



# Leadership Tips & Tools

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It all comes down to 12! 10 million interviews spanning 114 countries and conducted in 41 languages explain what every leader and manager needs to know about creating and sustaining staff engagement and excellence in our organizations. *12: The Elements of Great Managing*, is the long-awaited sequel to *First, Break All the Rules* published in 1999 by the Gallup Organization. In this newest book, Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter share the latest Gallup research findings.

Integrating their findings with the stories of 12 great managers, Wagner and Harter capture our attention with personal narratives of best practice and solid research. Weaving their insights with recent discoveries in the fields of neuroscience, game theory, psychology, sociology, and economics they provide a compelling story and convincing evidence of what we must do each day to create excellence and sustained individual success through our leadership and management behaviors.

Each chapter of *12: The Elements of Great Managing* unearths research, insights, and best practice examples to help us inspire top performance, generate enthusiasm, unite others to focus on a common mission, and motivate individuals and teams to achieve high performance goals. Each chapter provides an in-depth discussion of one of the twelve questions found to be at the core of great managing. These are essential messages and in the end they become the focus of this issue of Leadership Tips and Tools:

## Being a Strengths-Based Leader

*"The data from the last five years would suggest that . . . it helps tremendously if a manager starts by focusing on someone's strengths."*

**Roles and Responsibilities!** If *12: The Elements of Great Managing* advances research and best practices for "great managers" why would post-secondary leaders want to study, understand, and discuss applications of this research to our colleges and universities? The answer lies in the unique and challenging functions of post-secondary leadership. Each day we must lead *and* manage. Strengths Revolution advocate, Marcus Buckingham, defines leadership as the responsibility "to rally people to a better future" and management as the responsibility "to turn a person's talent into performance." Both are the responsibilities and daily challenge of post-secondary leaders.

**Focusing on Strengths is Important!** Recently, Tom Rath's book *StrengthsFinder 2.0* hit the bookstores. Here, Rath delves deeper into individual applications of The Gallup StrengthsFinder Assessment. This follow-up to *Now, Discover Your Strengths* published in 2001, shares what Gallup scientists have learned since the publication of the first book. Again, the message is clear: *"We've seen more and more evidence that demonstrates that focusing on your talents is important."*

**A Strengths Revolution!** He taught us to break all the rules . . . he encouraged us to discover our strengths . . . and now he says . . . *Go Put Your Strengths to Work!* Marcus Buckingham, former Gallup researcher—currently on tour as leader, author, speaker, and researcher for the Strengths Revolution, points out that the choice is ours. "Faced with the world's indifference, you've got two options: either resign yourself to a life in which your strengths are largely irrelevant; or, instead, learn how to make them relevant. Learn how to put them to work. It's your choice. Now it's time to start your own personal strengths revolution."

**It's About Excellence!** A paradigm shift toward excellence, that's the goal of *12, 2.0, Go*, and being a Strengths-Based Leader. Can we as post-secondary leaders identify and employ our own strengths . . . can we move from weakness detection and fixing . . . to strengths finding and building in our leadership and management interactions? Can we lead in ways to honor ourselves and others as unique and talented individuals?

*"Individuals gain more when they build on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness."*

—Donald Clifton and James Harter

**Levers for Excellence!** When you make the most of strengths—yours and others—they become levers for excellence. Know and observe strengths, watch and listen for ways to activate those strengths in pursuit of continued growth, development, and excellence. Manage challenges by leveraging the energy found in the strengths.

**Emblematic of Change!** Our good friends at George Brown College, Toronto have initiated a Faculty Performance Review Project that is emblematic of one of the key elements revealed in *12: The Elements of Great Managing*. According to Gallup the best connection between feedback/appraisal/evaluation and actual performance is remarkably simple: *"In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress."* At George Brown College the yearlong pilot finds faculty preparing best practice teaching portfolios, observing and providing strengths-based feedback on each other's classes, and looking forward to classroom observations by their academic chairs and managers. The whole process is strengths-based!

**Just Four Questions!** The protocol for the pre-observation conversations between colleagues at George Brown College (GBC) is anchored in just four questions:

1. What is your **teaching philosophy** and how does it contribute to student learning and success?
2. What are your **strengths** as a teacher and how do they contribute to student learning and success?
3. Is there anything you would like me to **watch** for during your class?
4. How would you like to **engage** in the observation experience and feedback conversation?

**Signed and Dated!** According to Gallup, the usual forms for performance review and evaluation are just that—forms—“*impersonal, one-size-fits-all, and procedural.*” The artifact for the George Brown College Faculty Performance Review? A signed and dated piece of paper—date of post-observation conversation, signed by the colleagues in conversation. That simple. A conversation happened . . . and it happened on this date! The pilot program at GBC “*recognize[s] that the consistency and assumed fairness in a uniform scoring system*” can backfire and reduce motivation. Instead of investing in copious forms detailing universal performance criteria, consider playing to strengths, being in conversation, and talking with someone about their performance.

**Adjust Your Lenses!** Each time we engage in feedback on performance—whether an informal conversation, a classroom observation, or formal performance review, it is critical to adjust our lenses. We must use invitational communication and invite colleagues to share their thoughts and feelings throughout the conversation. We must work to see the “performance” through the eyes of the “performer.” Therein lies the promise: understanding and appreciating another’s strengths—and finding the levers for excellence.

**Growth Areas!** Buckingham repeatedly reminds us that our greatest potential for growth and development lies in the area of strengths. Use strengths-based feedback and recognition to honor your colleague’s achievements. By first focusing on strengths you have the opportunity to inquire into issues, challenges, or weaknesses that might be affecting your colleague’s ability to contribute their strengths to the fullest. If there are challenges, inquire into them by using a caring conversational style that opens communication and provides opportunities for forward thinking and investigation into options for continued development.

*“Identifying strengths leads to positive emotions that spark personal growth and allow for greater problem-solving skills.”*

—Barbara Fredrickson

**12 is a Magic Number!** While preparing this issue my soon to be 12-year-old grandson inquired into my work. A bright and talented young man who plays to his strengths, Sage provided a great insight from his favorite author. “Nana,” he said, “just remember what Mark Twain said, ‘write what you know about, or live a life worth writing about.’”

Wagner and Harter, Rath, and Buckingham have written excellent resources that share research, stories, and best practices on being a strengths-based advocate. These authors are clearly writing about what they know about based on years of research. YOU, my friend, are living a life worth writing about each and every day as you coach, mentor, and develop your colleagues through strengths-based leadership.

During the next few issues of Leadership Tips and Tools we plan to continue this conversation on being a strengths-based leader. We look forward to your feedback, examples, and wisdom.

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We want to hear from you! Please email us with your suggestions for *Leadership Tips and Tools*. We would love to hear your suggestions, experiences, stories, discoveries, and successes with putting these tips and tools to work. What topics would be most helpful to you for up-coming issues of *Leadership Tips and Tools*? We value your suggestions and feedback. We are listening!

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