

An Essential Handbook for  
Managers and Emerging Leaders

# POTENTIAL

Find it. Own it. Work it.

DAVID GUILLE

# What can you do to get the best out of yourself and your team?

Drawing on David Guile's proven track record for helping his clients get the best out of themselves and their people, Potential will enable you to discover your strengths, define your purpose and achieve much more than you thought possible.

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- Become a more effective leader who others want to work for
- Know how to reach for, and achieve, exceptional performance
- Enhance your motivation, self-belief and confidence
- Recognise and realise your full potential in every area of your life
- Improve your career and inspire those in your team to follow your lead

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*"Filled with key leadership messages that will support, challenge and inspire you."*

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David Guile is an Executive Leadership Coach. Having worked his way up through all the managerial levels within the hospitality industry to CEO, he combines hard-won experience with a robust coaching methodology to provide insights, support and direction to help emerging leaders find, own and work their potential and the potential of others.

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# Praise

‘It is said that you cannot buy experience, but this book disproves that theory and challenges many others. You will not buy a more intuitive or more genuinely helpful leadership book.’

**Stephanie Hocking, CEO, Andrew Brownsword Hotels**

‘A powerful read for all managers and emerging leaders within the hospitality sector. This book will help you embrace and fulfil your own potential – and just as importantly, the potential of others within the industry.’

**Ufi Ibrahim, CEO, British Hospitality Association**

‘You won’t find a more potent book than *Potential*. Whether you’re just starting out or already in a leadership role, it’s packed full of useful exercises, coaching tools and business insights that will positively impact your own behaviour and influence others.’

**Danny Pecorelli, Managing Director, Exclusive Hotels and Venues**

‘This book is like having a very practical business coach with you at all times, helping you question what you’re doing and supporting you to achieve your best. David Guile draws on recognised coaching and business practices, packaging it all up into a book that is easy to read and easy to put into practice.’

**Anne Scoular, Co-founder and faculty member of Meyler Campbell, author of *The Financial Times Guide to Business Coaching***

'Potential is a great read. It's well structured with just the right balance between theory and David's experiences, based on his successful career of over 25 years leading to CEO. This book is written in a practical, helpful and humble way. Importantly, it's grounded in the real world of work. You can't help but reflect and question, "Am I doing all I can to perform at my absolute best?" For many of us I would suggest the answer is No. If so, this book is for you.'

**Tracy Robbins, Executive Leadership Coach and former EVP Global HR & Group Board Member, Intercontinental Hotel Group**

'The ideal book to support and enhance the professional development of my management team.'

**Richard Mayne, General Manager, Radisson Blu Edinburgh**

# RETHINK PRESS

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*To Jemma and Hannah  
and your potential*

# Introduction

This book is written to help you find, own and fulfil your potential, and in turn help your team, your business or your department to find, own and fulfil their potential. Drawing on my personal experiences and learnings, and combining the principles and tools from a business and coaching perspective, I explore the key areas that can support personal and team growth and development.

I have enjoyed over twenty-five years' service within the hotel and hospitality sector having started my career as a hotel trainee within Forte Hotels and then steadily worked my way up through various managerial roles to eventually CEO and Board level within Macdonald Hotels and Resorts.

I have worked alongside and led many teams during my career, and have been fortunate to be able to influence the performance of individuals and encourage and support many to greater success within their careers – as others have done for me. However, not everyone achieves their true potential despite their best efforts and the efforts of others, and many of us are capable of much more than we realise.

By following my passion of seeing people grow and develop within their careers I am now working as an Executive Leadership Coach, supporting individuals and businesses to realise and fulfill their potential and to achieve their goals and ambitions.

You may have questions about how you and your team can achieve your potential. Perhaps you see others getting on and being promoted while you are stuck at a particular level within your career.

Are you brimming with confidence and want to channel your energies into maximising your potential and creating opportunities for yourself? Are you leading a team of people and want to get the best out of them? Are you aware of your strengths yet unsure how to use them to create a competitive advantage for you and your team?

Read on to discover how to:

- Become more successful in your career
- Become a more effective and dynamic leader whom others want to work for
- Gain clarity in terms of what you want and how to achieve it
- Enhance your positivity, self-belief and confidence
- Take control of yourself and positively influence the future.

Here's the framework to help you Find, Own and Work your Potential.

## The Dynamics of Potential



The Dynamics of Potential is a business model aimed at realising and fulfilling Potential. The model can equally be applied to an individual, a team or a business.

The Dynamics of Potential consists of four key parts - The Four Ps - each part important in its own right yet integral to the whole to ensure ongoing success and fulfilment. The book follows and explores the individual parts of the model, providing insight, personal reflections and learnings, self-development tools and exercises.

## **Perspective**

In the Perspective section we ask some searching questions to help you gain insight: How well do you know yourself? Are you aware of your strengths and are you using them to your advantage and to maximise your own and your team's performance? Are you allowing self-limiting beliefs to restrict opportunities and the potential that lies within you?

By gaining a clearer perspective of yourself and others, you can create a solid foundation to define your purpose effectively and articulate who you are, where you are now and where you aspire to go.

## **Purpose**

We then move on to look at defining a Purpose. Do you have a clear sense of purpose, of what you want to achieve and what's important to you? Have you defined personal values that can shape and influence your decisions? Have you visualised your future, devised a plan and know how to implement it? How will you review progress and keep motivated?

Having a sense of purpose is fundamental to achieving your potential and getting what you want out of life, both personally and professionally.

## **Performance**

To achieve your Potential you need to improve your Performance. Are you getting the best out of yourself, your team and your business? What areas of your performance require support and increased focus? How can you continually improve performance to create further opportunities?

Enhancing your performance and that of the team will lead to the business becoming stronger and create new opportunities for you and all those associated with its success.

## Progress

Finally, we look at continuing to Progress. Are you clear of your next steps? Are you in a position of influence and strength to take control of your development and future? How do you create a learning culture to support others towards their personal goals?

Progress is essential to the success of you, your team and the business. Embrace change and continually strive to grow and develop to maximise your potential and be ready for the next challenge.

For the Four Ps of Potential to be effectively realised I have identified three **critical success factors** that will prove fundamental to successful implementation. They are each important yet can be life changing and potentially transform the performance of your team and business if they are consistently applied in equal measure. These critical success factors of **Positivity, Balance and Environment** are regular themes throughout the book and are key to each part of the model. Most importantly, you are in control and can influence all three of them.

## Positivity

A positive frame of mind encourages a can-do attitude in yourself and others. Positivity motivates, influences and breeds success. You can choose to be either drained and demotivated by always looking at the downsides and what hasn't gone right, or be energised and upbeat by the positives and the opportunities. **Inspirational leaders and managers look up and look forward, and**

draw on their positive mindset to encourage and motivate themselves and others to success.

## Balance

Adopting a balanced approach in your personal and professional life creates a strong foundation from which to take decisive, effective and consistent action. Balance provides you with stability and influences a more inclusive and rounded approach.

In business, balance is essential. The best performing businesses recognise the importance of a balanced approach for maximising profitability through developing and investing in their people and delivering high service standards to their customers in equal measure. Just focusing on cutting costs at the expense of their people and customers creates a long-term negative imbalance.

## Environment

Working environments and company cultures can be very different. Creating success and fulfilling your own potential and that of others can be dependent on the culture being conducive to your values, your thinking and your preferred working style. Some professional cultures can stifle you and make you question your own potential and value, while others can be energising, supportive and rewarding.

Find a culture and environment that's right for you or one you can positively influence and make a difference to, in order to maximise your potential and the potential of others.

Use the **Dynamics of Potential** business model to support your thinking, performance and continual development so you can understand and then achieve your aspirations.

# PART ONE: Perspective

Know your strengths and discover  
your untapped potential



## CHAPTER 1

# Discover and embrace your strengths

“Each person’s greatest room for growth lies in the areas of his or her greatest strength.”

**Buckingham and Clifton, *Now, Discover Your Strengths***

When it comes to developing your potential it’s not enough to focus on improving your weaknesses. Maximum impact can be gained by leveraging your strengths.

When you’re thinking about your potential and developing it, there is a tendency to focus on what’s not going well or on your limitations. However, there is more to be gained by focusing on and identifying your strengths, and making them stronger.

Focusing on areas of non-performance and weakness can diminish resources, drain energy and reduce motivation, whereas if you focus on strength, it motivates, inspires, creates energy and excitement. The impact that it has can be significant. Buckingham and Clifton, in their book *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, argue that by focusing on identifying, practising and refining your strengths, you become more productive, more fulfilled and more successful in the things that matter most.

By accepting that we are all different, have different strengths, and that weaknesses are part of everyone’s character, we grow and develop. Think about it: how realistic is it to turn every weakness you have into a strength? Is it even possible? If you focus

on your strengths – what works for you, what motivates you, what inspires you – you’ll be coming from a more positive approach. Focus on what you’re good at and what you can do, rather than what doesn’t work and what you’re not so good at.

### **FIND IT! Build on strengths**

Whenever I appointed someone into a new role, I always gave them one piece of advice to support them: focus on what’s right and not on what’s going wrong. Identify and build on the strengths and successes.

A newly appointed General Manager would often list their issues and concerns, highlighting problems that needed to be dealt with and emphasising the amount of time and energy required to put things right. The extent of the list sometimes overwhelmed them, drained their energy and motivation, and occasionally was used to create the impression, rightly or wrongly, that there was so much to do.

By adopting a different approach, by focusing on the positives within the business and identifying the successes, we can create a position of strength from which to tackle some of the issues and weaknesses. It’s more energising, motivational, and liberating.

It is crucial in any new role to step back, watch and learn; list all your first impressions, but don’t let the strengths and positives of the business be clouded by the tendency to focus on the problems and weaknesses and what is wrong.

**Identify and build on the strengths to help you to overcome some of the weaknesses.**

## Your Personal Strengths

So, what are your strengths? How do you define them and improve them? Alex Linley, the founder of the Center of Applied Positive Psychology (CAPP) which focuses on spreading the word about strengths and their role in the field of positive psychology, says that a strength is a capacity that already exists within us. It is something that comes naturally. Using a strength feels authentic; it's energising. Weaknesses, in contrast, often drain us.

When you stop focusing on your weaknesses and start playing to your strengths, you can transform your life. Most people are very good at identifying their flaws: "Oh, I'm not good at this. This isn't my strength."

If we turn that around and say, "I'm great at this and my strengths include..." the mindset changes.

Strengths will vary between individuals and can be both behavioural and task orientated. Typical strengths could include:

- Being well-planned, organised and disciplined
- Communicating in a natural and confident manner
- Analysing and interpreting data
- Having empathy with others
- Motivating and encouraging others
- Completing tasks
- Influencing others
- Having resilience and an inner strength
- Being focused and determined.

You may not be aware of your own personal strengths. You may be aware of some but have conditioned your thinking to exclude or limit others. If you are not fully aware of your personal strengths you might not utilise them, and as a result limit the potential within you, so miss out on greater opportunity both personally and professionally.

Before you can build on your strengths, you have to identify them.

**Steps to discover your own personal strengths:**

**Articulate your personal strengths by making a list.** What qualities do you see in yourself? When you believe you can find no more, challenge yourself to find another five. List a minimum of ten strengths and reflect upon and acknowledge each one.

**Ask others.** Ask people, both inside and outside of work, who know you well and whose judgement you respect and trust. Some of their answers may not have been included in your initial list.

**Learn from others.** What strengths do you admire in others? Perhaps you have a role model or a mentor. Look at their strengths and then think about whether you demonstrate any of those strengths yourself.

**Focus on the activities that you enjoy and that bring you the most satisfaction.** What strengths are you using that come naturally?

**Notice what you do differently to everyone else.** In a situation where you are truly using your strengths you will stand out from a crowd. Your approach will be unique. To name your strengths, you want to identify those moments and note how you are different.

**Figure out what comes naturally to you.** Break these strengths down to identify what skills you are using.

**Work with a coach.** A strengths-based coaching approach will support you to articulate your strengths clearly and build upon them.

Go online and take a **strengths assessment** (see below).

## **Strengths Assessment**

The most widely recognised online Strengths Assessments are the following:

**Gallup Strength Finder** – through research, a list of thirty-four personal strengths have been identified against which an individual is measured. The entry level assessment is the first step in helping you identify your strengths and talents and highlights your top five strengths out of the thirty-four. A comprehensive report is produced of your top five strengths and what makes you stand out. Recommendations and useful insights are detailed on how to start utilising your strengths to gain maximum advantage. Entry level requires a minimal charge.

**Values in Action (VIA)** – core character strengths based around twenty-four personal values. An entry level report, which is free, ranks your top twenty-four strengths in order. This is more of a holistic approach focusing on your values and what they mean to you, and how they can help you lead a happier, more engaging and satisfying life. There are more detailed reports, analysis and recommendations which can be purchased for an affordable cost.

**CAPP R2 Strengths Profiler** – measures sixty attributes across three dimensions of performance, energy and use. Results are

grouped into four areas covering: Realised Strengths – things you find energising, perform well and use often; Unrealised Strengths – things you find energising and perform well but don't use so often; Learnt Behaviours – things you have learnt to do well, but that don't energise you; and Weaknesses – things you find hard to do well and find draining. Entry level is comprehensive with a set of helpful and insightful reports at an affordable cost.

Whatever method you use to identify your strengths will bring you one step closer to improving them.

## **What are your greatest strengths?**

Having interviewed many potential employees over my career, I consistently ask one question: "What are your greatest strengths?" The answer to this question can tell me a great deal about the individual. Answers range from the candidate struggling to identify anything of significance to an exhaustive list of attributes plucked directly from a leadership book, telling me what they think I want to hear.

If you ever get asked that question be prepared and articulate your response with genuine authenticity. Some of the best responses include:

**Highlighting several identified strengths and then prioritising the strongest.** *"My key strengths lie with getting the best out of people, in particular giving honest and constructive feedback to allow my team to improve their performance."*

**Tailoring the strength to the relevance of the opportunity or individual.** *"In a sales environment it is most important to develop a chemistry and affinity with your client, and this is a strength that now comes naturally to me."*

**Giving examples of how that strength has been used to the maximum.** *“One of my greatest strengths lies in building relationships with others, so I have put myself forward to represent the company at networking events.”*

**Demonstrating what you have done to build on that area of strength.** *“I am really interested in understanding my strengths and how to make them stronger so I decided to carry out an online exercise. It highlighted strengths such as communication and organisational skills which I hadn’t recognised in myself, but I am now more conscious of these and how I utilise them in my job effectively.”*

**Showing how you could use that strength going forward.** *“Coaching my team to deliver the best service they can is something that I enjoy and consider to be one of my strengths. I have now been asked to apply my knowledge to other departments to support their teams.”*

## Strengths at work

A strengths-based approach to managing teams can also benefit businesses. Marcus Buckingham effectively highlights the importance of a strengths-based approach within your business. His findings demonstrate that great companies must not only recognise that each employee is different, but they must capitalise on these differences. He states that the employers must watch for clues to each employee’s natural talents and then develop these talents into bona fide strengths.

### Build strengths from personal to team to business

Your strengths are brought into play when you work alone, or in a team or as part of the business. You may use different strengths

as you find yourself in different roles in the business or your career. When a business is able to see a person's strengths and find ways to use them effectively, this will have a positive bottom line impact. Often leaders and managers use the appraisal system and strengths profiling to identify the strengths they have within their team members.

Think about your last appraisal or performance review. How much time and focus did you spend looking at your strengths and the positives? How much time did you spend focusing on areas of development and weaknesses? Think about what you did as a result of that appraisal. How much time did you spend on leveraging your strengths and making them stronger?

Invariably, more time is spent focusing and discussing the weaker areas as opposed to getting more from the strengths team members have. This goes across the team and business reviews too, where often the stronger or well-performing parts of the business are bypassed, and the weak parts are identified as the key areas for development and improvement.

### **Work it! Get more from your high performers**

As part of a central Executive Team, we met regularly to review the performance of each hotel within the group. Most of our time was spent focusing on the poor performing hotels and discussing what actions could be taken to improve their results. We would divert and direct resources to a hotel to readdress and support an issue or problem that was impacting the performance of the business. On reflection, very little time was spent discussing the high performers –what we could we learn from them and what support we could offer to make them even better.

We could, perhaps, have better utilised specialist and expert resources to get more out of the successes and strengths within the performing business as well as putting out fires and restoring normality in the under-performing hotels.

Use your strengths to get more out of the high performers, which can add more value to the overall business. We successfully adopted this approach when setting profit targets per hotel to reach an overall company target. We asked more from the hotels that were performing well as there was more opportunity to maximise and grow the business from a position of strength.

**Play to your strengths and get more from your high performers.**

When an organisation plays to the strengths of its team, it can create stronger business units by:

- Putting people together who complement each other's strengths and cover the weaknesses
- Creating reverse mentoring schemes: putting less experienced people with the more experienced, so both can develop.

A recent Gallup survey (<http://www.gallup.com> - survey conducted in the USA in 2014) found that organisations focusing on maximising the natural talents of their employees increase engagement levels by an average of 33% per year. Only about one in three employees strongly agrees that they've had an opportunity to do what they do best every day. In the survey, for the 37% who agreed that their supervisor focused on their strengths, active disengagement fell dramatically to 1%. This suggests that if all companies train their managers to focus on

employees' strengths, they could double the number of engaged employees in the workplace.

More than half (52%) of the respondents who use their strengths for three hours a day or fewer are stressed, but this falls to 36% for those who use their strengths ten hours per day or more. Gallup's data show that simply by learning their strengths, companies make employees 7.8% more productive, and teams that focus on strengths every day have 12.5% greater productivity.

Gallup has found that building employees' strengths is a far more effective approach to improving performance than working on weaknesses. When employees know and use their strengths, they are more engaged, perform better, and are less likely to leave the company.

### **Own it! Are you playing to your strengths?**

It is not unusual that, as you grow within a business and take up more responsibilities, you continually face many new challenges that sometimes don't play to your strengths or skill set. You may also find that you become less motivated or less energised. When I reflect on my career in hospitality, the highlights for me were all about people: developing, building and leading great teams of people and sharing their passion for delivering excellent levels of service to the customer; being in the business at the sharp end and getting a buzz from the shop floor.

As my career developed and I became CEO and a member of the Board, my remit was very different. My role pulled me further away from what I really enjoyed and more towards high level meetings with the bank, potential investors and the Board. Much of my time was spent locked away in my office, planning

and preparing for the various meetings, and then in board rooms presenting and debating various strategic issues, largely finance related. While I found this part of my role challenging, interesting and an opportunity to broaden my knowledge and deepen my understanding, I also found it quite draining and de-energising and it wasn't motivating me in the same way.

**Sometimes you have to listen to yourself and understand where your strengths lie and how you are using them to give you energy, purpose and motivation in what you do.**

## Talents become strengths

If you want to be a great leader, consider these two assumptions:

- Each person's talents are enduring and unique
- Each person's greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength.

A talent could be untapped, or something that you use in other areas of your life but perhaps don't realise you could use in a work context, or even what others see in you that you don't see. **For that talent to become a strength you have to grow it, use it, build it, like a muscle.**

With the above two assumptions in mind, use these four steps to build a strength based business:

- 1 Spend a great deal of time and money to select the right people in the first place
- 2 Focus on performance rather than legislating outcomes. Don't describe each step; allow people to find their way using their strengths

- 3 Invest time and resources into learning about an individual's strengths and figuring out how to build on these strengths, rather than plugging the "skills gap"
- 4 Devise ways to help each person grow their career without necessarily promoting them up the corporate ladder and out of their areas of strength.

I have seen many examples, when I have been coaching, of individuals who have grown within their businesses, but as a result have not played to their strengths. Here are just a couple:

A talented sales person has been promoted and is now leading a sales team; she has become more of a people manager than a sales person. Her strength is doing business and sealing deals in front of the customer, but she has now been taken away from the customer and is spending most of her time managing, leading and reviewing teams. She's become more internal than external and not playing to her strengths. She's not as motivated by what she's doing.

I have also coached a marketing specialist who now does very little marketing as he is managing the marketing team and spends more time presenting, communicating and influencing up the line. This supports the findings of the survey, concluding that the longer an employee stays with a business and the higher they climb the traditional career ladder, the less likely they are to be playing to their strengths.

The challenge is whether the individual can adapt, build and develop new strengths to complement their existing ones.

## **Work it! Play to employees' strengths**

I was fortunate to work alongside a very talented Hotel General Manager whose passion was to surprise and delight his guests by his commitment to the quality of his product and the service that his team delivered. He was always highly visible to both his team and his guests, and his eye for quality was exceptional. His hotel was a centre of excellence within the company.

He was then promoted to a central role with responsibility for driving and enhancing quality across all the hotels within the company. Although the logic behind creating this role for him was a sound one and was based upon his area of strength, it sadly did not translate into success.

He found it difficult to influence from a central perspective and his skills for delivering and enhancing quality at one hotel through an individualised approach could not be translated into a wider remit. The skill set required to be successful in the role was very different and proved more challenging than focusing on one specialist area of strength. He returned to his role as General Manager and played to his strength once again, which also proved to be more motivational to him.

**As an employee grows and gets promoted within the business, ensure that their key strengths are not lost in the transition.**

## Acknowledge your weakness – it's a strength

We all have weaknesses. Even great leaders and the most successful businesses have weaknesses. We have to recognise and acknowledge that we can't be good at everything – although many leaders feel they have to be. The challenge is to recognise and accept your weaknesses in the same way as you do with your strengths and then to take some form of action.

Much is written and talked about transforming a weakness into a strength. If we focus on a particular weakness with a positive and open mindset then anything is possible. However, I believe the energy and time spent can perhaps be disproportionate to the result.

Instead, focus on acknowledging your weaknesses and limit their impact on you and your business:

**Admit and accept the weakness exists.**

**Effectively manage the weakness** – spend more time and energy on developing and fine tuning your strengths.

**Be in control** – avoid putting yourself in situations where your weakness may be highlighted.

**Get good enough** – a weakness doesn't have to become a strength, but place importance on learning, practising and achieving enough to get by.

**Use the strengths of others to support you** – delegate and empower others to complement your strengths.

**Be prepared** – take time and preparation to deal with your weakness. Excellent preparation can make up for a lot and give you more confidence.

## Summary

If you focus on the positive – on what you're good at, on your strengths – it drives motivation, energising you rather than draining your energy. I have a tendency to focus on my weaknesses and have to make an effort to remember my own strengths, When I do this, I feel more motivated, energised and positive.

We all have more strengths than we may realise.

“Only when you operate from strengths can you achieve true excellence. You must develop a thorough understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, and discover where you can make the biggest contribution to your organisation.”

**Peter Drucker, Management Consultant**

## The Author



As CEO for Macdonald Hotels & Resorts, the largest privately owned hotel group in the UK, from 2007 to 2014, David was responsible for over 5,000 employees and a senior executive team of twelve. Under his leadership, the company achieved successive EBITDA growth, despite the challenging economy, and was awarded the prestigious accolade of AA Hotel Group of the Year in both 2008 and 2014 in recognition of exceptional quality and customer service.

Having started as a trainee and worked his way up through all hotel departments, David rose through managerial roles before becoming CEO and Board member. In addition he has experience in both large PLCs (Forte Hotels Group, Granada and Compass) and privately owned businesses (Macdonald Hotels & Resorts). He has an exceptional range of commercial and people experience that supports the leadership development he can offer as an Executive Coach.

David completed an MBA in 2001 at Oxford Brookes University, specialising in hospitality and people management, and is a graduate of The Meyler Campbell Business School of Coaching, the leading Executive Coach training programme in the UK and accredited by the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches.

As well as holding Non-Executive roles, David is also a trustee of the hospitality based charity Room to Reward, recognising hidden heroes within the charity sector by rewarding them with hotel breaks. He has also been involved with the charity Daisy's Dream, supporting bereaved children and their families, for over twenty years.

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