

# MANAGING CHANGE WITH A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH



Headquartered in Piqua, Ohio, Trupointe Cooperative, Inc. has about 500 employees and represents more than 4,300 farmers as an agricultural and energy cooperative. The company offers everything from fertilizer and seed treatments to propane, feed, and lawn, garden, and pet supply items at its 45 locations in Ohio and Indiana.

## CHALLENGE

Two large agricultural cooperatives with distinct leadership styles and cultures decided to merge to become Trupointe Cooperative. The merger brought with it the opportunity to expand the new cooperative's geographic footprint and portfolio services in an effort to better serve its customers. Because both cooperatives had long traditions of success dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, the challenge for the leadership team was to help the two companies grow together to become one unified organization. Trupointe's new CEO, Larry Hammond, a long-time Clifton StrengthsFinder advocate, wanted to unite employees from both companies by building a strengths-based culture within the new organization. However, it would take time and buy-in from both sides to succeed in this endeavor.

## APPROACH

Before taking the helm at Trupointe, Hammond served as CEO of one of the companies involved in the merger. Having worked with Gallup on strengths since the 1980s, Hammond had a deep understanding of the concept and had successfully implemented strengths-based solutions in the past to improve individual and organizational performance. With executive sponsorship from Trupointe's CEO and the chief human resources officer, the organization committed to aligning all employees with a strengths-based strategy, providing a common language they could use to identify, appreciate and rely on one another's talents.

Initially, Trupointe's leaders brought in Gallup learning and development consultants to hold strengths sessions with employees of the two merged companies. To further support its strengths initiative, Trupointe hired a dedicated strengths and

engagement manager responsible for implementing strengths and engagement principles throughout the organization. Having a strengths and engagement manager ensured constant on-site support for all managers and employees and expedited the strengths rollout throughout the organization.

The strengths and engagement manager attended an in-depth strengths coach training session at Gallup, equipping him with valuable ideas and strategies as well as a network of strengths coaches who could share their experiences and insights with him. After becoming a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach, the strengths and engagement manager held introductory sessions with new hires and existing employees at Trupointe to help them understand strengths-based concepts and learn how to integrate them into the workplace, providing employees with a solid foundation in strengths. He worked to ensure all employees had the opportunity to take the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment and learn about their top five strengths.

Group strengths sessions helped employees work together and communicate in the language of strengths. Through one-on-one strengths coaching sessions, individual employees learned how to use their strengths to develop in their job roles, improve their performance and resolve conflicts among team members. Executives and influential leaders in the company have made strengths part of their vernacular in their communication efforts, allowing the movement to gain traction and ensuring its sustainability. Employees incorporate their top five strengths in their email signatures or display them in their office to become more familiar with their coworkers' talents.

## CASE STUDY

### IMPACT

The strengths initiative has played a powerful role in the merger's success. Trupointe's strengths-based approach has helped blend the cultures of the two companies to form one unified organization. It has given all employees, no matter which organization they came from, a shared language to relate to one another and to set common goals. And the company's status as a strengths-based organization differentiates it from others in the industry, giving Trupointe a unique competitive advantage.

Demonstrating strong executive sponsorship and hiring a strengths and engagement manager dedicated to building a strengths-based culture have proven to be powerful catalysts in igniting momentum and establishing an engaging, strengths-based culture. Trupointe's Q<sup>12</sup> employee engagement results have shown a positive relationship between strengths and employee engagement throughout the company. In reviewing results from its most recent employee engagement survey, Gallup analysts found that employees at Trupointe who took the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment outscore their counterparts who have not taken the assessment on each of the 12 employee engagement items.

The strengths and engagement manager sees evidence that the strengths concept is becoming more deeply embedded in the organization as time goes by. Employees have approached him to help them ensure that they have the right balance of talent on their teams, and advancement-minded workers have asked him about using strengths to develop their leadership capabilities. The overall company response to strengths has been positive, with employees looking forward to strengths sessions to learn more about themselves and their colleagues and gaining awareness and acceptance of individuals' differences.

### STRENGTHS CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

	<i>Difference in Mean Results (SF-No SF)</i>
OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND GROW	<b>0.30</b>
PROGRESS IN LAST SIX MONTHS	<b>0.31</b>
BEST FRIEND	<b>0.18</b>
COWORKERS COMMITTED TO QUALITY	<b>0.01</b>
MISSION/PURPOSE OF ORGANIZATION	<b>0.05</b>
MY OPINIONS COUNT	<b>0.26</b>
ENCOURAGES DEVELOPMENT	<b>0.20</b>
SUPERVISOR/SOMEONE AT WORK CARES	<b>0.22</b>
RECOGNITION LAST SEVEN DAYS	<b>0.22</b>
DO WHAT I DO BEST EVERY DAY	<b>0.09</b>
MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT	<b>0.23</b>
I KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME AT WORK	<b>0.10</b>
<b>GRANDMEAN: 0.18</b>	

Moving forward, Trupointe plans to harness the power of strengths by incorporating it into team and individual performance discussions. The strengths and engagement manager will hold sessions with managers and their workgroups to help them better understand and harness their collective strengths to improve team performance. He will also aid managers in configuring project teams based on strengths, so that each team member contributes his or her unique talents to the effort and all projects have the right mix of employees who can execute, influence others, build relationships and think strategically. The company is designing a performance management system built on strengths to ensure that every development conversation between a manager and a team member is based on the employee's unique talents and potential.

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