Case Notes

# Chapter 3: Engaging Strengths

# Case 3.1: Ready to Be CEO?

## Case Summary

Christine Jorgens’s experience, dedication, and passion for her organization – Begin the Future Foundation – had led her in an unexpected position as a potential candidate to become the Foundation’s new Chief Executive Officer. Although Christine had never deliberately planned to pursue this particular leadership opportunity, she was now considering whether or not she had the experience, skill, and strategic planning abilities to ascend to the highest position in her organization.

Christine had a wide array of experiences with the Foundation, and displayed a willingness to do whatever should could do for the organization. She consistently displayed initiative and developed new programs to benefit the middle school students served by the Foundation. She was enthusiastic, dedicated, and innovative in her role initiating new programs. Now, she questioned whether or not she had the experience in day-to-day management to be an effective CEO of the organization.

Case Analysis

This case provides a unique look at strengths-based leadership, highlighting the strengths that Christine Jorgens exhibited over a 12-year period with the Begin the Future Foundation. Christine clearly was dedicated to the organization and committed to the organization’s mission and vision. Those strengths were what convinced the board that she would be the perfect choice to be the organization’s new Chief Executive Officer.

Christine’s upbringing paralleled the experience of many of the Foundation’s students; she was from a rural area, struggled financially, and worked in her local community. Her upbringing could be considered a natural and authentic **strength**. Christine’s commitment to program development was viewed by the board of directors as her **realized strength** and the strongest asset to the organization. It is possible that despite her lack of experience in day-to-day management, the board of directors saw her management potential as an **unrealized strength.**

In assessing potential **weaknesses**, Christine’s lack of confidence in her ability (or humility) could be considered a weakness. For her to be successful as the Foundation’s CEO, she will need to believe in the skills and abilities that caused the board of directors to consider her for the position in the first place.

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. Strengths are considered inborn traits that can be enhanced with experience. What experiences in Christine’s background helped her develop her strengths?*

It could be argued that Christine’s childhood and adolescence from a rural area where her family struggled financially innately prepared her for a role serving a similar population. Christine’s experience and background throughout her childhood prepared her to help others from a similar background. She designed programs that would help children from impoverished backgrounds based on her experiences, creating a support system for these children.

*2. Of the strengths identified by the assessments, which were directly observable in Christine’s work? Were there any that were not?*

Five skills were listed as strengths in Christine’s skill assessment: strategic planning, relationship building, creativity, compassion, and influencing. The only directly observable strength based on Christine’s work is strategic planning; the case study identifies two programs that were started under the leadership of Christine – Study Buddies and Girl Power.

Implicitly, it can be assumed that Christine demonstrated three of the other four skills, relationship building, compassion, and influencing. Relationship building is necessary in order for Christine to obtain funding for her programs and also to foster relationships with the children she mentored. Christine’s compassion is probable as she has shown a commitment to the organization’s mission and is invested in the success of the children. Influencing is another area that is implicitly implied, as Christine would have to have strengths in influencing others if she is securing funding, creating programs, and being approached by others with new initiatives.

Creativity was not directly observable, but once again, it could be assumed that Christine would have to be creative to obtain funding and also in creating appropriate programming for the populations she is serving.

*3. Christine admitted having some weaknesses, especially in day-to-day management of the organization. Which of her strengths could she put into use to help her deal with that, and how?*

Christine may not have demonstrated day-to-day management in her role, but this is also because she is spending a lot of time directly working with children and programming and meeting with donors and funders. Her ability to engage with stakeholders, constituents, and children receiving services is a component of management. The case study does not document how Christine works with her subordinates and her employees. If she can develop her strengths of influencing and compassion into employee relations, this could help her deal with lack of traditional management experience.

It is also possible that day-to-day management could be an unrealized strength of Christine, as she has not had the opportunity to engage regularly in management practices. This might be something that Christine will be successful with, once she has the opportunity to practice it in the day-to-day operations of her position.

*4. What strengths should Christine seek from others that would complement her own and fill some gaps?*

Two potential areas stand out as skills that Christine should seek from others, both related to management. In her position, Christine does not necessarily involve herself with the fiscal operations involved in managing a non-profit organization. Even if there is a Chief Financial Officer for the organization, it would behoove Christine to obtain some experience in fiscal management. In terms of understanding the human relations factor (human resources management) involved in her role, Christine might seek additional training and certification in best practices in human resources, or also work with a qualified, employed individual with a background in human resources.