



Move Your Career 4word: Leading From Your Strengths

By Marion Medina

The following is based on a “Work, Love, Pray” podcast interview with Linda Valdez Thompson. To hear the entire conversation with Linda, be sure to listen to the second January 2024 episode.

An Introduction to Upskilling

In 2024 we’re going to focus on “upskilling” - that is, adding new skills to our professional toolboxes so we can move our careers forward. God has uniquely gifted women leaders with qualities that the world needs right now, and by adding new skills and honing our existing skills, we can be more readily available when God calls us to make a difference in our workplaces, our families, and the world.

This month we’re focused on discovering, developing, and deploying our strengths so we can lead more effectively and empower others to lead as well.

It all begins with being grounded.

A grounded leader is someone who is centered in a relationship with Jesus. Being grounded in Christ means spending time with Jesus in Scripture and in prayer so that we begin to see ourselves and others from his perspective. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we recognize who we were created to be, and we more readily recognize the talents that God has entrusted to us.

Being grounded does not mean being still all the time. It means that from the still center of an intimate relationship with Jesus, we can learn to navigate life and work in ways that actively bring hope and goodness to the world around us.

Linda Valdez Thompson defines a grounded leader as someone who has a firm foundation built on faith. Thompson says that a grounded leader is resilient in the face of challenges and not easily distracted by circumstances. In short, a grounded leader remains focused on the mission regardless of whatever else is happening.

Jesus explained being grounded this way:

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. ******When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” – Matthew 7:24-27

Strengths begin as talents.

Linda Valdez Thompson knows firsthand the difference that discovering your God-given talents can make. Linda describes her youth as “humble beginnings.” She grew up in a migrant family and made her way into a career in a male-dominated industry. Linda says she felt like an imposter much of the time in that environment. It was only when she discovered her talents and began developing them into strengths that she was able to change her mindset and focus on what she DID have rather than what she did not have. This was a huge shift for Linda that helped her rise to an EVP role reporting to the CEO.

How to turn a talent into a strength.

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Every person is gifted with certain God-given talents. Talents are innate, and you may not even recognize them as talents because they come naturally to you. Talents are part of who you are, but what you do with them is up to you. For a talent to become a strength, you need to utilize the three “D’s”: Discover, Develop and Deploy.

Discover - You can begin to identify your potential strengths by noticing what others affirm in you and by paying attention to the activities to which you are drawn. Take time to be mindful of the things that give you energy and bring you joy - these are clues about your strengths.

A great way to start discovering your strengths is to take an assessment like the Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment. This excellent tool can help you identify and name your God-given abilities.

Develop - It’s great to recognize that you have potential, but what you choose to do with your potential ultimately determines your success in life. Some people are aware that they are naturally talented in one area or another, but they don’t exert the effort to develop their natural talent. That’s a formula for wasted potential.

Linda offers the following advice for developing an unrefined talent:

1. *Gain more knowledge.* Learn all you can about your talent by reading books, listening to podcasts, and by taking advantage of training opportunities. Check with your employer to see if there are development dollars available to you, and then search out quality training programs in which to use them.
2. *Activate your knowledge.* Information that stays in your head will never become a fully developed strength. Watching a video or reading a book is inadequate for successfully engaging in a new activity. You need to activate learning by actually getting involved and experiencing the activity.
3. *Practice.* To develop a talent into a fully formed strength you need active practice. Rather than just doing the activity over and over, actively analyze where you need extra work. Get feedback from others and make adjustments. Your talents are already part of you, but you need to be intentional about the way you engage in active practice.

Deploy - Once you’ve discovered your strengths and worked to develop them, you need to put them to use in pursuit of a goal. This is where the rubber meets the road. It’s great to have talent and to develop a talent into a strength, but it’s equally important to determine how you will use that strength to benefit yourself and the world around you.

Linda suggests that you use your strengths to enhance your well-being through your career choices. Our careers can be expressions of who we are, so map out your career and be purposeful about pursuing influence so you can use your strengths for good.

Besides your career, Linda points out several other ways that you can benefit from combining your life’s goals with your strengths.

- **Financial:** When you know your strengths, you can better harness them to manage your finances.
- **Physical:** You can direct your strengths toward your physical well-being by creating exercise plans in which you can excel.
- **Altruistic:** You can do good for others and reap many personal benefits when you give back by choosing volunteer activities that utilize your strengths.



- Relational: When you know your strengths, you can build and nurture social bonds by engaging in group activities and using your strengths for the benefit of others.

Activating strengths builds stronger workplaces.

When you understand and embrace your strengths, you can stop competing and start helping others discover and develop their own strengths. And as a leader this will help the entire organization.

Research shows that employees who know and use their strengths are three times more likely to report an excellent work experience. And they are six times more likely to be engaged in their job and enjoy coming to work. When an organization allows its employees to operate in the areas of their strengths, interactions between employees are more positive and everyone is more creative and innovative.

Knowing and using your strengths is catalytic to your career, your relationships, and your faith journey. So, start the year right by discovering, developing and deploying yours!

Discussion Questions

1. Based on the section about being a grounded leader, on a scale of 1-5, how grounded are you? Explain your answer.
2. How do you understand the difference between a talent and a strength?
3. When it comes to your strengths, which of these areas needs the most attention: Discover, Develop, Deploy?
4. How might knowing and developing your strengths help you to appreciate other people more?
5. After thinking through this topic, how do you plan to use your strengths for doing good?



Linda Valdez Thompson is the former Executive Vice President of Administration and Diversity at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. She provided strategic leadership for Human Resources, Procurement and Materials Management, Risk Management, Business Diversity and Development, and Corporate Communications & Marketing. She is one of the highest-ranking Latinas in the airport industry.

Linda is also a strong advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and is committed to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce by implementing strategies that promote engagement and develop a culture of inclusion. She has established a Leadership Council, and numerous Employee Resource Groups and mentoring programs.

Linda is active in the community serving today as the Co-Chair for the H-100 Latina Giving Circle at Texas Women's Foundation. She has served on various community boards such as the United Way Tarrant County, American Heart Association, North Texas Commission, Visit Fort Worth, Tarrant County College Foundation, and is the Past President of DFW Hispanic 100. She is married and has one adult daughter.



Marion is the Director of Programs for 4word.

Marion served in pastoral ministry for 17 years at three local churches including, most recently, Willow Creek Community Church. During her church ministry, she incorporated her organizational development skills with her practical knowledge of effective discipleship to create growth strategies that focused on the equipping and mobilization of congregations on the mission of Jesus. She holds degrees from Trinity International University and Wheaton College in Organizational Leadership and Missional Church Movement.



***4word** is a global community of Christian women in the workplace. Our mission is to help women in the workplace reach their God-given potential with confidence.*

Why 4word?

At 4word, we know you want to reach your God-given potential so you can have a Kingdom impact on your workplace and the world. To do that, you need resources for professional and spiritual growth - and a community of like-minded women to cheer you on!

The problem is your time is limited and meaningful connections are hard to find. This can leave you feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and isolated on your life's journey.

We believe you shouldn't have to navigate work, life and faith on your own because God designed you for community. You are worthy to be surrounded by loving and supportive women who "get you."

We understand you face unique challenges as a Christian woman in the workplace, which is why we create easy-access opportunities for leadership development, spiritual growth, and connections to influential women around the globe.

Our Simple Empowerment Plan:

- Connect to a community – We offer virtual and in-person Community Groups specifically designed for working women – and we also have special groups for executive women.
- Access relevant content – 4word's podcast, blog, and our Community Group Discussion Guides are specifically geared to women in the workplace to help thrive on your journey.
- Get matched with a mentor – From our pool of over 220 amazing mentors we connect you with the right fit for a transformational mentoring experience through 4word's Mentor Program.



Join the Journey to empower 10 million Christian women in the workplace to change the world by 2030. Click the picture below to learn more.



Upcoming

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