

COLUMN

Momentum Project

Start With What's Good – Focus on Strengths[©]

Success comes when people do what they do best.

by **David J. Pollay**

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Imagine you arrive home from work after a long day. Your spouse is waiting for you when you get home. He asks you to grab a cup of coffee and to meet him in the home office. You do what he asks and you find him sitting across the table, waiting for you to take your seat. You sit down and he says, "I've been thinking about your performance over the last 6 months and I've come up with a list of things you need to improve. Let me run down the list and let's come up with a development plan."

And what would be your response? "What the - #?@! Are you kidding me?! After all I do around here, this is what you have for me?!" If you're like anyone I know, you wouldn't be happy.

The question is, would this ever really happen? The answer: It happens in companies every day. Most managers focus on what's bad about employees, not what's good about them. For many managers, it's not all their fault. This is what they have been taught: Focus on the weaknesses and an employee will get better.

Well, they've been taught wrong.

Why would this strategy succeed at work and fail miserably at home? It won't. We resent unbalanced feedback, and we feel shortchanged, and unappreciated when our managers, or loved ones put the spotlight only on our faults.

This is a serious issue in business. Do you know why most employees leave companies? If you answered money, try again. Money consistently comes in third place or lower. Research shows that the number one answer most often given is, "I left because of my boss."

Don Clifton, former CEO of the Gallup Organization, and Jim Harter, Gallup's Chief Scientist, discovered in their research that

“the greatest gains in human development are based on investment in what people do best.”

Martin Seligman, co-founder of Positive Psychology, has found through his research that people who engage their strengths are not only more successful, they are happier.

Consider the Miami Heat, the new champions of the NBA. Shaquille O'Neill is one of the worst free-throw shooters in the history of the NBA, yet he led the Heat to their first championship ever. Did Miami win by O'Neill increasing his free-throw shooting percentage by just under 1% (he went from 46.1% to 46.9%), or did they do it by leveraging his talent and letting other players, like Dwayne Wade, bring out their best game?

We know the answers.

Success comes when people do what they do best.

If you don't get this, you'll be the reason your employees leave your company. You'll be the reason your children don't want to be around you. Focusing only on weaknesses leads to bad results.

So what can you do right now if you're a manager or a parent? Start by looking for what your employees, or your children, do well. What do they love to do? When do they succeed? What strengths do they use most? Then give them more opportunities to use these strengths. Look for ways they can apply them. Partner them with people who can help them do their best even better, and work around their lesser strengths. And don't forget to tell them, "I know what you do around here and I appreciate it."

***Imagine what your company
would be like, and what it would
be like at home if everyone
focused first on what's good.***



David J. Pollay is the founder of the Momentum Project, an organization whose mission is to help leaders and their organizations build and sustain powerful momentum in order to achieve their goals. The promise of The Momentum Project is to enable leaders to mobilize their teams to reach levels of performance never before achieved. The Momentum Project fulfills this promise by teaching leaders how to put into practice the principles of Strengths-Based Positive Psychology Leadership Development™.

Mr. Pollay has led, spoken to and trained thousands of people in his career, and has personally managed hundreds. His roles have ranged from chief executive officer to sports-team captain. He is best known for his focus on developing and utilizing the best talents and strengths of his employees and those in his client organizations.

Mr. Pollay is launching the Young International Leaders Organization (YILO) in Applied Positive Psychology in 2006. YILO is dedicated to bringing the cutting-edge research of Positive Psychology to young leaders worldwide. YILO's membership will include leaders from every

country around the globe. YILO's vision is to help Young Leaders shape a world in which strengths are valued and applied, and lesser strengths are overcome through partnership. Martin Seligman Ph.D, Fox Leadership Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, former president of the American Psychological Association, and co-founder of Positive Psychology; and Christopher Peterson, Ph.D, world-renown Strengths Researcher, author, and professor at the University of Michigan; and Karen Reivich Ph.D, acclaimed Resilience Researcher, author, and teacher at the University of Pennsylvania, are three outstanding YILO advisors.

Prior to founding the Momentum Project and his work with YILO, Mr. Pollay was the director of Learning and Development at Yahoo! Inc. in Sunnyvale, California. He introduced and led Yahoo!'s first management development program, working with the president and chief financial officer. He was well known for helping leaders and managers increase their performance through focusing and developing their employees' talents. David's team, known as the Yahoo! Talent Channel, was responsible for providing training and new-hire orientation to employees worldwide.

Mr. Pollay joined Yahoo! in May, 1998 to initiate and develop Yahoo!'s Customer Care organization. David was successful as an early advocate for internet companies to provide outstanding service to their customers. Reporting to the president, he rapidly built a team of more than 130 associates worldwide, with an infrastructure capable of supporting customer service via email and telephone in more than 10 languages. His team responded to nearly one million email and phone calls per month. Known company-wide for developing talent, David helped promote forty of his Customer care associates into roles in marketing, sales, legal, and operations.

Prior to Yahoo!, David directed the Atlanta-based customer service center for Global Payment Systems, a subsidiary of National Data Corporation in Atlanta. He served in leadership roles at MasterCard International in New York, including director of planning and administration for MasterCard's Automated Point of Sale Program (MAPP), the most profitable division of MasterCard. David was also president and chief executive officer of AIESEC in the United States, the largest student-run business exchange program and management development organization in the world. He was recently inducted into the AIESEC International Alumni Hall of Fame

at a ceremony in Agra, India. Mr. Pollay was also honored with his selection to chair the ten-day AIESEC Annual International Congress, an event held this year in Warsaw, Poland, and attended by 800 leaders from more than 100 countries.

David is a graduate of Yale University with a B.A. in Economics. He is currently pursuing his Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) at the University of Pennsylvania, the only post-graduate program of its kind in the world. He was recently chosen to serve as the first president of the MAPP alumni association. David directs the Momentum Leadership Program at the Village Academy, an inner-city elementary school in Delray Beach, Florida. The program teaches the principles of Positive Psychology Leadership Development to emerging leaders in the 6th and 7th grades.

Mr. Pollay is a weekly columnist with The Boca Raton News, and a monthly columnist with the Boomer Times & Senior Life. He resides in Florida with his wife Dawn and their two young daughters, Eliana and Ariela. Email David your comments and stories at David@TheMomentumProject.com or call 561.265.1165