

EXTRA

PERFORMER

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LEADER

PART 1

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DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS

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Leadership is ultimately about behavior.

Frankly, we tire of books by executives and business writers that primarily express personal philosophies and beliefs. The discipline of leadership and those committed to developing leaders inside organizations deserve better.

Our standard is to have every conclusion grounded in objective data and statistical analysis. It then becomes our task to make sense of the data and share helpful insights from our findings.

We look to the future of our vital institutions—universities, schools, hospitals, government agencies, and businesses. They all need extraordinary leaders to flourish.

Our hope is that the information that follows will aid in the development of those much-needed leaders.

-Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman

CHAPTER 1

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS

ZENGER FOLKMAN

THE RESEARCH BEHIND WHY LEADERS SHOULD FOCUS ON STRENGTHS



When people are challenged to improve their leadership effectiveness, they almost automatically assume that the best approach for improvement is fixing weaknesses.

Zenger Folkman's 20+ years of research continues to affirm that great leaders are not defined by the absence of weakness but rather by the presence of clear strengths.

What is a strength?

We have defined a strength as a skill or competency measuring at the 90th percentile compared to others.

- It's something done very well.
- It's used in various situations and has an enduring effect.
- It lasts over time.
- The use of a strength does not detract from or diminish another strength.
- It can be a natural ability or the result of intensive practice and effort.
- It's deeply rooted and exhibited in differing situations over long periods.
- It produces positive outcomes, but the strength is still valued even in rare cases where there is no immediate result.

1

FOCUS ON **STRENGTHS** OR FATAL FLAWS?

One of the basic questions facing everyone creating a personal development plan is whether to focus attention on correcting faults or to focus on building strengths.

The Mediocre Manager Epidemic



84% of leaders do not have any severe weaknesses, but they're not perceived as strong leaders.

They're just... "blah."

The absence of weaknesses combined with the lack of pronounced strengths leaves you no better than average.

Major Weakness = Fatal Flaw

While minor weaknesses do not affect overall performance, extremely negative ratings indicate a lack of ability and damage leaders' effectiveness. To emphasize their seriousness, we call these fatal flaws.

Fatal flaws need to be corrected.

Fatal flaws prevent a leader from being recognized for their strengths. Progress is thwarted until this flaw is fixed.

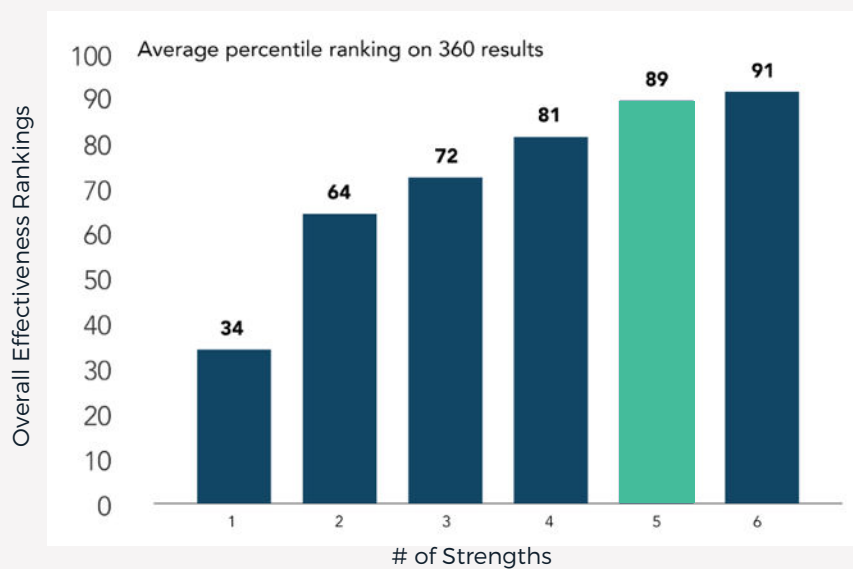
Who should focus on **STRENGTHS**?

20% of leaders have fatal flaws or behaviors that significantly detract from their performance.

80% of leaders (who don't possess fatal flaws) should magnify their strengths to become extraordinary.

THE KEY TO EXTRAORDINARY LEADERSHIP? DEVELOPING STRENGTHS

True leadership flourishes when the emphasis is on amplifying strengths rather than merely fixing weaknesses. Delving into data from over 100,000 managers, we found a clear trend: those with the highest leadership scores consistently showcased an array of outstanding strengths.



OBSERVATION 1: On average, leaders with no strengths were perceived to be in the bottom third for overall leadership effectiveness. Why? While they weren't ineffective at anything, they also were not highly effective at anything.

OBSERVATION 2: Having just **one strength** moves leaders from the 34th percentile to the **64th percentile**. Imagine a 30-percentile point increase for possessing one strength!

OBSERVATION 3: Leaders with four strengths are at the 81st percentile, and those with five strengths jump to the 89th percentile in overall leadership effectiveness.



“When you understand the key to being at the 80th percentile is having three strengths, it seems possible. Our managers have invested all their energy in trying to fix a nit here and there rather than concentrating on developing three strengths.”

Extraordinary Leader Program Participant



CHAPTER 2

DIFFERENTIATING BEHAVIORS FOR LEADERS

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EXTRAORDINARY LEADERSHIP REQUIRES CERTAIN BEHAVIORS



Our research reveals that certain leadership behaviors significantly outshine others, and their importance varies based on the organization.

It's not just about any behavior—while punctuality might be valuable, it didn't set top leaders apart. The real game-changers are those traits that profoundly influence organizational success.

We call these "differentiating behaviors," and we've pinpointed 19 of them. For maximum impact, leaders should focus on enhancing these specific competencies.

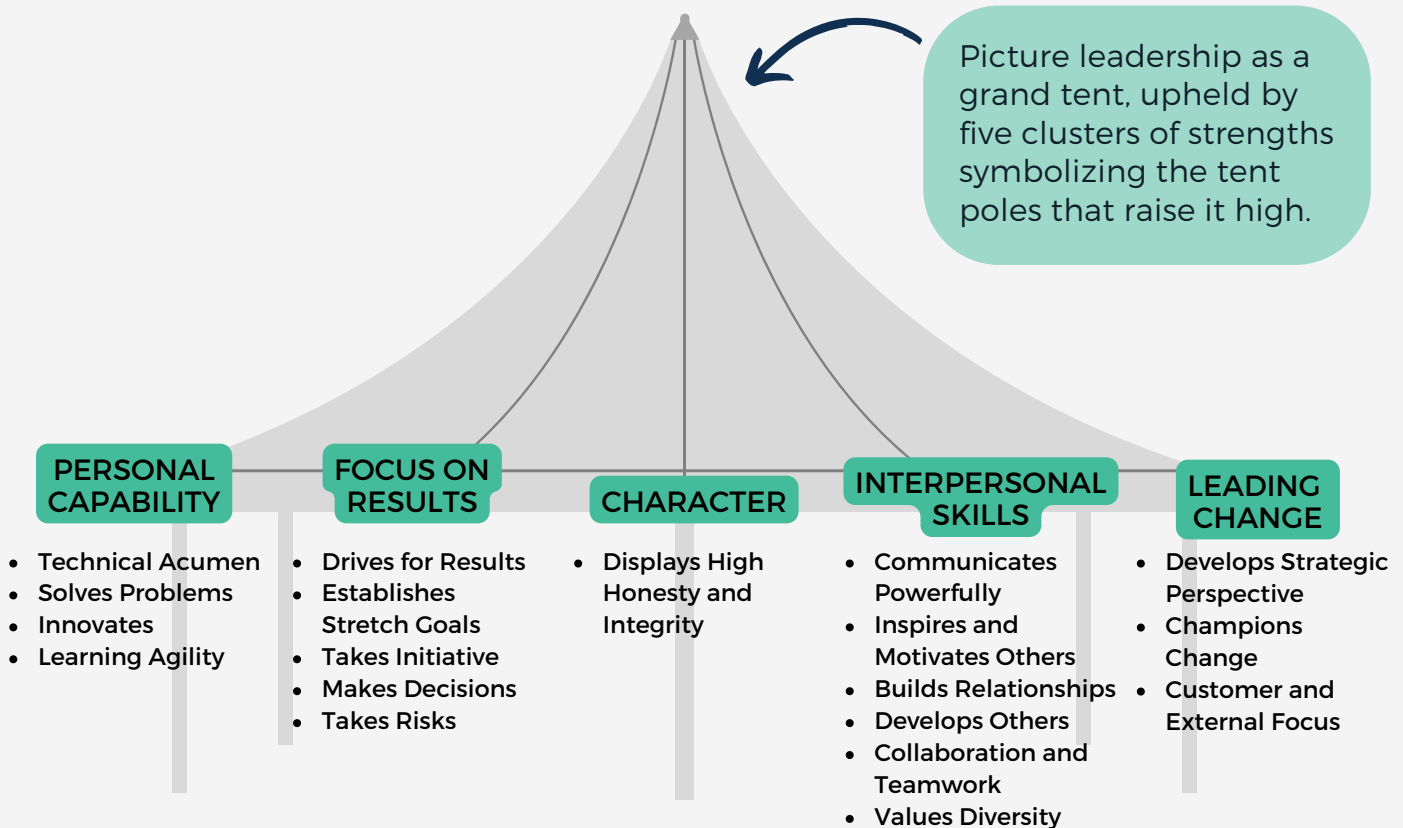


ALL COMPETENCIES ARE NOT EQUAL. SOME DIFFERENTIATE GOOD FROM GREAT LEADERS, WHEREAS OTHERS DO NOT.

Joe Folkman,
President Zenger Folkman

THE LEADERSHIP TENT

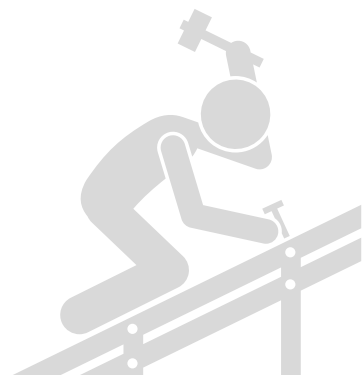
The 19 Differentiating Leadership Behaviors



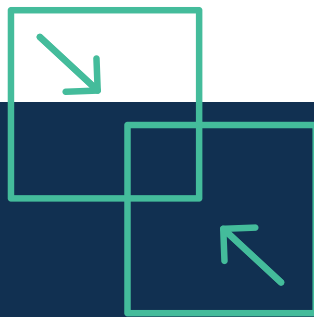
Leadership Needs a Broad Footprint

A single tent pole, on its own, cannot create volume inside a tent. It's only when these poles are strategically spaced apart, each representing differing capabilities, that the tent expands in volume and strength.

While a leader's set of strengths doesn't have to be perfectly balanced, **it certainly doesn't function optimally with one or two essential poles missing.**



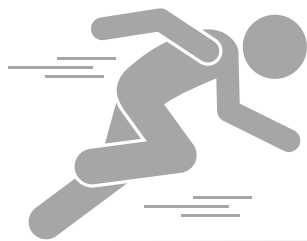
Zenger Folkman has created brief **MICRO LEARNING sessions** for all of these 19 differentiating leadership competencies. If there is a skill that your team or organization would benefit from improving, **click [HERE](#)** to learn more.



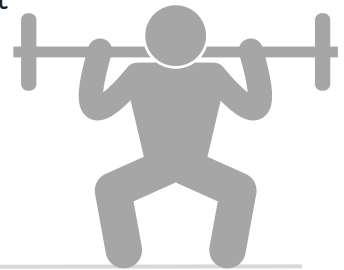
POWERFUL COMBINATIONS

Our study found that effectiveness stems from a blend of competencies. Merely having one strength in “focusing on results” can be counterproductive, much like trying to row a boat with one paddle. True success arises from combining leadership strengths.

Although an effort has been made to make them appear unique and specific, the fact of the matter is that **leadership competencies are highly intertwined. The data shows that:**



1. Becoming good at one competency makes people better at another. This is similar to an athlete’s “**cross-training**” effect. If you want to be a better runner, try lifting weights.



2. Becoming linked appears to be from “attribution” or creating a “**halo effect**.” If people see a leader as excellent at working with others, they will likely believe the leader is also committed to helping their team members grow.



Whether you are working with complex organizations or with one direct report, there is seldom any ONE thing responsible for producing a positive outcome. Instead, it is the **combination of several forces** that produce desired outcomes.

COMBINING STRENGTHS



IMAGINE A LEADER WHO IS...

Highly skilled at **building relationships** → but not rated positively in **driving for results** → Only an **8%** chance of being in the 90th percentile of effectiveness.

Highly skilled at **drives for results** → but not rated positively in **building relationships** → Only a **9%** chance of being in the 90th percentile of effectiveness.

Highly skilled at **building relationships** → and highly skilled in **driving for results** → A **92%** chance of being in the 90th percentile of effectiveness.



BOTH SKILLS ARE VALUABLE AND CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESS, BUT THE **COMBINATION** OF BEING IN THE TOP QUARTILE FOR BOTH SKILLS CATAPULTED THEIR PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS BY 70 PERCENTILE POINTS.

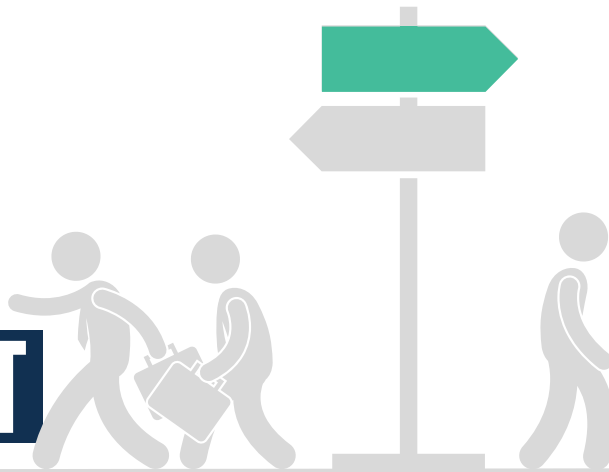
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CHAPTER

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO DEVELOPMENT

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ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO DEVELOPMENT



The vast majority of action plans created by leaders use a linear philosophy regarding behavioral change.

EXAMPLE: *“John, your team does not see you as highly motivational or inspirational. They do not feel energized after they interact with you.”*

John’s Linear Plan of Action:

- Enroll in a public-speaking course to improve his speaking skills.
- Read good texts or articles on human motivation.
- Deliberately display more enthusiasm.

However, there are non-obvious ways to improve how John is perceived by his team.

NON-Linear Development

Rather than simply repeating the same actions and expecting improvement, Zenger Folkman discovered a more nuanced method for cultivating strengths.

When an individual exhibited proficiency in a particular skill, Zenger Folkman pinpointed additional behaviors with high scores. In contrast, leaders who received low ratings for a specific skill often exhibited poor ratings in the same cluster of behaviors.

We call these interconnected behaviors **"strength builders,"** as they consistently correlate with the presence or absence of another strength.

WHAT ARE STRENGTH BUILDERS?

Back to John and his uninspiring leadership...

Looking at the strength builders for “inspires and motivates others” reveals some different ways John can improve people’s perceptions of this skill.



When people score HIGH on “**inspires and motivates others,**” they also receive HIGH scores on “**communicating clear expectations.**” And when people receive LOW scores on “**inspires and motivates others,**” they receive LOW scores on “**communicating clear expectations.**” By working on these behaviors, John can improve his ability to inspire.

To help John, we’d suggest that he choose two strength builders to help improve his ability to inspire and motivate. It doesn’t matter which ones.

This strength-builder approach to development provides multiple pathways to improve any strength!

Other's Perceptions Influence Your Reality

The message from this research is that many behaviors and practices come together to **create a perception** of a leader.

Understanding the **STRENGTH BUILDERS** gives the leader additional ways to improve that perception.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Mechanisms of Strength Builders

1. Every differentiating behavior has statistically correlated Strength Builders.

Our researched approach is similar to how athletes cross-train. It reveals linked behaviors that might not always be obvious.

2. Strength builders change the context in which we operate.

They create a deeper understanding of how people's perceptions of a certain skill are created.

3. Developing a strength builder changes the person.

Expanding your abilities changes a person's perspectives, attitudes, and outlook on life.

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CHAPTER

**BRINGING SCIENCE TO
LEADERSHIP**

Z E N G E R F O L K M A N

AN APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS

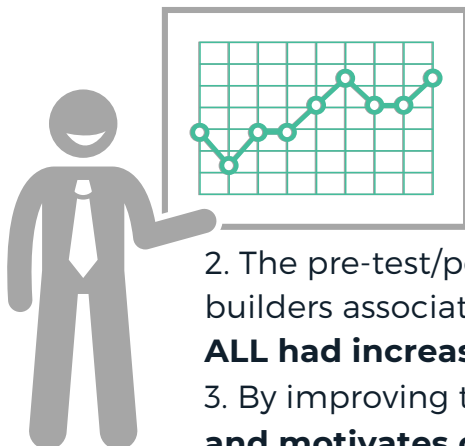


Leadership studies show that a relatively small fraction, approximately 10% of leaders, have a personal development plan to which they give regular attention. And while 20% have something on paper, half aren't taking any action.

Zenger Folkman is committed to producing high results.

To study the impact of strength builders, we looked at data from 882 leaders who had utilized *The Extraordinary Leader 360-degree assessment and workshop*. Each participant created a development plan focused on one specific strength—inspires and motivates others.

Here's what happened:



1. Of the 882 leaders, 157 of them made a significant improvement in their ability to inspire and motivate others, **moving from the 33rd percentile to the 73rd percentile.**

2. The pre-test/post-test scores were reviewed on the strength builders associated with inspires and motivates others. **ALL had increased.**

3. By improving these strength builders, the **scores on “inspires and motivates others” also improved.**

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DON'T SETTLE FOR GOOD SEEK AFTER EXTRAORDINARY

The results for leaders using this strengths-based approach.

For those organizations with pre/post-test results in *The Extraordinary Leader 360*, we found that leaders who chose to

- fix fatal flaws were, on average, able to move from the **18th to the 46th** percentile
- work on building strengths moved from the **55th to 75th** percentile overall.



Directing Feedback the Right Way

Many leaders don't benefit from feedback because they don't know what to do to improve.

Programs that focus on fixing weaknesses only help leaders move from poor to average performance but miss out on the approach that creates the most value for both the individual and the organization —becoming extraordinary.

We know this approach works, and leaders who are using this approach see the value.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Extraordinary Leader Client Testimonials

“Using the ‘cross-training’ approach, our leaders achieved an across-the-board **improvement of close to 15% in their year-over-year employee commitment scores**. Not only did our best leaders get better, but our ‘average’ leaders and even our poorest leaders showed marked improvement in their leadership effectiveness and employee commitment scores.”

-Aerospace Manufacturing Fortune 500 Company

“The biggest change has been in the **energy people have for the performance management** process. It is now something that most employees look forward to. How many companies can say that?”

- Prominent Medical Device Company

“These efforts have led to an improvement in how leaders give and receive feedback and an overall **strong rise in the percentage of leaders who have seen an increase in their number of profound strengths**. We have also seen a significant improvement in the overall team effectiveness of the leaders engaged in these programs.”

-Ivy League University

CONCLUSION

One target in our early research was to discover if there were competencies that were absolutely essential for a leader to be considered great. In other words, “Great leaders always do _____ well.” In short, that failed.

Rather than identifying a consistent profile or style that always worked for every person, we found a tremendous variety in the style, approach, and makeup of extraordinary leaders. Some have strengths in certain behaviors, complemented by the different strengths of others. For an organization to have exceptional leadership ability, it needs to assemble the right team with ample diversity and talent to maximize the collective influence and effectiveness of the team.

People can grow, improve, and change. Zenger Folkman’s approach to leadership development is more than just CONTENT that provides people with greater awareness or flashes of insight. It is grounded upon the idea of action and implementation that continually elevates behavior.

You can learn more about [The Extraordinary Leader Development Experience](#).

Excerpts from: *The New Extraordinary Leader*, by Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, McGraw Hill, 2019.

EXTRAORDINARY NEXT STEPS

1 LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXTRAORDINARY LEADER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

2 TAKE THE EL ABBREVIATED SELF-ASSESSMENT.

3 SCHEDULE A CALL TO SEE HOW WE CAN BRING INSPIRING LEADERSHIP TO YOUR ORGANIZATION.

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