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StandOut 2.0

ASSESS YOUR STRENGTHS.
FIND YOUR EDGE.
WIN AT WORK..

**MARCUS
BUCKINGHAM**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW PRESS

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PREFACE

Birthday Wishes—Toward a Stronger Future

It's Sunday, a rainy Sunday in Los Angeles, and, as it happens, my birthday—a good day to stop and look back. Fifteen years ago, in *First, Break All the Rules*, my colleagues at Gallup and I presented the world with a deceptively simple discovery—that although the world's best managers have different styles, personalities, and methods, they all share one insight: to get the most out of people, you must build on their strengths and manage around their weaknesses. This might seem like common sense to you, but it caused quite a stir because, at the time, all management thinking and practice was based on the conviction that, to help people grow, you must first fix them. Pinpoint their weaknesses, label these “areas of development” or “areas of opportunity,” and then work diligently to turn these weaknesses into strengths. In this remedial world, a world in which polls revealed a global fascination with fixing weaknesses, this strengths-based approach was an eye-opening jolt to the conventional wisdom.

Not so anymore. If you walked into the offices of *Harvard Business Review* today and announced that the best managers focus on strengths, the staff would nod politely and say, “Yes, thank you. We know.” In the intervening years, this unconventional truth has become conventional. Positive psychology is now one of the

most fertile and popular fields for academic research, appreciative inquiry has taken hold as a model for strengths-based organizational change, and more than nine million people have taken the StrengthsFinder assessment, introduced in my second book *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. In fact, this truth is now so widely held that one sure-fire way to get people's attention is to rail against it—hence, books such as *Fear Your Strengths* and articles with titles like “When Your Strengths Become Your Weaknesses.”

Yet, look more closely and you discover something rather odd. Although the strengths-based approach to managing people is now conventional wisdom, the forms and systems for people inside organizations—the performance appraisal forms, the training interventions, and succession planning systems—remain stubbornly remedial. When you have your first performance review—and every performance review thereafter—you will still be rated on how you stack up against a preset list of competencies, your gaps will be identified, and you will be told that to secure a bigger bonus and a desirable promotion, you must knuckle down and plug your skill gaps. Management theory and management practice have become separated and are now utterly and unhelpfully out of sync. It's as if we are now all aware that the earth is round, yet our maps and navigation tools persist in representing it as flat.

What to do? This is no idle question, because when it comes to revolutions—and we were certainly trying to start one—the forms and processes always trump the ideas. The forms always win. Change the ideas and keep the forms the same, and you will have changed little. Teach people that to excel they must discover and apply their strengths, but leave in place all the remedial forms and systems, and all you will net is confusion and frustration and an inexorable slide back to the old ways of doing things.

This is where we all are today. The situation is undoubtedly frustrating and unproductive for students, team members, team

leaders, and organizations the world over. To remove these frustrations, increase productivity, and bring actual practice up to date with thinking, my team and I created this new version of StandOut.

First, we've taken the StandOut strengths assessment and dramatically increased its power. When we launched it in 2011, it was an assessment that simply identified your most dominant strengths and then presented them to you in a report. This was useful, though, like all reports, it inevitably wound up hidden in a drawer somewhere, alongside your StrengthsFinder report, Myers-Briggs report, and all the other personality tests you may have taken. Being made aware of your strengths at a point in time is one thing, but if you're not deliberate about keeping your strengths front and center, then people—including you—gradually lose sight of them, leaving you vulnerable to the distractions of weakness-fixing forms and systems.

To make your strengths visible, we designed for you a *StandOut Snapshot* that you can use to present the very best of yourself to your team and your company. Based on your assessment results, the snapshot describes your greatest value to any team and what others need to know to see you at your best. You can customize these insights as you see fit and post any pictures, videos, articles, or quotes that you think will add to people's understanding of you at your best at work. You can export this snapshot to LinkedIn, Facebook, or any other social network, where its unique contribution will always be to present your strengths to the world credibly, precisely, and vividly. Of course, if you happen to lead a team, you can make a team dashboard where each person's snapshot will serve as your cheat sheet to help you know the right moves to make with each team member.

Second, we wanted to give you a way to keep learning. After all, the point of teaching you about your strengths is to help you excel, and excellence, as Aristotle reminds us, is created not by one act but

by what you repeatedly do. So, to guide what you repeatedly do, this new version of StandOut provides you with your own *personal learning channel*. Once you've completed the fifteen-minute online assessment, you will receive not only your report with the ranking of your strengths and action suggestions, but also a weekly tip, insight, technique, or idea, something that will help you know how you can do your best work this week. Faced with a noisy world that is ignorant of you and your strengths, this weekly pulse will help you take a stand for what you bring to your team and your organization and guide you to bring it most intelligently.

Third, we made the StandOut assessment the front door to an online *performance system* that is entirely strengths-based. Think of StandOut as a toolbox, in which each tool is designed to tackle one aspect of performance and engagement.

To help you do more of your best work, you'll find a simple Check-In tool that captures your weekly priorities and tracks how engaged you feel week by week. This Check-In tool comes with coaching advice customized to each person's strengths so that, as a team leader, you can know just what to say or do to keep each person motivated and on track.

Team leaders will also find a simple but powerful employee survey tool that you can use whenever you want to see what your team is thinking and feeling, and a performance tool to evaluate the performance of each team member. Your organization can then aggregate the data from these tools to reveal the real-time performance and engagement of every team.

Each tool can be used separately, of course, but together they comprise an integrated system expressly designed to help you and your team do more of what always happens on the best teams: leverage your strengths and manage around your weaknesses. We hope and believe that this StandOut system can replace the legacy remedial systems and finally allow practice to catch up to thinking.

As you can see, we have joined forces with Harvard Business Review Press. We figured that if we want to change the world, we need the most influential and credible partners possible, and of course, *Harvard Business Review* is the unquestioned authority on how the most effective leaders think and what they do. Together, with you, we can accelerate the speed of change toward a world in which each of us knows how to identify, contribute, and develop the very best of ourselves. That is our wish, for you and your team.

—Marcus

Los Angeles, January 11, 2015