

The Revolution Around Us and What DWU Is Doing About It

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Over the last 30 years a quiet, growing revolution has changed the way we view work, education and life. Some call it positive psychology; others call it the strengths revolution. At its core, it seeks to determine what is best about a person, encouraging us to identify and cultivate our talents and enhance our work and personal lives.

Why call this a revolution? It sounds like common sense. But it's more than common sense and far more than a passing fad. Modern understanding of brain development indicates talent is hard wired into our brain. It helps explain who we are, what we like, what we ignore, and what we're good at. There is practical application here and the news is both good and bad. The good news is that research confirms that all human beings have talent. None of us are left out. The bad news is that so few of the jobs we do utilize the talent we have. The tragic fact of American work life is that only 20 percent of us think our jobs call forth our best talents. The other 80 percent are not lazy or disinterested; they are miscast – a round peg in a square hole - and are bored or disenfranchised.

In recent years, the faculty and staff at DWU have been considering the data on talent: why so many are miscast at work and what we might do to boost performance, especially in the work place, to create higher personal satisfaction. We asked a profound question: "How can we help every DWU student identify his or her unique talent and then use that talent to build and develop a successful, fulfilling life?"

Our ruminations turned to action which we think is a path-breaking model for higher education. To help students identify and develop talent we created the Center for Talent Development and a 4-year initiative that we call LearnStrong. Each student has the opportunity to determine and develop his or her best self.

First-year students are introduced to a personal inventory created by the Gallup Organization, which did much of the basic research on talent. The goal is to help them discover their talent, become comfortable with the concept of their strengths, and ponder the meaning and purpose of a life based on those talents and strengths.

Sophomores are challenged to think about the larger world and reflect on where they fit.

Juniors begin the process of linking their talents and passions to majors, jobs, internships and graduate school. The theme of the senior year is responsibility: for using their talents, service to the world, and how they may lead lives that spring from their strengths with integrity.

We may be on to something here at DWU. The Gallup Organization recognized DWU as a national leader in helping students identify and develop their talents. Only six other schools have this distinction as a "Strengths Leader Campus."

Our educational goal is to place our students among the 20 percent who thrive in their chosen career by helping them find a career based on their strengths and then using those strengths every day for the sake of their employer, family and community. Yes, we think education is about

facts, thinking and learning. We want our students to thrive in whatever occupation they choose. But ultimately, we think a college education is about nurturing and challenging our students to become their best selves. If we are successful in a systematic way, we think our Learn Strong brand is not only the wave of the future, but perhaps the most practical and cost-effective type of college education available.