

**Good news-** Pretty easy to read, positive content, solid research, and includes a key that can be used to access the Gallup Strength Finder program. This allows you to complete an online assessment. The assessment analyzes your leadership strengths and includes guidance on how to use your unique strengths to improve your leadership effectiveness.

**Bad news-** You have to buy the book to use the self-assessment tool. It's a one shot deal.

**Good news-** It has some very practical lessons for companies, organizations, departments and leaders of today and tomorrow that I have turned into applications and tactics! As usual, I hope you can put them to use right away.

## Summary:

In Strengths-Based Leadership, Tom Rath and Barry Conchie examine the question "What are the keys to effective leadership?" To answer this question a group of researchers were gathered to review data collected from Gallup on the topic. The research included 20,000 interviews with senior leaders, studies of more than one million work teams and 50 years of Gallup Polls of the world's most admired leaders. Key findings from the research are:

1. The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths.
2. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team.
3. The most effective leaders understand their followers' needs.

## Investing in Your Strengths

Without understanding our strengths we are doomed to lead from mediocrity... "If you spend your life trying to be good at everything, you will never be great at anything. While our society encourages us to be well-rounded, this approach inadvertently breeds mediocrity. Perhaps the greatest misconception of all is that of the well-rounded leader."

## It's our differences that define our success as leaders...

"I've never met an effective leader who wasn't aware of his talents and working to sharpen them." – Former NATO supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark, in the New York Times Magazine. The authors go on to make some interesting observations, "if you look at great historical leaders such as Winston Churchill or Mahatma Gandhi, you might notice more differences than similarities, and it is the differences that defined them and led to their success." And, "many political and business leaders have self-concepts that are miles away from reality. They simply don't know their strengths and weaknesses."

Leadership researcher, Donald O. Clifton, started studying leadership in the 1960's, conducting more than 20,000 interviews with various leaders across diverse industries. He was asked what was his greatest leadership discovery was from more than thirty years of research. He answered: "A leader needs to know his strengths as a carpenter knows his tools, or as a physician knows the instruments at her disposal. What great leaders have in common is that each truly knows his or her strengths, and can call on the right strength at the right time. This explains why there is no definitive list of characteristics that describes all leaders."

## Maximizing Your Team

"Effective people surround themselves with the right people and build upon each person's strength. Yet in most cases, leadership teams are a product of circumstance more than design. Among the executive teams they studied, team members were selected or promoted based primarily upon knowledge or competence. So, the best sales person becomes the chief salesperson, even if he or she is not a great manager. Rarely are people recruited to an executive team because their strengths are the best complement to those of the existing team members."

The research has identified four distinct domains of leadership strength that guide how different leaders contribute to their team. "Although individuals need not be well rounded, teams should be."

## The four leadership domains as identified in the research are:

1. **Executing:** Leaders who know how to make things happen.
2. **Influencing:** Leaders who help their teams reach a much broader audience.
3. **Relationship Building:** Leaders who are the glue that holds the team together.
4. **Strategic Thinking:** Leaders who keep us focused on what could be.

The four domains are supported by 34 themes that describe each leader's specific strengths.

In summary, effective leadership has its foundation in personal effectiveness. This requires a deep understanding of your unique strengths and weaknesses, resulting in greater self-awareness. Given the importance of self-awareness to effective leadership, any tool that can assist a leader in gaining a better understanding of himself or herself is worth the investment.

## Applications:

The most obvious applications are to remember the three key findings and do what they suggest, which I have added in **bold**.

1. The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths, **so invest in yours!**
2. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team, **so choose people to complement your existing team!**
3. The most effective leaders understand their followers' needs, **so practice the Situational Leadership techniques I have been teaching for years!**

And in particular, assess yourself in these areas by self-examination, asking others or buying the book and using the key to go online, and **build from your strengths:**

1. **Executing:** Leaders who know how to make things happen.
2. **Influencing:** Leaders who help their teams reach a much broader audience.
3. **Relationship Building:** Leaders who are the glue that holds the team together.
4. **Strategic Thinking:** Leaders who keep us focused on what could be.

## And Finally:

I work with many clients on **Coaching, Personal and Leadership Development** and hope to put aspects of Rath and Conchie's book to use with them. If you want more thoughts about this book, or want to add your own, check out my blog. You can visit it at <http://richsteel.blogspot.com/> This opinion and others are posted on my newly revised web site: [www.rsbc.com](http://www.rsbc.com) To talk more about this and other topics, **e-mail me** (Rich Steel) at [rsbc@aol.com](mailto:rsbc@aol.com) or call me at my office on (610) 388- 3680 or on **my cell** at (610) 324-8466.

## About Brandywine Valley Consulting

### Who We Are

We are a high quality organization development and training company that **makes a difference** for its customers.

### What We Do

Our experience and network enables us to **deliver** superior value to our clients through:

- Consulting Solutions
- Training Solutions
- Executive Coaching

### How We Are Different

We value our relationships and **truly customize** what we do to meet the needs of our clients.