagement, objective exam scores, and quality of a public speech.
- In a qualitative study, Kelly Bowers (2008) discovered that college students that are the best of the best at using their strengths, the capitalizers, rely on the sustained social support of family, friends, and mentors and build on success experiences that give them the confidence to apply their strengths in new situations.
- Using an experimental pretest-posttest wait list control group design, Michelle Louis (2008) compared the relative impact of the two strengths-based curriculum types to each other and to a traditionally-implemented curriculum in a first-year seminar course and found that students in the strengths development group and the talent identification group had significantly higher levels of perceived academic control than did those assigned to the control group. In addition, a strengths development approach is more readily associated with a growth mindset and students' tendencies to set learning goals than is the talent identification approach.