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# REFLECTIONS

*Exploring Your Personal Strengths and Goals*

## Strengths in Leadership

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In our Lead IUPUI programs, we have a guiding definition of leadership as "a values-based process toward the goal of positive change. By reflecting on who we are and how we engage with others, we learn to partner toward a common purpose." In order to fully engage in this process of leadership, you must have a reflective sense of self-awareness and an understanding of your unique strengths. While it is important to have role models and leaders you admire, using their same leadership style may not be effective. You will be most successful when you use your unique strengths as you engage in this process of leadership.

One tool we use in the Advancing Women Program to gain a better understanding of strengths is StrengthsQuest. This assessment is the culmination of a 30 year research study on strengths conducted by the Gallup organization in which they studied many top achievers in many different fields. What the researchers found was that achievers built on their strengths and managed their weaknesses, in part by surrounding themselves with people who possessed different strengths. The 34 strengths represented in the assessment were the most common strengths found in the research. In your report, you received your top five strengths. These are areas in which you have consistent, near perfect performance. The online resources you were provided give you more information on your top five. As you read through these results, remember that this is a tool, it does not define you or give you an excuse for not doing work that may not in line with your own strengths. In addition, know that you have a unique combination of strengths that weave together for an individual result. You may share the same strength with someone, but that does not mean you see it show up in your life in the same way.

Celebrating one's strengths and areas of accomplishments can be difficult for some, in particular for women. In Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In*, she tells a story of a keynote speaker who described the phenomenon of feeling like a fraud when praised for strengths. "Instead of feeling worthy of recognition, they feel undeserving and guilty, as if a mistake has been made. Despite being high achievers, even experts in their fields, women can't seem to shake the sense that it is only a matter of time until they are found out for who they really are – imposters with limited skills or abilities." This feeling of fraud is something that I have struggled with myself over the years, as an undergraduate student, in my first professional position after graduate school, my first semester teaching, and even as a parent. Embracing and celebrating a strengths philosophy was not an organic process for me; it took time and self-reflection. Over the last several years, I have made a lot of progress in growing my self-confidence and career ambitions, and StrengthsQuest has been helpful in this process. I hope this month you will take some time to celebrate your strengths and accomplishments and make it a regular part of your leadership routine. In addition, recognize the unique strengths in others. We all have something unique to contribute to process of leadership.

# Mid-Air Disaster Avoided: Values Win Over Litigation

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In an emergency, would you do what's right to help someone or would you do what's legally acceptable? I hear you saying, "It depends." Well, yes it does. But on what does your choice depend? What influences your choice?

Here's my client's story about that kind of dilemma that had him up-in-the-air, literally, and how his values – what mattered to him – guided his actions.

## The Captain's Voice

"On an international flight from China, the captain's voice woke us: "Will the doctors on board please press their call buttons?" I looked at my watch. It was the middle of the night. I automatically reached for the button, and then lowered my hand. If I get sued, I put my family at risk — the litigation will bankrupt us. I know there are 500 people on the flight. Surely, there are other doctors who can answer the call. The captain called again: "Will any doctors on board please push their call button and make themselves known." I looked at my watch again. 7 minutes had passed since the first call. I was really struggling with myself. Come on, someone. I am not the only doctor on board!

## What do I do?

I pressed my call button and went to the flight attendant. "I'm a doctor."  
I followed her to the business

class galley. The person in need was unable to stand unassisted. One of the flight attendants said, "Well, he's not bleeding. He must not be too bad." Fifteen years ago, I would have come down hard on her as I am sure I did on nurses making unqualified assessments. She was ignorant, not ill-intended. She saw what she saw. I saw what I saw — a guy going downhill quickly, about to go into anaphylactic shock. The purser already had a syringe in her hand, knowing that if no doctor showed up, she was accountable for injecting something generic into the man that hopefully would help. She gladly handed me the syringe. I inserted an IV, pushed lots of fluids. He stabilized. When we landed, he was put in the hands of the waiting medics.

## On the Ground

Back at my corporate desk, answering emails, attending meetings, pushing papers, I heard myself wonder: Is this the right job for me? Is this how I want to use my talents and skills? Does it match my values? Is this how I want to experience my days? Am I satisfied in a way that matters to me?  
I recalled that during the incident, as the passenger stabilized, the purser patted me on the back as she said "You're an angel." That respect is what I crave. I don't always get it, or as much as I want, at my corporate desk. I was happy the guy stabilized, not just for his sake and his health, but for mine, too.

## You're the Captain

Because of the conversations you and I have had about my values, I'm listening to life and myself differently. I now know what to listen to when I make important choices. What's negotiable and what isn't. Where to bend and for how long. I've already seen my colleagues look at me with surprise because I've stopped flying off the handle due to being less triggered by my hot buttons. That benefit alone has helped me perform at a higher level, build trust where I used to break it.

On that plane, life was telling me something. And I was listening. I get it: I am the captain of my work, my career, my life. It's up to me too. I'm going to stabilize myself and take care of my health. It's funny: I'm a doctor who's going to get healthy and live better by understanding my values."

**Dear Reader:** This story is one of hundreds I am privileged to hear as people share how understanding their values brings clarity to their work, strengthens their voice and empowers them to be who they want to be. In today's 24/7 world of rapid-everything, understanding our values isn't a luxury, it's essential for us to make our contributions and live a meaningful, fulfilled life, successfully navigating our own mid-air crises.

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, "I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along." You must do the thing you think you cannot do.  
~Eleanor Roosevelt~

# Goals Need To Be SMART!

Goal setting is a powerful process for thinking about your ideal future. It can help you strategically plan how to achieve the future you ideally see yourself having. By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know where you have to concentrate your efforts. You'll also quickly spot the distractions that can, so easily, lead you astray. Setting goals gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation. By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals, and you'll see forward progress in what might previously have seemed a long pointless grind. You will also raise your self-confidence, as you recognize your own ability and competence in achieving the goals that you've set. A useful way of making goals more powerful is to use the SMART mnemonic. While there are plenty of variants (some of which we've included in parenthesis), SMART usually stands for:

**S – Specific (or Significant).** A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To set a specific goal you must answer the six “W” questions:

- Who: Who is involved?
- What: What do I want to accomplish?
- Where: Identify a location.
- When: Establish a time frame.
- Which: Identify requirements and constraints.
- Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

**M – Measurable (or Meaningful).** The second criterion stresses the need for concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of the goal. A measurable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

**A – Attainable (or Action-Oriented).** The third criterion stresses the importance of goals that are realistic and attainable. An attainable goal will usually answer the question:

- How can the goal be accomplished?

**R – Relevant (or Rewarding).** The fourth criterion stresses the importance of choosing goals that matter. A relevant goal can answer yes to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match our other efforts/needs?
- Are you the right person?
- Is it applicable in current socio- economic- technical environment?

**T – Time-bound (or Trackable).** The fifth criterion stresses the importance of grounding goals within a time frame, giving them a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps a team focus their efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. A time-bound goal will usually answer the question:

- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?