

Association of Leadership Educators
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Practice Presentation Proposal

1. Presenter Information:

Carol A. McBryde
Coordinator, Leadership and Service Center
Texas A&M University
142 Koldus, MS 1236
College Station, TX 77843
979-458-3518
mcbryde@tamu.edu

Sarah Edwards
Advisor, Leadership and Service Center
Texas A&M University
142 Koldus, MS 1236
College Station, TX 77843
979-862-2514
sedwards@stuact.tamu.edu

2. Title of Presentation:

Using Gallup's StrengthsQuest to Teach Leadership

3. Presentation Track:

Practice

4. Description:

Institutions of higher education across the country are now using the StrengthsQuest program from the Gallup Organization to help students understand themselves better, make good career choices, prepare for job interviews, and develop teamwork skills. This session will describe a workshop created to use the self-awareness generated through the use of StrengthsQuest to help students develop their leadership ability using Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership.

5. Biographical Profile:

Carol McBryde is the Coordinator of the Leadership and Service Center in the Department of Student Activities at Texas A&M University. She works with the StrengthsQuest program and advises the Parents' Weekend Committee, as well as supervises the staff in the LSC. Carol recently completed her Ph.D. in Leadership Education from Oklahoma State University. Carol is passionate about helping students learn more about themselves and about leadership as theory and practice. She holds a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University and a B.S. in Agricultural Development from Texas A&M University.

Sarah Edwards is an advisor of the Leadership and Service Center in the Department of Student Activities at Texas A&M University. She works with the LeaderShape Institute, StrengthsQuest and Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People for College Students, and advises the Aggie Recruitment Committee, Alternative Spring Break, and the Gilbert Leadership Conference. She completed her M.E. in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education from Texas A&M University in 2007, and holds a B.S. in History, Technology, and Society from Georgia Institute of Technology.

Using Gallup's StrengthsQuest to Teach Leadership
Carol A. McBryde and Sarah Edwards
Texas A&M University

Introduction

Institutions of higher education across the country are now using the StrengthsQuest program from the Gallup Organization to help students understand themselves better, make good career choices, prepare for job interviews, and develop teamwork skills. At Texas A&M, the StrengthQuest inventory has been taken by over 6,000 students through participation in student organizations and academic courses that choose to use the inventory and the accompanying workshop. In an effort to take this new self-awareness to the next level, staff developed a program entitled Leading With Your Strengths. This four-hour workshop is designed to provide students with an opportunity for self-exploration through the StrengthQuest inventory and the Leadership Practices Inventory, and to help students find the connection between these two concepts and use their new self-knowledge to impact their practice as leaders. Specifically, the learning outcomes for this workshop include:

- Students will be able to describe their five signature themes (from StrengthsQuest) and provide examples of how these themes impact behavior
- Students will be able to define leadership and identify five exemplary practices of leadership (as described by Kouzes and Posner)
- Students will be able to articulate the application of their individual strengths to these practices of leadership.

Background

This workshop is grounded in two pieces of research, both strongly tied to the positive psychology movement. First, the workshop uses the StrengthsQuest inventory developed by the Gallup organization (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006). This instrument and the accompanying materials are based on a 30-year research project of the "best of the best" from a variety of fields. The instrument has a high reliability among college students as well as the general population (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006), and provides an excellent tool for helping students begin to view their life from the perspective of building on what they are good at rather than fixing their weaknesses.

The second major framework for this workshop is Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leaders from their book *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This study provides a framework for describing leadership, as well as for helping students begin to understand how to develop as leaders. The student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory provides a tool for students to self-assess their current leadership ability, and begin to think about how to develop this ability.

Description of the Practice

Each fall and spring the Leading with Your Strengths workshop is offered to up to 25 students. Students are asked to sign up in advance, and take the StrengthQuest inventory and the Leadership Practices Inventory prior to the start of the workshop. The workshop is marketed campus-wide, so the group of students who take the workshop ends up being quite diverse. Typically there are a number of student leaders in the room, some of whom have taken Strengths

in the past but are interested in deepening their knowledge. Often there are also several graduate students in the room who are interested in learning about leadership and how this knowledge will help them when they move into the business world. The workshop is a mixture of lecture, discussion, small group work, and reflection. Following is an outline of the workshop:

I. Introduction to Workshop

- a. Introduce presenters
- b. Go over learning objectives

Students will be able to:

 - Describe their five signature themes and provide examples of how these themes impact behavior
 - Define leadership and identify five exemplary practices of leadership
 - Articulate the application of their individual strengths to these practices of leadership
- c. Ice-breaker

II. Understanding Your Strengths

- a. Activity: Writing Challenge

Students write their name 5 times first with dominant hand, then with non-dominant hand. Process by having the group describe what it felt like to write with each hand. This is the difference between operating from your strengths and operating from your weaknesses.
- b. Why Focus on Strengths?

*Unhappiness on the job affects one-fourth of the American Workforce
One-third of Americans say, "I hate my job."
Two-thirds of your fellow citizens labor in the wrong career
Others find employment success, but not satisfaction
US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998
Miller, D., 48 Hours to the Work You Love*
- c. The Organizational Focus

Share statistics on engagement level of employees based on focus by manager: ignored by manager, manager focuses on weaknesses, manager focuses on strengths.
- d. Strengths Assumption

Share example of speed reading training study with much greater improvement from participants who were already above average readers.
- e. Strengths Building: The Right Assumptions
 - *Some behaviors can be learned. Many are nearly impossible to learn. There is a difference between talent, skills, and knowledge.*
 - *The best in a role deliver the same outcomes, but use different behaviors.*
 - *Weakness fixing prevents failure. Strengths building leads to success.*
- f. Research and Background of StrengthsQuest
 - *Gallup – not just polling, Education Division*
 - *Instrument to identify strengths has been developed, 180 pairings, 34 themes measured, top 5 provided (explain why only top 5).*
 - *Interviewed over 2 million people over 3 decades in 30 different cultures, the best of the best in a myriad of fields*
 - *Identified over 420 different strengths*
 - *Measured which strengths were the strongest and placed them in groupings of 34 signature themes; 33,700,000 permutations of 34 (top 5)*
 - *At this time, over one million people have completed strengthsfinder*
 - *Where else Strengths is being used*
 1. *Best Buy*
 2. *Toyota*
 3. *The majority of Big 12 Institutions are using in some form or fashion*
 4. *All incoming freshmen in the Business School*

g. Definitions

Talent: A naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied. A talent is a potential strength.

Knowledge: What you are aware of. It may be purely factual knowledge. Or, it may be how you make sense of what you know – your understanding. (Declarative, Situational, Reflective)

Skills: The capacity to perform the fundamental steps of an activity. Skills deal with the “how-to” areas of your job. Once you have acquired the skill for something, you know how to do it. (procedural)

Strength: The ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. To build your strengths, identify your talents, and add knowledge and skills.

Strength = Talent (Knowledge + Skills)

h. Strengths Development Model

Knowledge of Self

Knowledge of Others

Management & Leadership of Self

Management & Leadership of Others

i. 7 Demands of Leadership

(from Gallup study of great leaders and what separates them from the rest)

- *Visioning*
- *Maximizing Values*
- *Challenging Experience*
- *Mentoring*
- *Building a Constituency*
- *Making Sense of Experience*
- *Knowing Self*

j. Activity: My Strengths and How I Use Them

Students complete a worksheet defining each of their five strengths and writing how they think this strength helps them, and an example of when they have seen this strength in their life.

After students finish the reflection, lead a group discussion sharing some of the strengths and how they saw them in their life. This activity is focused on knowledge of self.

k. Activity: Scavenger Hunt

It is also important to understand others. During this activity, find 10 people who have one signature theme that is NOT among your top 5 themes. Record each person’s name, theme name, and one benefit of that theme.

l. Activity: Pairs

In addition to understanding different strengths, it is helpful to understand how the same strength works differently for different people. For this activity, please pair up with someone who has one of the same strengths as you. Identify and discuss differences in how this strength plays itself out in your life and your partner’s life. What are the differences? What are the similarities? Once the group has had a chance to do this, give them the opportunity to share examples of what they discussed.

II. BREAK – 20 minutes

During the break, participants should grab some pizza and spend some time writing their Personal Best Leadership Experience. Instructions are to think about a time when you have been at your personal best as a leader. Describe the situation, and how you felt during it. How did others perceive you in the experience? Identify five to seven key practices that made a difference in that experience.

III. Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders

a. Defining Leadership

Students share their personal definitions of leadership, followed by sharing Kouzes and Posner’s definition: The art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.”

b. Introduction to the Five Practices

Describe the research study (sought examples of personal best leadership experiences of more than 10,000 interviewees), talk about credibility, this is where the five practices come from.

c. **Model the Way**

Describe the practice, and the two commitments:

- *Find your voice by clarifying your personal values.*
- *Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.*

After talking about the practice, ask participants to share what they think are applicable strengths and why.

d. **Inspire a Shared Vision**

Describe the practice, and the two commitments:

- *Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.*
- *Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.*

After talking about the practice, ask participants to share what they think are applicable strengths and why.

e. **Challenge the Process**

Describe the practice, and the two commitments:

- *Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.*
- *Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.*

After talking about the practice, ask participants to share what they think are applicable strengths and why.

f. **Enable Others to Act**

Describe the practice, and the two commitments:

- *Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.*
- *Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion.*

After talking about the practice, ask participants to share what they think are applicable strengths and why.

g. **Encourage the Heart**

Describe the practice, and the two commitments:

- *Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.*
- *Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.*

After talking about the practice, ask participants to share what they think are applicable strengths and why.

h. **Student Leadership Practices Inventory**

Describe the SLPI

Hand back scored LPis

Talk a little bit about what the scores mean

Did it turn out the way you thought it would?

i. **Activity: Personal Best**

Discuss the Personal Best stories students wrote during the break. Specifically:

- *Where do you see the 5 practices in your story?*
- *How does this compare to your results on the LPI?*
- *Where do you see your Strengths in the story?*
- *How does this application give you insight into why it's your "personal best"?*

j. **Activity: Putting it All Together**

Students are asked to complete the reflection activity Putting It All Together. They write their scores on the five practices and their strengths at the top of the page, then answer the following questions:

- *Which of the leadership practices and behaviors are you most comfortable with? Why? How does this relate to your strengths?*
- *What strength are you most comfortable and competent in? How does this relate to your scores on the leadership practices?*
- *What Strength are you most interested in developing?*
- *What Leadership Practice are you most interested in improving?*

IV. **Specific Applications**

a. **The Seven Demands of Leadership revisited**

Earlier today we talked about the seven demands of leadership. Which one do you think we've been working on the most today? (knowing self). Also touched on a couple of others (making sense of experience in particular)

Today we are also going to focus on another one of the seven demands: (ex: Visioning)

b. Visioning lecture, discussion, and activities

Each time we do the workshop we focus on another one of the demands, and do about 30 minutes focusing on that particular aspect of leadership.

c. Activity: Action Planning

At the end of the workshop students have the opportunity to complete the Action Planning

Worksheet and discuss it:

- *Write a specific goal for one thing you would like to be better able to do. Base it off of the Leadership Practice and Strength that you are most interested in developing.*
- *What specific actions will you take to accomplish this goal?*
- *What tools or resources do you need to be able to accomplish this goal?*
- *What is the first action you will take? Who will be involved? When will you begin?*
- *"I will know I have improved in this leadership skill when . . ."*
- *Who will help hold you accountable? Write their name and contact info here:*

Results to Date

The Leading with Your Strengths workshop has been offered at least once a year for the last three years. Originally the workshop was a seven-hour workshop, spread out over two days, with a strong emphasis on the Strengths portion of the content. Based on feedback from students the workshop has morphed into a shorter, more concentrated time block, and the content has been adjusted to focus more on how to utilize what you know about your Strengths to develop yourself as a leader. Student feedback from the workshop has been very positive. Students tend to agree that the workshop was helpful, and that they will use what they learned. Some comments from recent workshops have included:

“Learned that my belief, connectedness and input were strengths, I thought they were habits, will be more aware of how I can relate to others”

“I have a potential of being a leader-my general idea about myself being a leader was guided in the right direction”

“I learned my strengths and how I can apply them to leadership.”

“Build on strengths to cover weaknesses and do things I didn't think I was good at or could do.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

For leadership educators who want to help students develop their knowledge of self from a positive perspective, StrengthsQuest is an invaluable tool. It provides an excellent opportunity for students to really begin to understand their talents, and to learn what this can look like in the real world. In addition, Gallup provides some excellent educational tools for higher education that make implementing this on your campus pretty straightforward. These educational materials focus not only on understanding the results of the instrument, but on understanding the philosophy behind it – that is, build your life around your strengths, not your weaknesses. This

message is an important one for future leaders, and this tool helps bring it home in a way that college students often find timely and applicable.

References

- Clifton, D. O., Anderson, E. C., & Schreiner, L. A. (2006). *StrengthsQuest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career, and beyond*. New York: Gallup Press.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.