Results That Last

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A Dozen Things You can do after Core Strengths Results through Relationships Training to Sustain and Extend the Learning

Now what? It's the essence of a question the authors of Core Strengths training and our Master Facilitator Team often hear. The questions arise from the realization that no matter how good the Results through Relationships training experience, if there is not additional reinforcement and personal commitment on the part of learners, sustainable change and better performance in high-stakes situations is a hit-or-miss proposition.

Metaphors abound that make this point. Imagine going to the best gym in town, working with a professional, knowledgeable, and engaging personal trainer who puts you through the best workout you've ever experienced. Then, you leave the gym, return to your old habits, and expect your fitness and health to be forever improved. Although we all wish this was the case, it's not. Lasting change requires intentional effort and in most cases, hard work. Fortunately, for relationship skills, it's an enjoyable process that simply requires people to do what they really want to do anyway—build authentic connections with the people that matter most in their lives—and help others do likewise.

So whether you're a Core Strengths facilitator, a L&D executive, a line leader trying to get the most out of your investment in training, or a learner who just experienced Core Strengths training, you'll want to consider these actions so people can get results through their relationships on an ongoing basis.

1. **Execute the Action Plan created in class.** The purpose of the Action Plan every Core Strengths learner completes is two-fold. First, the authors want learners to connect the principles learned in the classroom with a meaningful real-world situation. Adult learning theory teaches us that adults learn best when they consider the topic relevant to their daily lives and the new skills acquired useful in solving an immediate problem or creating results that will lead to some sort of tangible benefit. We also want to provide the opportunity for a first-hand, proof-of-concept experience that leads people to say, "Wow! This stuff really works."

   One of the highlights of Core Strengths for many facilitators is the moment when learners raise their hands to say that they have chosen strengths from the middle or bottom of their Strengths Portrait to use in their high-stakes situation. This is a real "a-ha" moment for most learners when they recognize that the usual way they have been interacting with a key stakeholder probably isn't the best approach in the current situation. This new awareness and the probability of creating better results is the direct outflow of Core Strengths training—and a moment that every facilitator should celebrate.

2. **Frame coaching conversations with Core Strengths.** Managers can use a Core Strengths frame of reference and the format of the Action Planner when coaching team members that have completed Core Strengths training. Now, when looking forward toward new projects or conducting a retrospective review of a situation that could have gone better, the manager can become a partner in the learning process.

   Imagine the energy that could come from jointly planning an upcoming sales presentation or change initiative to assess the motives and values of key stakeholders, whether or not they may be in conflict, and how this should affect the strengths your team choose to advance your cause. Ultimately, the goal is to communicate in the right style based on the needs of the audience, so the manager can certainly be a guide and sounding board as members of the team prepare.

3. **Develop the habit of referencing the SDI Quick Guide each day.** The SDI Quick Guide is a practical, easy-to-use resource that, in 30-seconds or less, can positively impact your results with people. We recommend that every Core Strengths graduate keep their SDI Quick Guide on their desk and within easy reach.

   Before making that telephone call or hitting send on an email, recognize the value taking just a few moments to pause and consider people on the receiving end. It could cause you to change your tone, the words you use, or the order in which you present your ideas. Most importantly, you will quickly recognize that one size doesn't fit all and that your results will improve when you begin tailoring your approach to fit the people with whom you are communicating. That's what it means to communicate in the right style.

   Most people have dozens of interactions with colleagues and clients on any given day. What if, as a Core Strengths graduate, you committed to using the SDI Quick Guide at least five times per day for two weeks? It would take less than 5 minutes each day and the results you would see in terms of better interactions and improved relationships would be almost immediate. It might be easiest to begin with people who were in the same Core Strengths workshop—ideally colleagues from the same team, but the tips for identifying each MVS type make the SDI Quick Guide a valuable tool to use with every interaction.

4. **Integrate Core Strengths language into daily conversations.** Core Strengths provides a simple and memorable language to use when discussing what people want from their relationships when things are going well (People, Performance, and Process) and when there is conflict (Accommodate, Assert, and Analyze). This common language is useful in collaborating with a peer about how to get off on the right foot with a new client or in meetings when a leader wants to invite alternative perspectives or opposing views (i.e., "I would love to hear a Blue perspective on this issue…"). Ultimately, these non-judgmental terms make it easier to discuss how people can work better together by honoring what's most important to all parties involved.

5. **Display Core Strengths monuments that illustrate each person's MVS, Conflict Sequence, and top strengths.** Core Strengths training teaches that it is critical to know your audience in order to make authentic connections and work better together. There are times when we are forced to make an educated guess about the MVS of a stakeholder, but if it's not necessary, why leave it to chance?

   Everyone who completes Core Strengths training receives a personalized monument identifying their MVS, Conflict Sequence, and top strengths—ready for framing, and front-and-center positioning in the workspace. These vivid, one-page monuments can also incorporate the Core Strengths graduate's photograph and be printed from LearnerSource, so they are always readily available.

6. **Use MVS and Conflict Sequence in email signatures and social media profiles.** Another easy way to proclaim one's MVS color and primary concern for People, Performance, or Process (or some combination thereof) is by putting this information in your email signature and social media profiles. Doing so makes it incredibly easy for others to respond to your messages in ways that honor your motives and the way you like to interact with people.

   For example, if I know my colleague's MVS is Red, I might be brief and to the point in my response to a question. If my colleague's MVS is Green, I might attach some data that she can carefully review at her own pace. If my colleague's MVS is Blue, I might use a couple of lines at the outset of my message to inquire about his weekend or his kid's game before getting down to business. Here's another place where the SDI Quick Guide can come in handy. People will also respond to you in ways that are most appealing and before long, you've create an organization where effective interactions are the norm.

7. **Display the composite SDI Triangle of the team in prominent locations.** Most teams spend considerable time "Forming, Storming, and Norming" in Tuckman's model of team development. Core Strengths training, coupled with ongoing consideration of each team member's MVS and Conflict Sequence, can greatly reduce the time to the "Performing" phase of team life. One new district sales manager in a large pharmaceutical company recently told me that he estimated that knowing the MVS and Conflict Sequence of each of his sales representatives accelerated his onboarding by months and improved collaboration among team members almost immediately. The key is know how best to take advantage of these insights.

   One of the great benefits of the SDI is that it can vividly display the personalities and relationships of people on a team on one, easy-to-read graphic. The team's composite Triangle should be distributed to everyone on the team and if possible, blown up and prominently displayed in common areas like conference and break rooms. By understanding the interpersonal dynamics of a team and what gives everyone wants from their relationships, everyone can begin to proactively manage their communication and anticipate what may happen when there is conflict.

   Facilitators can easily create composite Triangles using the functionality of FaciltatorSource or Core Strengths Platform (CSP), save the files as a pdf, and printing. With the right printer or a quick trip to a local print shop, poster size printouts are easily made as well.

   Consider the power of a manager having his or her team's SDI and Conflict Sequence results readily available. The information would most certainly affect the way the manager coaches, provides feedback, and introduces new initiatives. Equally important is how team members interact with the leader and each other. Creating a Team Triangle is an incredibly valuable tool for these purposes—and it's easy to do.

8. **Create composite SDI Triangles for new project teams or task forces working on special projects.** As mentioned in the item above, creating a team Triangle is a simple and easy process using FaciltiatorSource or the CSP. This process can also be applied for teams specially formed to take on a project or new initiative. Often these teams are made up of experts from various parts of the organization—sometimes, different parts of the world—and they often don't know each other. Distributing

a SDI composite Triangle and investing some time talking about how the members of the team can best work together and take ownership of their new project using the language of Core Strengths as a guide should be on the agenda of every project kick-off meeting.

9. **Conduct team brainstorming activities using MVS filters.** I have heard several stories about teams separating into MVS groups to provide different perspectives on business challenges in brainstorming sessions. For example, the HR team might be wrestling with how to identify and implement a new package of employee benefits. Knowing this is a high-stakes situation with the potential for vastly different points of view, the leader might form the team into MVS groups and invite them to identify "key considerations" from each group's perspective. This kind of activity almost always reveals issues that the leader had not previously considered.

10. **Anticipate potential conflict triggers in yourself and others.** Conflict is costly, and the impact can be felt personally through damaged relationships and in the organization's bottom line. Spend some time in meetings and one-on-one sessions discussing what things might trigger conflict long before the conflict occurs. Encourage people to be specific and use common workplace examples as a way of identifying "things to avoid" when working with them.

   When conflict occurs, use the language of Core Strengths—especially Overdone Strengths—to identify exactly what triggered the conflict and how the people involved might find a path back to feeling good again. These conversations can be delicate, but if the people involved are courageous enough to candidly and respectfully engage one another, most conflicts can be resolved quickly and create an opportunity for additional learning.

   Some high-performing teams go so far as to create a conflict charter. A conflict charter is essentially an agreement addressing how the team will act when one or more of its members experiences conflict. These agreements often encourage team members to let others in the group know when they enter Stage 1 Conflict with a simple statement like, "Hey, guys, I'm not feeling comfortable with the direction we're going here. Let me tell you why…" This openness will cause the group to slow down, consider others' points-of-view and perhaps move toward a different or better decision. Another point in the charter might be, "I commit to going directly to the person with whom I am in conflict to have a private conversation rather than discussing the matter with others who are not directly involved." There are myriad ideas based on the needs of the group, but having the conversation and creating a conflict charter is an ideal starting point.

11. **Revisit and spend additional time in each of the Core Strengths activities to provide opportunities for deeper discussion and practice.** There are several major activities in the Core Strengths (Assessing Motivational Value Systems, Stage 1 Conflict Groups, How I See It, Strength Management, and Communication Challenge). All of these activities can be worked through again exactly as written with more time given to discussion or the facilitator could create different prompt questions that would raise new areas of discussion. There are also instructional icons throughout the Facilitator Manual that note how an activity can be altered or extended if more time is available.

12. **Create learning communities through opportunities for review, discussion, and sharing best practices.** Adult learning theory teaches us that adults learn best in community, so it often falls to the facilitator or another leader in the organization to drive that sense of community following the initial learning event. At some point, however, the learning community should be self-sustaining as members drive the agenda and take care of the logistics, but it is often necessary for someone to get things started.

   Learning communities can form and be sustained in a variety of ways. One tried-and-true version is the "lunch and learn" where volunteers bring a "brown bag" lunch to a specified location to discuss how they're applying what they learned. If funding is available, the organization might provide free sandwiches or pizza to entice learners back to share best practices or present a case study. Either way, getting people together to discuss their real-world experiences is always valuable.

For organizations with remote workers, technology can be leveraged to create this sense of community. Whether it is a technology-based platform for asynchronous dialogue or old-fashioned teleconferences, there are many viable approaches to connecting people in convenient, unobtrusive ways.

While the word community implies large groups, some of the best learning takes place one-on-one. Peer coaching is a model that emphasizes this type of direct dialogue. Learners are usually paired up during the initial workshop and then encouraged to have informal conversations on a regular basis to encourage and coach one another as they seek to apply what they learned and further refine their skills. These arrangements usually work best when the partners are peers, yet come from different point on the SDI Triangle. On occasion, strong, long-lasting professional relationships are formed from these learning partnerships.

In my experience, the best communities take a positive and encouraging tone, and are solution oriented. At the outset, it's best to establish clear ground rules, follow an agenda, and invited people to prepare something in advance of each session. As a member of the community, everyone should be prepared to share something.

The Best News

While all of of these ideas for extending and sustaining the learning are extremely valuable, they require little or no additional financial investment. Unless you want to use additional Action Plans, all of the ideas offered here can be implemented using materials that are already available to you.

I realize that this is simply a starting point in terms of all of the creative ways in which people can keep what they learned in Core Strengths alive and work better with others on an ongoing basis. I would sincerely appreciate hearing your ideas and success stories, so please send them to me at mike@corestrengths.com. I will look for opportunities to share them in future blogs or pass them along to our Facilitator Community so we all continue learning together.

About the Author

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