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**Choose a path that will get you to your destination.**

- **Quick start** – To jump-start the process, turn to “Quick start” to find the plan that will help you address your need.
- **14 paths to improvement plans** – What the plan is, when to use it, how to use it, and an example of what the plan looks like.
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Item number 82123

Robert W. Eichinger, Michael M. Lombardo, Alex J. Stiber, J. Evelyn Orr
Introduction

Work, like life, is an exercise in navigation. Whether you are guided by compass, GPS, street signs, or stars, two key pieces of information are essential in order to navigate your way: where you are now and where you want to be.

Imagine an interactive map for your career. Once you know where you are and where you want to be, the methods for how you reach your destination are numerous. Some routes will be direct, others less direct. Some routes will be safe, others more risky. How long it takes to get there is another factor to consider. It can be tempting to choose the most familiar path, but the goal is to choose a path that will get you to your destination.

For most people, development has meant discovering and fixing weaknesses. While this approach can work, focusing exclusively on fixing weaknesses can be challenging and discouraging. Creating a “fix-it” development plan is not always the most effective route to improvement. In fact, most development plans (if they exist at all) are poorly crafted, unlikely to be executed, and have variable outcomes. Fortunately, development plans are not the only way to accomplish a goal or get results.

So, if converting your weaknesses to strengths is not the panacea, what other paths are available to help you improve?

Paths to improvement: Navigating your way to success is designed for individuals who are seeking alternative routes to improve their performance and potential. It is also for coaches, mentors, bosses, and HR professionals—anyone helping others improve their effectiveness. This book reviews 14 different paths to improvement, helps you identify a suitable path for your situation, and sets you on your way to success.

Knowing yourself and your portfolio of strengths and weaknesses is key. Study after study has found that self-awareness is a key factor associated with high performance and potential and an indicator of long-term career success. Individuals who are more self-aware are more likely to seek feedback in many forms, quicker to accept it, and more likely to act on it.

Research shows that having five to seven key strengths might be all you need to achieve success. But it’s important to read the fine print. These strengths need to be in mission-critical areas that contribute to performance. Additionally, your weaknesses in mission-critical areas need to be dealt with so that they do not distract from your strengths. Finally, you can’t have any fatal flaws—negative traits or behaviors that would stall your career.

Unfortunately, success is not as simple as self-awareness and a handful of mission-critical strengths. As you progress in your career, the requirements for success change. Strengths that contributed to your success in the past can have a negative effect later, especially if overused. On the flip side, weaknesses overlooked early in your career can catch up with you and create problems.
Given the dynamic nature of what’s required for success, what are some routes that will get you to your destination? Research and experience suggest that there are many strategies for achieving your desired outcome. Depending on your skill level, the need, and the situation, the 14 paths in this book are all legitimate approaches to getting better results at work.

Let’s say you received feedback from a direct report that you are not providing very clear directions about how the team should divide the workload. You have several possible paths that will help you improve: You could seek additional feedback to build more awareness of your need in this area. You could use another skill (like delegation or planning) to cover for, substitute for, or neutralize the negative effects of your lack of skill. You could work around the weakness by finding someone else to partner with you when it’s time to distribute the workload and clearly communicate objectives. Of course, you could also choose to develop the skill directly, but a “fix-it” development plan is just one path of many.

Once you recognize the many paths you can take to improve, how do you determine which path to take? Here are a few factors to consider:

- **Awareness and acceptance.** If you are not aware of a weakness or a problem area, or if you do not accept the feedback that you are hearing, then you need to do some additional exploration. The Insight plan (p. 3) is the best way to build awareness and acceptance. (Another resource to explore is FYI* for Insight, a book designed to help you become more self-aware and build a realistic knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses.)

- **Willingness to take action.** It is one thing to be aware and accept the need to improve in an area; it’s another to be willing to do something about it. To change your behavior. To invest in improving. Most plans in this book require you to be willing to act. There are two plans to choose from when, for whatever reason, you are not willing to take action: the Redeployment plan (p. 61) and the Capitulation plan (p. 65).

- **Skill building.** Some situations will require you to build the skill directly. Other times, it will be OK to keep the status quo on your skill level but supplement, complement, substitute, or address the need in some other fashion. Plans that build skill directly include the Development plan (p. 13), the Enhancement plan (p. 17), the Good to extraordinary plan (p. 21), and the Rerailment plan (p. 25).

- **Skill level.** The plan you choose will depend on whether you are weak, average, strong, or overusing the skill in question. It’s also possible that you have not tried using the skill that you need. Find the plans that are appropriate for different skill levels by deciding whether you need to build the skill directly, find alternative paths, or demonstrate a skill you already possess. For help, turn to Figure 1 (p. 86) in the “How to select plans” section or refer to “Quick start” (p. iv).
• **Time frame.** Depending on the urgency of the situation, you may have a need that must be addressed within a week, or you may be able to take several months or years to improve. You can choose a path that fits your time frame. Or you can choose an interim path that gets you some immediate results and a long-term path that helps you improve over the long run. See Table 4 (p. 88) in the “How to select plans” section for more details. Each chapter indicates the path’s relative time frame (shorter to longer):

![Time frame icons]

• **Coaching support.** If you are working independently and you do not have a coach, mentor, or manager supporting you, there will be some plans that are easier for you to craft and implement on your own. Other plans require an expert coach, mentor, or boss to act as a partner, advise you, help you reflect, and keep you honest. Find out which plans require additional support by turning to Table 4 (p. 88) in the “How to select plans” section. Each chapter indicates whether the path can be pursued independently or whether it is most effective to partner with a coach:

![Coaching support icons]

If you do not have access to a coach, think of this book as your coach. When you see yourself in one of the examples or descriptions, see if the plan described might be a good fit for your need. Use this book along with the companion guide, *Paths to improvement: Navigating your way to success* Coaching reference guide, to create a plan that will help you address your need. To jump-start the process, turn to “Quick start” (p. iv).

Whether you are using the book for your own or someone else’s benefit, knowing the possible paths to improvement is an important first step for career, performance, or development conversations. *Paths to improvement: Navigating your way to success* equips you with an interactive map offering multiple routes to get you to your destination—success.
### Quick start

#### Where do I go when I need a plan?

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<tr>
<td>I have never tried using this skill, so I <em>don't know</em> where I stand.</td>
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<td>I received feedback or I just know that a <em>weakness</em> is impeding my performance.</td>
<td>3 Development plan</td>
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<td>I am <em>average</em> in a skill, and I want it to be stronger.</td>
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<td>5 Good to extraordinary plan</td>
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<td>I have a very <em>serious problem</em> that is hurting my performance and career.</td>
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<td>I have a weakness I can’t seem to improve or I don’t want to tackle or I <em>don’t have time</em> to fix.</td>
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<td>I have a strength people say I overuse.</td>
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About the authors

**Robert W. Eichinger**
Bob Eichinger has been working with managers and executives on leadership development for over 50 years. He is one of the founders and the former CEO of Lominger Limited, Inc. and co-creator of the Leadership Architect® Suite of management, executive, and organizational development tools. During his career, he has served as Vice Chairman of the Korn Ferry Institute, worked inside companies such as PepsiCo and Pillsbury, and as a consultant in Fortune 500 companies in the United States, Europe, Japan, Canada, and Australia. Dr. Eichinger lectures extensively on the topic of executive and management development and has served on the Board of the Human Resource Planning Society. He has worked as a coach with more than 1,000 managers and executives. Some of his books include *The Leadership Machine*, written with Mike Lombardo, *100 Things You Need to Know: Best People Practices for Managers & HR*, written with Mike Lombardo and Dave Ulrich, and *FYI*® for *Strategic Effectiveness*, written with Kim Ruyle and Dave Ulrich.

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Mike Lombardo has over 30 years experience in executive and management research and in executive coaching. He is one of the founders of Lominger Limited, Inc., publishers of the Leadership Architect® Suite. With Bob Eichinger, Mike has authored 40 products for the suite, including *The Leadership Machine*, *FYI*® For Your Improvement, the Career Architect®, Choices Architect®, and VOICES®. During his 15 years at the Center for Creative Leadership, Mike was a coauthor of *The Lessons of Experience*, which detailed which learnings from experience can teach the competencies needed to be successful. He also coauthored the research on executive derailment revealing how personal flaws and overdone strengths caused otherwise effective executives to get into career trouble, Benchmarks®, a 360° feedback instrument, and the Looking Glass® simulation. Mike has won five national awards for research on managerial and executive development.
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J. Evelyn Orr
Evelyn Orr is an Intellectual Property Development Consultant for Korn Ferry Leadership and Talent Consulting. She is coauthor of the Lominger publication *FYI® for Insight: The 21 Leadership Characteristics for Success and the 5 That Get You Fired* and has many years of experience in talent management, including competency modeling, interviewing and selection, engagement, leadership development, team development, and succession planning. She has held leadership positions in a large retail organization and served as a consultant with over a dozen Fortune 500 companies from a variety of industries. Evelyn is coauthor of several papers and articles, including *Setting the Stage for Success: Building the Leadership Skills That Matter*, *Best Practices in Developing and Implementing Competency Models*, *Fundamentals of Competency Development*, and *Illuminating Blind Spots and Hidden Strengths*. © Korn Ferry 2005–2016. All rights reserved.
We would like to express our gratitude to a number of people who contributed ideas and assistance in the preparation of this book.

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We appreciate the contributions of all.
Deeper exploration

1 Insight plan
2 Exposure plan

Knowing yourself, your unique portfolio of strengths and weaknesses, is the first step toward improving. You can’t get to where you want to go if you don’t know your starting point. Not knowing where you stand could be due to lack of self-awareness, confusing or inconsistent feedback, or lack of experience using specific skills. On the other hand, you may think you have a clear understanding of your skills but your perception is off compared to other people’s perceptions of you. All of the above represent opportunities to explore more deeply and develop a more accurate and complete picture of your current state.
1 Insight plan

Increase self-awareness and better understand yourself.

“There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one’s self.”

Benjamin Franklin – American author, inventor, and diplomat

What is the Insight plan?
The Insight plan will help you develop a greater self-awareness of your portfolio strengths and weaknesses. The plan could involve self-reflection or asking bosses, colleagues, or others for more feedback. Whatever it is, it should help you recognize and eliminate potential blind spots—areas where you think you are more skilled than other people think you are. The Insight plan can also shed light on potential derailers—issues that could cause so much trouble for you that they obscure your portfolio of strengths. The goal is to achieve a more accurate awareness of yourself so you can take steps to reach your potential. You can’t get somewhere else until you know where you are now.

When do I use this plan?
The Insight plan is appropriate in a number of situations:

• **You do not understand what is inhibiting your performance.** Something is amiss. You are unable to make the impact or get the results you and others expect. You are tempted to blame the situation, find fault in others, or shrug your shoulders and leave it a mystery. But you know those are not fruitful options. On the other hand, seeking feedback about your skills and behaviors requires courage. The Insight plan can provide the structure and direction to gather and analyze feedback in a supportive environment.

• **You do not understand the feedback you’re getting.** Sometimes it’s hard to make sense of the feedback because it’s intermittent and inconsistent. It’s possible, for example, that your peers view you as compassionate, but your direct reports don’t. Or your boss thinks you are a strong problem solver, but your peers think you have a weakness there. More often than not, these types of scenarios are a result of behavior on your part that is context- or situation-dependent. In fact, you may behave differently with people in the same constituency—for example, being viewed as approachable by two direct reports but not by a third. Just because the feedback is inconsistent or you don’t understand the problem doesn’t mean there isn’t a problem.
The way to move ahead in these situations is to get additional sources of credible feedback.

- **You do not agree that a skill deficit is as bad as others are saying, and you’re starting to get defensive.** Maybe you’re in denial about a weakness or unable to accept that your weakness is really such a big problem. Stark disagreement with consistent feedback from others usually means that you do not know yourself very well. Your goal is to narrow the gap between your own and others’ perceptions. Gaining additional insight and building self-awareness can help you avoid trouble. Self-aware leaders are more likely to be higher performers and have greater long-term career success.

- **You have tried to work on the issue, but others are still not seeing improvement.** Accepting feedback is one thing. Understanding the underlying cause is the next crucial element to creating a successful improvement plan. For example, you could go home and during dinner say to your spouse, “You know, a curious thing happened today at work. Many of the raters on my 360° feedback said that I’m not improving at listening. What do you think?” To which your spouse answers, “I’ll be glad to tell you, but only if you promise not to interrupt me again!” In this case, understanding why you don’t listen can be the key to changing the underlying beliefs and assumptions that drive your behavior.

**How do I use this plan?**

Depending on your situation and your openness to self-discovery and insight, the application of the Insight plan may range from the simple to the more radical and in-depth.

Sometimes self-reflection can increase insight or self-knowledge, but often you will need feedback—an outside perspective.

- If you get inconsistent feedback and have trouble making sense of it, you will need to collect additional, more objective feedback from a coach, a mentor, or some type of skills inventory or personality assessment.
- If you don’t agree with the feedback you have been given, get additional sources of credible feedback from mentors, trusted associates, past bosses, or even your spouse. Also consider some additional assessment and calibration.
- Watch out for defensiveness and resistance. Be willing to accept that you are wrong. The acceptance process can require a skilled coach to build accurate awareness of the issues.

At some point, you may have deeper issues that are causing noise at work or at home that you are not willing to acknowledge or address. In order to resolve these more serious situations, you will need to rely on experts such as an assessment specialist, a diagnostic coach, a counselor, or an employee assistance program resource.
Self-knowledge is one of the most valuable skills you can develop since it is a foundation for so many others. When in doubt, pursue additional opportunities for insight. And remember this caution: lack of self-awareness and insight is a ticking bomb. There are many ways in which you can learn more about yourself—many sources of feedback—your boss, peers, significant other, friends, even enemies. Build self-knowledge by pursuing additional opportunities for insight. If you are a person who wants to take time to self-reflect and understand potential blind spots, you'll find tools like the FYI* for Insight book and online self-awareness assessment to be great places to start. Visit our FYI* for Insight web site at http://Insight.lominger.com.

Example
Sanjay thinks he's a whiz at sizing people up. “I can tell the winners from the losers as soon as I meet them,” he has bragged more than once. Based on his belief in his infallible people instincts and intuition, Sanjay assigns people to well-defined areas of responsibility and then closely monitors their performance.

And Sanjay gets pretty good confirmation of his faith in his judgment. When Sanjay thinks someone is a “low burner,” he puts the person in roles where they aren’t going to be challenged. Then, when the person doesn’t achieve great things, shows little motivation, and gets disgruntled, Sanjay says, “See, I told you.”

Sanjay has been a strong individual contributor and has a wealth of technical knowledge as well as other strengths his organization prizes. As Sanjay transitions to management, it will be important for him to skillfully assess and deploy people. Unfortunately, Sanjay’s inordinate faith in his own judgment about people creates some bad self-fulfilling prophecies.

A coach meets with Sanjay to review feedback from direct reports alleging that he is controlling, arrogant, and not empowering. Sanjay has heard it all before and rejected it outright. The coach presents some additional data pointing out how unpredictable performance and higher-than-average turnover are emerging problems in Sanjay’s group. This gets Sanjay’s attention. He’s willing to acknowledge that there is a problem. Getting acceptance of the precise problem and diagnosing the root cause will help Sanjay get the insight he needs in order to avoid the imminent derailment others see in his future.
Sizing up people
I would like to select and deploy people effectively. I thought that I was good at this, but it seems like my track record is questionable. From the results I’m seeing, it appears that I am overconfident in my ability to assess talent. This is a critical skill for me to get right.

I want to be able to read people accurately, diagnose strengths, weaknesses, and potential. I want to hire the best people so that I can have the best team, but first I need to figure out what is going wrong and why.

As a substitute, the only skill that would be a good crutch for me to lean on while I work out this issue is Managing and measuring work. I can clearly assign responsibility and set clear objectives for my team. I will provide more regular feedback on progress so that they are set up for success as much as possible.

I will partner with my coach to observe my thought process and decision-making process so that we can better understand the root cause of my issue with Sizing up people. I will also seek feedback from others. Once we diagnose why I’m failing at this, I will create a Development plan.

I’d like to get at the root causes within the next 2 months.
Creating a “fix-it” development plan is not always the most effective route to improvement. For most people, development has meant discovering and fixing weaknesses. While this approach can work, focusing exclusively on fixing weaknesses can be challenging and discouraging.

So, if converting your weaknesses to strengths is not the panacea, what other paths are available to help you improve?

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