

The Deficit Delusion

by Michael Ruhl

Author Tom Rath in *Strengthfinder 2.0* refers to a "misguided maxim" which deceives people and deludes organizations: "You can be anything you want to be, if you just try hard enough." This humanistic delusion leads people to conclude that the pathway to "success" is by overcoming deficits. Our culture is obsessed with books, motion pictures, and folklore, which are packed with narratives of the "underdog" who conquers unbelievable odds and emerges in triumph. Even now a host of football fans are waiting for an "athletic underdog" to rise up by its own cleat-straps and topple the New England Patriots.

Can you think of a single culture that does not embrace the "deficit delusion"? One study in the United States revealed that 77% of American parents think that a student's lowest grades deserve the most time and attention. How ironic that many parents celebrate excellence in their children with apathy, but instead concentrate passionately on wanting to "fix" their children's shortcomings and weaknesses. Rath cites the example of the legendary Michael Jordan, who incarnated the giftedness of raw talent on the basketball court, but was not able to become the incarnated champion of baseball or golf. The tasks of baseball and golf were not in tight alignment with his (God-given) strengths. All too often, that humanistic assumption (You can be anything you want to be, if you just try hard enough) leads to the "deficit delusion".

So what does this have to do with *Missio Dei* --the great gospel imperative of Jesus to His people and His church to *go and make disciples of all the nations (people groups)*?

The Holy Spirit imparts to Christians and to congregations through the Word the burning missionary burden to reach unconverted people with the good news of salvation by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ. And the best stewardship of mission is to express and develop that mission on a local level by aligning our God-given gifts and strengths with the missionary purpose of God in the world. Avoid the trap of assuming that, "until we focus and fix our weaknesses", we are unable to have missionary impact. That is simply yielding to the "deficit delusion". Instead, build mission momentum and impact by aligning and deploying personal, corporate, and God-given strengths (spiritual gifts, ministry competencies, unique talents) to make Gospel connections with those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Let the missionary people of God declare: *We **cannot** be anything that we want to be -- but we **can** be a lot more of who our God has gifted us to be!*

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the strengths of your congregation? What do the members have fun doing?
2. What one ministry could your congregation add to leverage its strengths for effective outreach?
3. What are your gifts and strengths?
4. How are you using your gifts and strengths in your church?
5. What support/encouragement do you need to more fully use your gifts and strengths at church? How will you get it?

Links - LCMS Short Term Missions

[Strength Finder 2.0](#) by Tom Rath

Asks the question, "What makes you stand out?" [From the website:] In StrengthsFinder 2.0, Gallup unveils the new and improved version of its popular assessment, language of 34 themes, and much more. Loaded with hundreds of strategies for applying your strengths, this new online program will change the way you look at yourself - and the world around you - forever. [Website]

[Finding Your Spiritual Gifts Self-Assessment](#)

An online spiritual gifts assesment on the ELCA website. It provides immediate results that you may download or print. [Website]

[Twelve Keys to an Effective Church, The Planning Workbook](#) by Kennon L. Callahan [Book]

Callahan takes a positive approach the church and its ministries. He encourages churches to identify what they do well and discern how they can leverage their strength to reach their community with the gospel. There is also a [study guide](#) available to help congregations identify strengths and develop a strategy to leverage them.

[Small, Strong Congregations: Creating Strengths and Health for Your Congregation](#) by Kennon L. Callahan [Book]

Callahan gives hope to small congregation showing them how to apply the Twelve Keys to an Effective Church to strengthen their churches.