

The Greatest Hiring/Recruiting/Retention Tool: StrengthBank®

Every Gifted, Struggling, and Ineffective Teacher Has the Same Sign-up and Retention “Button”

Every gifted, struggling, and ineffective teacher has the same sign-up and retention “button.” It is called StrengthBank®—every person’s perfectly designed bank of strengths that when used as designed provides fulfilling careers. The trick is to get that button pushed.—*There are plenty of students with the dream to teach school; our job is to nurture that dream, that passion for teaching through teachers that are themselves fulfilled and inspired.*

If we could offer teachers more money, we would have plenty of teacher candidates. Right? Companies try more money to motivate employees all the time. That works, does it not? Corporate America has even moved to sign-on bonuses. Is that helping? The answer to all of the above is No, that is, if you want a long-term solution for more effective teachers in the classroom. As the lifework of Kenneth Kovach of George Mason University (to name one) repeatedly affirms, money is not the first motivator for any successful person. Never has been and never will be. So, let us start off with the premise that more money would not solve this problem.

The answer to retention for gifted, struggling, and ineffective teachers begins with hiring and hiring begins with presenting an option too delicious for any gifted teacher to refuse, i.e., the real opportunity to teach the whole child and challenge the student to grow beyond ordinary expectation. This is the difference teachers are called to make in this world. For teachers to make such a difference, we need StrengthBank® high schools, that is, high performance high schools that foster every child reaching his or her unique potential through StrengthBank® discussion groups as a part of *The StrengthBank® for High Schools Character Initiative*.

From observing on the front lines in high schools over the last few years and having previously been a secondary school educator for 10 years, I am going to say straight out that some of the teachers we are “busting a gut” to retain are the ones we need to let go. Blasphemy, I know. How can I say that? Because I have witnessed many corporate layoff and downsizing “fixes” for a similar problem, that of weeding out the low performers and bringing in more high impact performers. I have found three things that come from these seemingly perfect solutions:

- A large percentage of those “downsized” get plugged into something better by being forced out of where they were.
- On the heels of downsizing comes hiring. In fact, much downsizing is to get rid of low performers to make room for proven talent (USA Today, May 15, 2001, “Companies hire even as they lay off”)
- New hires are brought on board without regard for what the candidate loves to do; instead, hiring remains weighted to the resume and the “dress-for-success” right answers in an interview. Thus, sluggish performance is often perpetuated rather than improved.

These private sector lessons should be brought to the public sector, i.e., education. We cannot be desperate for “warm bodies.”

The seedbed for future teachers is today's students along with community and business people who were talked out of going into teaching because the pay was not good enough. As a corporate speaker since 1984, I have had untold numbers of participants who, after learning that I spent so many years in the high school classroom, say something to this effect:

"You know, I always wanted to be a teacher but... everyone convinced me that I would be happier using my skills where they could make more money."

Many times by the time they tell me their story, they are so vested in their "job-for-the-money rut" that most do not have the courage to find a way out of it. (I am always reminded in these discussions of John D. Rockefeller's answer to the question, "How much money is enough?" His answer, "A little bit more.") These seminar participants remember the vision of what they would have loved to do but they can't quite "see" it again. The ones that can see it break out of the their "job-for-the-money rut" and are an inspirations such as:

- the man at NASA in Houston, Texas who realized his dream was to have an Alpaca ranch and now has a sizeable herd.
- the single mom from Orlando, Florida in her early 40's with three children who is going back to school to be a nurse.
- the postal worker from Tempe, Arizona who realized he lost his family when his job was split up and parceled out to other departments. He realized he has lost his passion so is leaving the postal service and its "golden" benefits package to go out on his own as a marketing consultant and digital designer. By finding himself again, he hopes to restore his marriage.

However, the success stories are too few in number.

The more numerous and typical examples are of missed career connections. The most recent comes from a seminar about how to manage, motivate, and lead a team. A young man named Kevin in his early 30's is miserable as a customer service manager. We began talking at a session break in reference to the StrengthBank® concept that reminds managers that people have a point of motivation; it is giving someone a job he or she loves to do. Kevin noted that he LOVES to work with at-risk kids. In fact, that is what he does in his off-hours. The more he talked about his teaching experience the more his face lit up (a sure sign that we are in StrengthBank® territory). began suggesting to him that he could once again live his StrengthBank® dream full time; there is a need for those inspired to work with at-risk students. As he thought about it after the session he emailed me his frustration about not feeling like he could now let go of the corporate job... many stress related health problems and the killer comment at the bottom of his email read:

"... You know, Sandra, I use [sic] to be very outgoing. I was the life of the party. When we go out my wife tells me I am no fun anymore. I have been in this funk for so long I don't know how to get out of it. I have tried a bunch of things, the gym, playing ball, my kids, but the drain on me keeps me from involving myself like I would like."

This story is all too familiar and I have heard it in some form or other every time I present StrengthBank® strategies for almost 20 years and in 14 countries. There is something that can be done about it so that there are less not more of these heartbreaking stories. **There are plenty of people with the dream to be a teacher.**

Here are three solutions for having more and better teachers in our high school classroom:

Solution #1

Stop talking to kids about their future in terms of the money they can earn in today's market; instead, start talking to kids about their future in terms living:

- their dream.
- their passion.
- their StrengthBank® alive and making a difference.

Help them to develop that passion. "Pursuit of happiness" is stated in our declaration of independence, not pursuit of money. Our forefathers understood that money is the fruit of that pursuit not the first reason for it.

Solution #2

Give teachers a simple way to affect how the student relates to others. Give them a simple methodology to teach strong character-building relationship skills in the process of getting clarity on each student's unique dream. "The StrengthBank® for High Schools Character Initiative" (offered at no cost to schools by StrengthBank Inc.) sets up a specified time during the school day for frequent, regular StrengthBank® small groups. The program inspires kids to stick with their dreams regardless of the paycheck. Each StrengthBank® is pre-designed to a specific need that will evoke the necessary life rewards. High school faculty alongside community, and business volunteers facilitate these groups.

Teachers are demoralized daily when they must encourage students to feel good about "self" rather than encourage them to accept the challenges presented by pursuing each one's highest potential, i.e., each one's StrengthBank® potential.

Seeing students directed and engaged in their passions for the future is what keeps teachers teaching and loving it in spite of sometimes tough teaching situations. Any career has difficulties; the key to sticking with it is that the individual loves the job activity itself! People who love their jobs get along well with others in the work environment.

Solution #3

Get teacher dropouts - teachers who decided not to teach - back into the classrooms. By bringing business and community leaders back into the classroom to mentor kids, they themselves will be inspired to:

- "come on back" to a teaching career.
- come out of retirement to a teaching career.
- replace their current vocation with a more satisfying teaching career.

In the process of their mentoring kids in the small StrengthBank® groups, community and business leaders will mentor themselves as they inevitably apply the StrengthBank® principles to themselves.

Why It Works

How do I know that getting adults back into schools in a meaningful way works? Because that is what happened to me. When my dad became ill, I needed to find a way to stay in town to help my mother through his long, agonizing illness and subsequent death. I began to substitute teach. I did not know if I “still had it” to teach high school but surely I could substitute.

Every day that I walked into the high schools, I found myself uplifted and energized. I have always loved teenagers and enjoyed their antics as they plod through high school, way too “cool” to act like it matters. One day a student hollered at me half way down the hall, “There’s the coolest substitute ever!” For me, that was a powerful reminder. Kids connect with adults who are gifted at working with and teaching kids... the gift or the “calling” never goes away. We need gifted teachers in the classroom. Exposure to the students themselves will bring the gifted teachers back.

The problem has been that we educators have not had a specific way to reach out beyond our own academic discipline effectively. Now, StrengthBank® strategies are providing a simple, specific way to show kids how to find their passion and not lose it in the tangle of relationship pressures and without denting the attention to academic disciplines. StrengthBank® accomplishes relationship skills learning without “preaching to kids” thus “turning them off” or making them learn a curriculum filled with diagnostic tests and thus “killing the experience” by reducing it to just another academic exercise required to get a diploma. Academic skills cannot alone prepare a child to survive well in the jungle of life. Character-building relationship skills can be learned alongside academic disciplines.

Teachers who are able to work with high school students on this higher StrengthBank® relationship plane will find themselves fulfilled. *These are the teachers we want to increase in number.* Those that do not find fulfillment in nurturing kids are not in their StrengthBank® and are the ones that should be doing something else, something related to their true StrengthBank®.

No magic, no bandaides - just cures. We are talking long-term cures for an ailing system that is not recruiting enough of its gifted to come to the classroom. Just imagine who we might have coming into the ranks of teaching within the next four years if all those who dream to teach actually pursue a teaching career. We would have a healthy start to true teacher recruitment and retention!

Long-term Benefits

The long-term benefits of having StrengthBank®-inspired teachers are multifold.

- Increased wages for teachers. The community now sees up close and personal the fine people dedicated to teaching our young in the path they should follow. They will be more likely to vote in a salary increase for a job well done.
- Fewer misfits at the education recruiting door.
- Students become focused on their passions so that educators have a calmer environment in which to do the job they are called then trained and equipped to do.
- Principals spend a large percentage of time giving awards rather than expelling troublemakers.

- Teachers are connected to the heart of who they are teaching; they no longer are limited to teaching only academics. Good teachers love kids. Sure they love a particular academic discipline, but they love even more to witness kids graduating from high school well-rounded in academics and directed to unique StrengthBank® positive and productive goals.

Every person was given a God-designed StrengthBank® at birth. It is perfectly designed for a need in the world. Pursuing a career using a person's unique StrengthBank® will render a living that will meet personal needs and a career that is fulfilling. That is the way it has always been.

Sandra A. Shelton, BA, MEd, President/CEO for StrengthBank Inc. - a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation providing teacher character-building relationships strategies for high school students (*The StrengthBank® For High Schools Character Initiative* www.strengthbankinc.org). StrengthBank® strategies bridge the relationship gap between today's and tomorrow's workforce by bringing the two worlds together for meaningful conversations on a regular basis during the high school academic day.