



# Essential Strategies for Peak Performance

3 steps to transform  
performance at work



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## Peak Performance is a Balancing Act

*This e-book is for leaders and professionals committed to developing extraordinary performance in themselves, individuals and teams. Organisations can build peak performance by adopting a balanced approach, an approach that optimises strengths and manages performance risks in the workplace.*

## A Balancing Act - 3 Steps to Peak Performance

Effective performance of individual and teams is a balancing act. Leaders, performance and development specialists, human resource practitioners, coaches and consultants can build peak performance in the workplace by making strengths part of the equation.



***A balanced approach*** to performance builds confidence and results in higher levels of engagement and resilience.

Balance is the combination of understanding and applying strengths in the workplace while effectively managing performance risks. This e-book provides a 3 step approach to help leaders and professionals achieve a balanced approach to performance that will lead to peak performance.

### 3 Steps to Peak Performance Summarised

**There are three things leaders can do to unlock the potential of individuals and teams:**

#### 1. Be Clear on Strengths

There is a common misconception that strengths relate to competence; the specific skills and knowledge required for optimal performance.

*In fact, strengths are defined as the underlying qualities that energise individuals and lead to peak performance.<sup>1</sup> It's at the core of our natural abilities.*

#### 2. Manage Performance Risks

Performance risks relate to one of two areas – a strength in overdrive or a performance weakness.

#### 3. Make Strengths a Development Priority

By developing strengths performance becomes effortless and easy to manage.

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> Strengthscope™ by Strengths Partnership Pty Ltd

## The Challenge of Achieving Peak Performance

**Take a moment to think about performance conversations you've had in your career...**

How much time was spent on discussing strengths?

How much time was spent on discussing how to improve areas of performance that were weaker?

Was the conversation balanced?



In today's complex and fast paced business environment, individuals, teams and leaders are experiencing greater demands to produce extraordinary results.

Traditional approaches to optimising performance have focused on closing the "gap" on performance, the gap between desired performance outcomes and current capabilities. However more and more leaders are now discovering that these traditional approaches to performance are falling short of the pace required to adapt to the speed of change.

The challenge for many leaders is to move beyond addressing the "gap" to cultivating potential with strengths, an approach that ultimately leads to peak performance. Leading organisations globally such as Facebook, Tesco, American Express and more are adopting this balanced approach to performance.



### Quick Facts

The greatest negative contributing factor to employee performance is a focus on weaknesses while a focus on strengths has the strongest impact on employee performance.<sup>2</sup>

Productivity can increase by 38% when employees have the opportunity to do what they do best each day.<sup>3</sup>

### References:

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Leadership Council (2002) Performance Management Survey; HR Executive Forum research

<sup>3</sup> Harter, J.K., & Schmidt, F.L. (2002). *Employee engagement, satisfaction, and business-unit-level outcomes: Meta-analysis*. Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization

## 3 Steps to Peak Performance

### 1. Be Clear on Strengths

Extraordinary performance is easy to spot, whether it's from an inspirational leader, on the sports field or in the creative arts. So what makes performance extraordinary?

Peak performers use qualities that are **energising** and align this energy to their pursuits. What becomes visible to others is the expression of strengths.

Whatever the source of strengths, leaders and professionals can help individuals and teams become peak performers by clarifying strengths and raising awareness of strengths in the workplace.

#### Leaders can build peak performers by:

- ☐ Taking notice of the times there is energy in performance. What is the quality of this energy?
- ☐ What is motivating for individuals and teams – the task, the relationships, the thinking required, the environment? What is working well and leading to higher levels of engagement?
- ☐ Review a typical day – take note of the high energy points and the low energy points and decipher exactly what's happening.



#### A word of caution:

Beware of competence masked as strengths – given the traditional approach to improving performance it's likely individuals and teams have developed competencies and behaviours that are exceptional. Remember, the key ingredient to strengths is energy. Is the task, behaviour or skills truly energising or merely something they are good at.



## 2. Manage Performance Risks

What can get in the way of peak performance?

It may be a weakness or a strength in overdrive. To effectively manage any performance risks, leaders must first understand what performance risks are and how they relate to performance objectives.

**Performance Weakness** - a key identifier of a weakness is that it can drain individuals of energy. However, a weakness only becomes limiting to effectiveness when it directly impacts on the performance results required from the role.

A **strength in overdrive** is defined as the excessive use of strength to the extent that performance and effectiveness is limited.<sup>4</sup> Like weaknesses, a strength is only effective relative to the impact it has on performance. Strengths in overdrive can ultimately become a performance risk if not effectively managed. Research shows that career derailment at work is associated to strengths in overdrive rather than lack of skill or competency.<sup>5</sup>

### At risk of poor performance

Take for example the case of Brenda, a communications specialist in a large banking organisation, contracted to work on the development of the annual report. Brenda is a strong collaborator and influencer however she lacks energy for detail. During the final stages of production, Brenda spent most days attending to the finer details of the annual report, ultimately leaving her drained of energy and open to making mistakes.

*Leaders who are good at identifying weaknesses can help people develop practices to effectively manage their performance risks.*

In the early stages of planning the annual report, Brenda's collaboration and influencing skills were a welcome quality and her team were highly productive and cohesive. However as deadlines approached, team members became frustrated at Brenda's desire to want to collaborate on tasks that required a high level of efficiency and detail and this ultimately left the team feeling dissatisfied with Brenda's leadership and overall performance.

*Strengths are naturally energising and individuals have a tendency to want to use them. Leaders can help people recognise when an overactive use of strengths may be in danger of limiting performance effectiveness.*

### Leaders can use these cues to monitor performance at risk:

- ☐ What is the source of persistent problems and mistakes?
- ☐ What requirements of the role, project or task do individuals have limited energy for?
- ☐ Are people receiving mixed messages about their performance? For example, individuals may perceive themselves as performing well, however they are receiving mixed feedback from colleagues in the team.
- ☐ Is there a struggle to maintain a consistent level of performance, especially in new or challenging situations?

<sup>4</sup> James Brook and Dr Paul Brewerton (2010) *Strengthscope™ Strengths for Success Workbook*

<sup>5</sup> McCall, M.W., Jr., & Lombardo, M.M. (1983). *Off The Track: Why and How Successful Executives Get Derailed*, Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.



### 3. Make Strengths a Development Priority



Sustainable performance requires a commitment by individuals, teams and leaders to make strengths productive. Raising people's awareness about strengths provides the opportunity for change. The opportunity to transform performance at all levels of the organisation occurs when strengths are further developed and aligned to the organisations goals.

Making strengths part of daily performance conversations provides leaders with the opportunity not only to transform performance but to cultivate sustainable results. Furthermore, positive psychologists have shown that people with a positive frame of mind have an edge when it comes to performance and development.<sup>6</sup>

The challenge for leaders is to develop strengths even under times of stress. It's easy for leaders to fall into the trap of closing the gap on performance by improving weaknesses, even at the expense of achieving higher levels of engagement.

To make strengths productive, focus on developing skills that aligns to strengths.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, leaders can enhance organisational effectiveness when strengths are aligned to the organisations goals. Consider this:

- ☐ How much energy is spent on going over the same performance issues?
- ☐ What's the balance of time spent on strengths vs. weaknesses in performance conversations?
- ☐ What opportunities are provided for people to actively use strengths in the workplace?
- ☐ What knowledge and skills would compliment the strengths of individuals and teams?

Strengthening performance becomes easy through daily practice. Taking time everyday to strengthen performance, through effective conversations will ultimately lead to peak performance and higher levels of engagement.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Fredrickson (2009) – *Positivity*

<sup>7</sup> John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman, and Scott K. Edinger. *Making Yourself Indispensable* (2011) Harvard Business Review

## Commit to Peak Performance

Leaders can build peak performance by taking the ideas presented in this e-book and turning them into action.

Develop an action plan to productively apply strengths in the workplace.

**Remember the 3 steps to peak performance:**

- 1. Be Clear on Strengths**
- 2. Manage Performance Risks – strengths in overdrive or limiting weaknesses**
- 3. Make Strengths a Development Priority**

Turning insights into action is essential for peak individual, team and organisational performance.

To fully leverage strengths, leaders and professionals should further understand it's applications in the workplace.



To learn more about the power of strengths and it's applications visit [au.strengthscope.com](http://au.strengthscope.com) or contact us on +61 3 9421 4490 and visit our blog [au.strengthscope.com/blog](http://au.strengthscope.com/blog)

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