

Workshop: Talents

This fourth workshop is about Talents which, together with Needs, form our most significant motivation factors. We are now at the third level in the Hierarchy of Motivation[®] where we can begin to facilitate personal growth.

Background

There are two important concepts, both of which are detailed in the theory section of the Certified Partner Guide, that are related to our work with Talents:

First, when we use our natural talents the brain secretes "happiness" hormones (ie serotonin) which contribute to a feeling of effortlessness and "flow": the ideal balance of challenge and skill; effortlessness without being boring. Thus, using our talents is an essential tool in terms of both efficiency and motivation.

Each time you learn something new, the brain makes new connections and transforms. Since the brain will always seek the fastest path to make new connections to something unknown we can make much more efficient and effective use our talents in gaining new knowledge and developing new competencies.

Leading from strength is the best route to sustained creativity, top performance and fulfillment. Recent findings in business research, neuroscience and psychology support the idea that leading from our strengths is a much better strategy than focusing on our weakness.

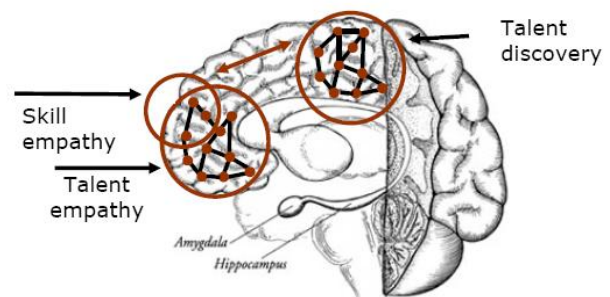
Using Talents to Create New Competencies

Our ability to leverage our talents can be compared with the way we learn in school. When children begin to learn arithmetic, we begin by showing them something recognizable e.g. apples. We ask them, How many apples do I have? Six apples? So if I remove two apples, how many are left? If the child has learned to count it will be relative easy to figure out that there are four apples left even though the child hasn't learned what the numbers 6, 2 and 4 look like. From there, we build on the child's familiarity with apples and counting to introduce and build skill in arithmetic.

Conversely, if we were to show the calculation $6-2=4$, the child would not be able to recognize the symbols. It would take significant effort to make the child understand since the calculation consists of entirely unknown factors and nothing to build from.

The Motivation Factor Indicator is the tool that helps us put words to our "apples".

The illustration here shows a simplified image of the difference between talents and skills. Our talents are the areas where we have created the strongest and greatest number of connections (synapses). Most often, these strongest talents have been formed in early childhood.



We use the Motivation Factor[®] Method to identify and leverage natural talents to build new skills and competencies.

A person without such a close set of connections for Empathy can nevertheless build new competencies in this area. They may not be able to do so with the same efficiency as a person who is naturally talented in this respect but by using something recognizable as a starting

point – a talent for “Discovery”, for instance, where they already have a close set of connections - they can build a bridge to form new connections.

One example of this bridge-building is offered in a case study on the Motivation Factor® website that describes an executive who needed to develop her skill in empathy. She did not have a natural talent in this area but she did have a talent for Discovery. She interpreted Discovery as being curious about things. Working with this executive, Helle, as her coach, asked if she might not direct that curiosity toward the people she worked with. By putting her talent for Discovery into play the executive was able to develop and demonstrate an interest in others which significantly improved her work performance and relationships.

A clear indication that people are not relying on their talents is that they feel an inner restlessness or uneasiness. They may have everything they could wish for, but they still can't quite identify why they suffer from this restlessness. They just feel that something should be different. When we experience this kind of inner uneasiness, it is often because we aren't using our potential correctly or sufficiently.

On the other hand, human beings often seem to take what feels natural for granted. We don't appreciate our unique abilities. Since they come to us so easily, we think everyone else could do the same. But that is not the case. We must recognize our talents and value, develop and apply them because this is where our biggest opportunity for development and motivation lies.

Rather than spending all our energy becoming better at things that don't come naturally to us (ie “weaknesses”), we encourage a focus on developing one's talents. It is more efficient, more motivating and provides much greater opportunity for growth.

Working with Talents

Even if a group of people experience the same thing, we will filter what we experience in radically different ways. The brain will always automatically choose the road of least resistance, via “talents”. We can develop new competencies in life, because the brain loves to make new connections but the very close networks of connections that make up our strongest talents are created during our earliest formation and youth.

Living a talent-based life is all about allowing the talents and strengths to be expressed in everything we do, and using our talents as a pathway to new learning.

Try to recall the last time things seemed to flow effortlessly across your desk. A time when you were super-motivated and everything just seemed to succeed. This is exactly the effect we will experience when we use our talents. This is the essence of internal motivation.

EXAMPLE: *From Founder, Helle Bundgaard: "I have worked in sales for many years. Like many sales people, I hated what is called "cold calling". Cold calling is when you call someone you have never spoken with before and try to set up a meeting with this person in order to tell them more about the product you want to sell. A lot of people get annoyed when they are contacted in this way, often because you are sales person number five to call that day. One is often turned down and, as a rule of thumb, only one out of ten agrees to see you.*

"Looking back at it, I realized that the times when I actually enjoyed cold calling was when I used my talents of discovery, creativity and mastery during the process. This is what I did:

"First I made up a list of all the advantages I believed the customer would get by purchasing our solutions. Then I developed a questionnaire based on these advantages but rephrased in terms of needs, e.g.: 'Is it important to your company that all data on your customers is located in one place?'. Finally, I called the customer and said we were doing a survey about the maintenance of customer data and would they answer a few questions. They usually would and, as I moved through the questionnaire, I got their attention and was invited to meet with them. "I was extremely motivated because I was internally driven through the entire process. From preparation through the meeting itself I used all my talents, as you can see:

- *Developing the list of benefits required me to learn how the products were distinct in the market (discovery, mastery, creativity)*
- *Developing the questionnaire (empathy, creativity)*
- *Obtaining information about the customer's situation (empathy, connectedness, mastery)*

"Today I live my life in a talent-based way to an even larger extent because I have developed my entire business based on my talents. When I develop new programs and presentations, I use my talents empathy, connectedness, creativity, mastery and discovery.

"When I seek new knowledge, I use my talent discovery and mastery. During the learning process related to obtaining knowledge on a subject, my brain naturally looks for new connections and ways of perceiving things. I can sit for days totally immersed in the process. I don't need someone to motivate me. I am 100% self-motivated.

"When I coach, I most especially use my talents empathy, connectedness and discovery. And finally, I use the talent connectedness to maintain focus on being a good role model, showing gratitude and attracting the things I want in life."

"Another example of both leveraging and managing talents came from a CFO whom I coached for a while. Delegating work was a challenge for him. His primary talent was "mastery", and his primary need was "to be needed". So no wonder delegation was difficult. We clarified which work functions he found most fun. In his case budgeting was fun, and budget follow-up was

not. This recognition led him to decide to master budgeting and outsource follow-up. He directed his talent for mastery toward the area of greatest satisfaction and, at the same time, his need "to be needed" was not threatened by this decision."



It is important to differentiate our natural talents from our learned competencies. Where our natural talents always bring us energy and has been there since childhood and youth, our learned competencies is something that we acquire on a need-to-have basis.

Overusing Talents

Working with talents is, to a great extent, a matter of helping people to put their talents into play but it is equally important to find out if they are overusing their talents. If a manager has a talent for Empathy and overuses this talent he/she might find it difficult to take on "hard" conversations and might be too sensitive to the impact to or reactions of others. Another example is that people with the Talent "Mastery" can tend to find it difficult to outsource things or delegate, because they have this inner urge that they have to master it themselves, or that other people are not as good at it as themselves.