

The Main Idea's PD Suggestions & Discussion Questions for *Fear Your Strengths*

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Below are discussion questions to help you (alone) or a group of school leaders (together) *reflect on* your leadership style(s) and *create an action plan* to become a more effective leader. If you choose to reflect on your own, I recommend taking the time to capture your thoughts and plans in writing.

Chapter 1

- Have you ever worked with a strong and charismatic leader like Richard Spire (competitive, bold, decisive)? Do you identify with Richard Spire's leadership style? What are the benefits and drawbacks of his leadership style?
- Discuss this quotation from Chapter 1 and how it relates to your own work as a school leader: "To the leader whose best tool is a hammer, everything is a nail." (pp.9-10)
- In the chart below, consider the leadership strengths and the resulting problems when those strengths are overused. Add a few other common leadership strengths to this chart. What might be the resulting negative consequences? If you identify with any of the leadership strengths below, do you also display any of the negative traits on the right?

<i>Leadership Strength</i>	<i>Potential Problem When Overused</i>
Strong and forceful	Abusive
Consensus-Seeking	Indecisive
Respectful	Ineffectual niceness
Focuses on quick results	Short-term solutions
Persuasive	Inability to hear countering viewpoints

- Do you surround yourself with other leaders who share similar strengths *or* with people who counterbalance your strengths? For example, the CFO who countered Spire's leadership approach said, "Let's make sure we execute in a measured way so growth won't just be a flash of light and burn out." (p. 11) When leaders value one type of strength they often discredit those who value the opposite strengths. Take a look at your leadership team or the other leaders with whom you work (department chairs, teacher leaders, coaches, etc.) – how many of them share your strengths? How many of them embody opposite strengths? Should you make any changes?

Chapter 2

- This chapter introduces a few pairs of opposing characteristics leaders often display – such as task-oriented vs. people-oriented, forceful vs. enabling, and strategic vs. operational. What other opposing pairs can you think of when you think about leadership traits?
- This chapter introduces Steve Jobs. The authors write that Jobs came to understand that creativity will only count if you get the product out of the door, and his mantra became, "Real artists ship." Discuss this quotation and the changes he made in his leadership.
- Think of a time when you have been overly forceful in your own leadership (taking the lead on something) and another time when you were more enabling (helping others take the lead). Did you display the appropriate amount of each trait or would it have been beneficial to use more of a mixture of the two traits? What about for strategic vs. operational leadership?
- How *versatile* a leader are you? Look at the chart below and note where you fall on the continuum between strategic vs. operational and forceful vs. enabling. Do you find you equally exhibit both sides for any of the pairs? Which skills do you need to crank up and which ones should you tone down? Discuss.

Strategic vs. Operational	Forceful vs. Enabling
Innovation →→→ <i>just right</i> ←←← Order	Takes Charge →→→ <i>just right</i> ←←← Empowers
Growth →→→ <i>just right</i> ←←← Efficiency	Declares →→→ <i>just right</i> ←←← Listens
Direction →→→ <i>just right</i> ←←← Execution	Pushes →→→ <i>just right</i> ←←← Supports

- The idea of a *versatile* leader is not just that you have a toolbox with a wide range of skills. Rather, it means knowing when to adapt and combine those skills in a variety of combinations that are specific to the situation at hand. The goal is to learn to moderate your approach; including knowing when to crank up a skill to its maximum level when needed. As the authors write, "You can't just be one thing. You have to be big-picture and little-picture. You have to be big power tool and sometimes a small screwdriver. You have to be able to zoom in and zoom out. And you can't just use one extreme quality to solve the problem." (p.33) Discuss the concept of *versatile leadership*.
- Consider developing a survey – you can use Survey Monkey -- and have coworkers rate you on the enabling-forceful and operational-strategic continua. You can base the survey on the chart of leadership traits above and these ideas from the authors as well: http://www.metaskills.com/wp-content/uploads/PDF/LVI2.1_PSample.pdf

Chapter 3

- This chapter introduces three leadership mindset traps (more is better, skewed mental model, faulty gauge). Do you fall into any of these traps? If so, share an example of a specific time when you or a leader you know has fallen into one of these traps.
- The authors write that, “Cherishing one truth can blind the leader to the opposing truth.” (p.47) Awareness of the *opposite side* of our strongest traits is the first step toward doing something about it. In the chart below, list your strongest traits on the left and see if you can come up with their opposite on the right. For example, the book introduces a leader who believed so strongly in being open that he inappropriately *overshared* information at times. When asked, he couldn’t think of the opposite of oversharing (discretion). Can you think of the opposite of some of your leadership strengths? A few examples are below:

Strong leadership trait	Its opposite (in positive terms)
1. Communicates openly	1. Is discreet
2. Is persuasive	2. Listens carefully to the ideas of others
3.	3.
4.	4.

Chapters 4 & 5

Now that you have an understanding of the dangers of lopsided leadership, this section focuses on how to become a more versatile and balanced leader. Below are a few suggestions for creating action plans or taking next steps – choose whatever path works for you.

- In Chapter 4, the authors argue that you must work on your outer *and* inner game at the same time. Below are several examples of two-pronged action plans that come from the book. Read through these, then create your own two-pronged goals. If you don’t know where to start, look back at the ratings you gave yourself, or the ratings colleagues gave you, in the Chapter 2 exercise above.

<i>Behavior Change</i>	<i>Mindset Change</i>
Stop overwhelming people.	I don’t have to give up my fast-ball, I just don’t need to throw it all the time.
Dial back on tactical detail.	I may not be the smartest person in the room, but I’m smart enough to do my job.
Be good to people <i>and</i> hold them to high standards.	Holding people accountable is not incompatible with treating them well.

Your turn:

<i>Behavior Change</i>	<i>Mindset Change</i>

- Below are some steps you can take to create an action plan to improve your leadership behavior *and* mindset:

ACTION PLAN TO BECOME A MORE VERSATILE LEADER
<p>Step 1: Awareness – To become aware of whether you take your strengths too far, do two things:</p> <p>A. <i>Ask</i> -- Ask others in person or through surveys – “Are there any of my strengths that I take too far?” Use the chart on p. 8 to help. YOUR PLAN TO ASK:</p> <p>B. <i>Reflect</i> -- Ask yourself if you take any of your strengths too far. Then examine your mindset – through journaling or conversations – by asking yourself, “Where do my ideas about leadership come from?” Are you hesitant to be forceful because of a bullying older brother? Do you demand to know all of the details because of a fear of not being in the know? YOUR PLAN TO REFLECT:</p>
<p>Step 2: Alternative Reaction – To prevent your strengths from going too far in the moment, plan some alternative reactions <u>in advance</u>. For example, instead of interrupting someone, plan to – write what you were going to say anyway, take a few breaths, or repeat a directive in your head, “Let the other person finish.” YOUR ALTERNATIVE REACTION PLAN:</p>
<p>Step 3: Routine or Counterbalance – Another way to prevent your strengths from going too far is to put a routine or counterbalance into place. For example, create a schedule of biweekly meetings with teacher leaders at your school if you normally give too much autonomy. Have your administrative assistant force you to leave the school at 5:30 twice a week if you are a workaholic. Put someone on your leadership team who has a different leadership style and tell that person that you welcome opposing viewpoints at meetings. Find a meditation podcast and schedule weekly meditation sessions if you are overintense. YOUR PLAN TO PUT A ROUTINE OR COUNTERBALANCE IN PLACE:</p>
<p>Step 4: Reflect and Adjust After putting some of these steps in place and trying alternative approaches, go back to the beginning and again, reflect on your own and/or by soliciting feedback from others – Have you successfully moderated your strengths and dialed up any weaknesses?</p>