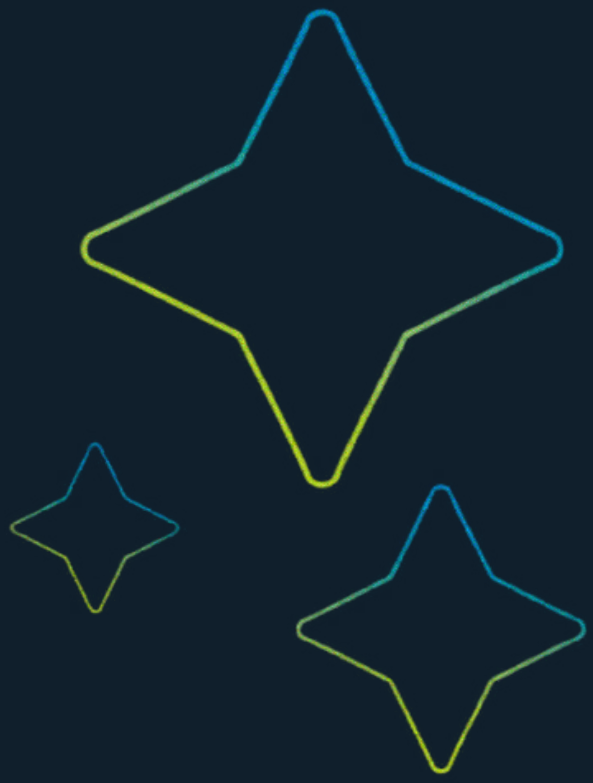


Extraordinary You™

BUILDING YOUR SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

ZENGER | FOLKMAN

Great Companies Develop Leaders.

Extraordinary Companies Develop Everyone.

Extraordinary You™ was built on a simple belief: development should begin at contribution—not promotion.

This report reveals the research behind that belief—**and the solution** that makes it possible.

The Workforce Development Blind Spot

Most organizations invest heavily in developing their leaders. Executives receive coaching. Managers attend leadership programs. High-potential employees are identified, supported, and accelerated through carefully designed experiences.

But there is one group that receives remarkably little attention: individual contributors.

The biggest opportunity to improve organizational performance may not be developing a few more leaders—it may be helping thousands of contributors become more effective.

80%

of employees are individual contributors.

That means the majority of your workforce—and the majority of your potential—is often overlooked in development strategies.

SOURCE: Zenger Folkman Research
2 Million+ Assessments Over 20+ Years

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS DRIVE RESULTS EVERY DAY

- EXECUTE STRATEGY
- SERVE CUSTOMERS
- SOLVE PROBLEMS
- BUILD SOLUTIONS
- DELIVER RESULTS

Most Employees Receive Feedback, Not Development

Performance reviews were designed for evaluation and compensation, **not for growth.**

Encouragement feels good, but it doesn't create change. Vague feedback rarely leads to improvement.

WHAT EMPLOYEES OFTEN GET	VS.	WHAT LEADS TO GROWTH
Infrequent Conversations Feedback comes once a year, long after the moment to pivot.	→	**Timely, Ongoing Feedback** Short, meaningful conversations that happen in the flow of work.
Vague and General Comments are broad and positive, but not actionable.	→	**Specific and Actionable** Clear input on the behaviors that drive impact.
Unclear Priorities Employees leave without knowing what to focus on first.	→	**Clear Priorities** Employees know exactly what to start, stop, or continue.

> **The feedback many employees hear:**
>
> **You're doing great. Keep it up.**

Why Good Intentions Don't Lead to Growth

We all want to improve, but most people don't see themselves as others do.

Without objective input from others, people tend to overestimate their effectiveness in areas where they feel comfortable—and underestimate the behaviors that would create the greatest impact.

As a result, development is guided by incomplete information, leading employees to focus on the wrong priorities and miss opportunities for meaningful growth.

We See Our Intent
We know what we mean to do, and we give ourselves credit for trying.

Others See Our Impact
Others experience the results of our behaviors—and their perspective is often very different.

Growth Requires Both
Combining self-insight with external feedback reveals the blind spots—and the strengths that drive results.

2X

MORE ACCURATE

Others are twice as accurate at assessing our strengths as we are.

This self-awareness gap is one of the biggest barriers to development—and one of the greatest opportunities.

The Question We Had Been Asking Was Wrong

After analyzing more than two million assessments over 20+ years, Zenger Folkman uncovered a different truth.

Exceptional performance isn't about eliminating every weakness. It's about developing the strengths that create the greatest impact.

The goal of development isn't to average 7s and 8s across EVERY skill. It's to build the few key strengths that drive results, influence others, and accelerate individual and organizational success.

WE'VE BEEN ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION:

"What weaknesses should we fix?"

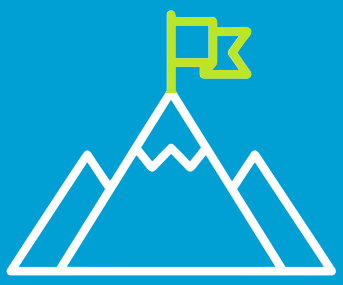
- ✕ Focuses on problems
- ✕ Creates incremental improvement
- ✕ Leads to frustration and stagnation

THE BETTER QUESTION:

"What strengths would create the greatest impact?"

- ✓ Focuses on what drives results
- ✓ Creates transformational improvement
- ✓ Builds confidence, engagement, and growth

> **High performers aren't the people who fix every weakness.**
>
> **They're the people who build profound strengths.**



One Profound Strength

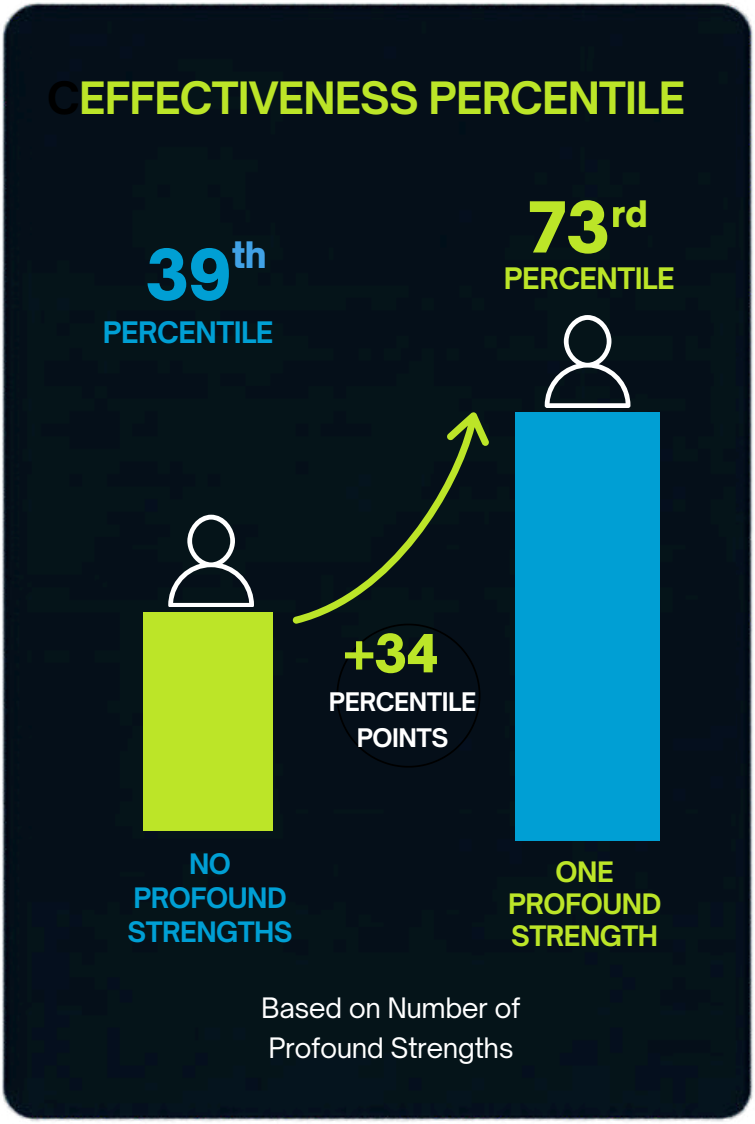
Changes Everything

In a study of more than 15,000 individual contributors, those with no profound strengths ranked, on average, in the **39th percentile** for effectiveness.

When those same individuals developed just one profound strength, their effectiveness jumped to the **73rd percentile.**

That's a **34-percent** improvement by developing a single strength.

This isn't marginal improvement. It's a step-change in performance—and proof that the right kind of development, focused in the right place, produces extraordinary results.



BUILT ON DEEP, GLOBAL RESEARCH

This finding comes from Zenger Folkman's proprietary database of:

15,703 INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

2M+ ASSESSMENTS ANALYZED

20+ YEARS OF EXTENSIVE RESEARCH

Most Development Begins Too Late

What if development began earlier?
Organizations invest heavily in developing leaders—because they know leadership drives results. But by the time people are promoted, identified as high potential, or selected for leadership programs, years of habits and work patterns are already set.

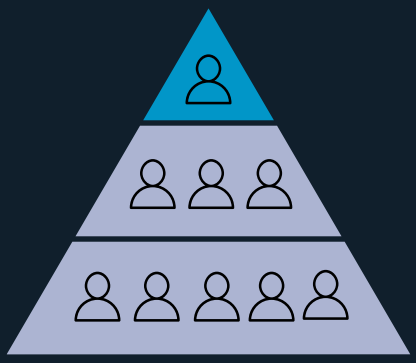
More Engaged Employees
Understand strengths, feel motivated to grow.

Better Performance. Faster.
Clarity leads to stronger contributions, better decisions, and higher quality results.

Stronger Retention
People who grow stay—and are more likely to recommend others to join.

TWO APPROACHES. TWO VERY DIFFERENT OUTCOMES.

TRADITIONAL APPROACH
Development happens at the top.



- ✕ Invests in a few leaders
- ✕ Starts late
- ✕ Limits impact to a small % of the workforce

VS.

EXTRAORDINARY APPROACH
Development reaches everyone.

- ✓ Invests in all contributors
- ✓ Starts earlier
- ✓ Creates impact at scale

Developing contributors early creates a **stronger leadership pipeline.**
But that's only part of the benefit.

What Actually Drives Individual Contributor Effectiveness?

FROM 59 BEHAVIORS TO 6 ESSENTIAL SKILLS

When we set out to understand what makes individual contributors truly effective, our goal was simple: identify the specific behaviors that most consistently separate top performers from everyone else.

We analyzed data from more than 15,000 individual contributors who were rated by managers, peers, and colleagues across dozens of workplace behaviors.

The analysis revealed a surprising pattern. While organizations often evaluate employees against long lists of competencies, only a small number of behaviors consistently predicted effectiveness.

OUR RESEARCH JOURNEY

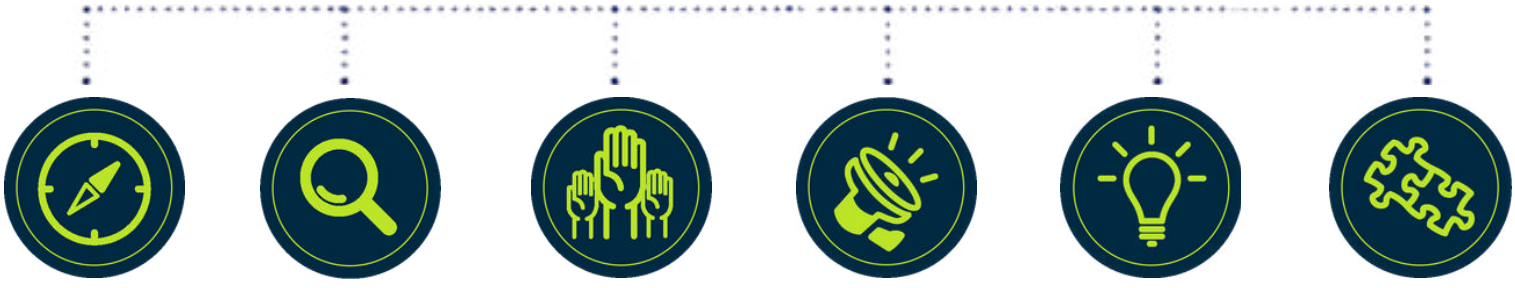
15,703 — **INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS**
Across industries and company sizes

↓

59 — **BEHAVIORS ANALYZED**
Dozens of workplace behaviors rated by others

↓

6 — **ESSENTIAL SKILLS IDENTIFIED**
The behaviors most strongly connected to real-world effectiveness



The Six Skills That Matter Most

The skills behind extraordinary contribution.

Across more than 15,000 individual contributors and millions of assessments, these six skills emerged as those that drive impact, influence others, and improve results—no matter the role or industry.

01 INTEGRITY

Earns trust by doing the right thing, following through on commitments, and acting with consistency.

02 PROBLEM-SOLVING

Evaluates information, makes sound judgments, and generates effective solutions.

03 INITIATIVE

Proactively identifies opportunities, solves problems, and moves work forward.

04 COMMUNI-CATION

Shares ideas clearly and listens well to build understanding, trust, and alignment.

05 INSPIRATION

Motivates others through positive energy and purpose, increasing engagement and team performance.

06 TEAMWORK

Works effectively with others, builds strong relationships, and achieves more together.

Knowing What Matters Is Only Half the Equation

The Challenge Isn't Understanding the Research. It's Applying It at Scale.

If organizations know that strengths drive performance, why do so few employees receive strengths-based development?

Because most development systems were not designed to deliver personalized growth across an entire workforce.

- Managers lack **time**.
- Feedback lacks **structure**.
- Employees lack **clarity**.
- Development lacks **focus**.

Research Identified the Opportunity.

Extraordinary You™ Delivers the Solution.

© 2026 Zenger Folkman

HOW IT WORKS

Extraordinary You™ is a self-paced, online experience designed to fit into the flow of work—not disrupt it.

Program Details:

Format	On-demand, online, asynchronous elearning
Duration	2.5 total hours of self-paced content
Delivery	Virtual access through Zenger Folkman's assessment portal
Participant Materials	• Career Stages Self-Assessment Report • *Extraordinary You* Feedback Report • *Extraordinary You* Key Takeaways Packet • Access to Continued Development Library • Manager Support Materials

Research-Based Assessment
Participants and their manager complete a short assessment. (20 min.)

Structured Feedback
Participants receive feedback from their manager. (15 min.)

AI-Powered Report
Participants will review their feedback report with AI-powered insights to help interpret it.

Strengths-Focused Growth Plan
Participants create a personal development plan focused on building 1 skill.

Manager-Supported Development
Managers receive tools and guidance to support ongoing development conversations.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARN

Extraordinary You™ focuses on what actually drives exceptional performance.

Participants learn how to:

Build The Strengths That Matter Most

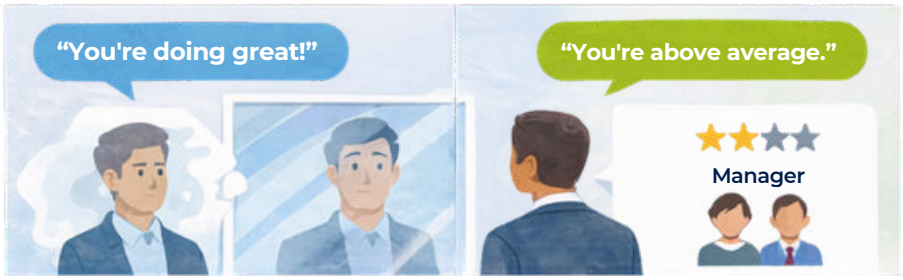
- Understand the six essential skills that our research shows differentiate high-performing individual contributors.

Avoid Career-Derailing Weaknesses

- Recognize how a critical weakness can disproportionately impact performance and effectiveness.

Understand How They're Perceived

- Discover how feedback shapes opportunities and how to actively manage perception.



Align Work to Maximize Impact and Engagement

- Identify **when** their best work happens—and how alignment between strengths, passions, and roles drives performance.

Turn Insights Into Action

- Translate feedback into a clear, focused development plan that is realistic, measurable, and supported by their manager.

STRONGER INDIVIDUALS. STRONGER ORGANIZATIONS.

When contributors improve, organizations improve.

+ What Participants Gain	+ What Organizations Gain
Clear insights into how they are perceived.	**Improved individual contributor** performance.
Understanding the **strengths** that most improve effectiveness.	**More effective** and consistent manager feedback.
A practical, **personalized** development plan.	**Higher** engagement and stronger retention.
Greater confidence in where to focus and how to grow.	**Scalable** development across the workforce.
More meaningful **development conversations** with their manager.	A practical, **cost-effective** solution that doesn't disrupt operations.

Extraordinary You™ helps **prepare** employees for greater **responsibility over time**—by strengthening how they **contribute** today.

One Strength Changes a Contributor.

Thousands Change an Organization.

70%
HIGHER ENGAGEMENT

40%
HIGHER JOB SATISFACTION

50%
LOWER TURNOVER RISK

The organizations that outperform in the future won't be those that develop a few leaders. They will be the organizations that **develop everyone.**

© 2026 Zenger Folkman

DESIGNED FOR THE MAJORITY—NOT JUST THE FEW.

Extraordinary You helps every employee understand their strengths, improve performance, and contribute at a higher level—without taking them away from work.

SEE *EXTRAORDINARY YOU* IN ACTION

zengerfolkman.com

info@zengerfolkman.com

ZENGER | FOLKMAN