

Tom Rath: I think on average right now, the average person in the US, their health is probably worse off because of the job that they're in today. On average. You just put everything together. And so I think there's a big opportunity to improve human health and wellbeing just by kind of fixing the relationship that we have with our work.

Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth, and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer and I chat with world class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity and helping others to do the same.

Welcome to the Elevate podcast. Today's quote is from Simon Sinek and it is "Focusing on our own strength is in fact what makes us strong." Our guest today Tom Rath researches the role of human behavior in business, health and wellbeing. He then writes incredibly interesting, insightful, bestselling books about it, including his number one New York Times bestseller, How full is your bucket?, Are You Fully Charged, and StrengthsFinders 2.0, which was listed by Amazon as the top selling nonfiction book of all time. Tom, very excited to have you here. Welcome to Outperform.

Tom Rath: Thanks so much. It's a pleasure to talk with you today.

Robert Glazer: So I found your books and research to be fascinating. I recently retook the StrengthsFinders test, which is now called the Clifton StrengthsFinders test named after your grandfather, who is a psychologist, I think, Donald Clifton, former chairman of Gallup. Your grandfather was deemed the father of strengths-based psychology and the grandfather of positive psychology, I think by the American Psychological Association. I'm assuming he was part of your inspiration and research, but how did you end up getting into this field and either inheriting or sort of improving upon his passion?

Tom Rath: You know, I was the oldest grandchild in a big extended family and as a kid lived right nearby Don and his wife Shirley, and they were both kind of a second set of parents and teachers to me as I grew up as a kid. And I grew up as a child in a house full of psychologists and teachers, actually. I started off, my first real role in this thing was being a Guinea pig. So I was the little kid who was trying all the inkblot tests and the-

Robert Glazer: You were over-analyzed as a kid.

Tom Rath: Yeah, I was over-analyzed as a child and so I guess it was inevitable, where I'd end up. And in all seriousness it was... They were always trying new approaches to, I mean obviously when I was a kid, I heard the how full is your bucket story and kind of theory and idea and that was practiced in my household and my family was always trying to figure out what my strengths were really early on and encouraging me to invest more time there when I was a kid and it was kind of revolutionary back then. My mother and my grandfather Don would tell me

not to worry about areas where I was struggling with in school because I didn't experience much success and I didn't like it. It was kind of a unique childhood.

And then when I graduated from college, to kind of make a long story short, one of the opportunities I had was to go do some research with my grandfather and this was around 1998 when the Internet was just starting to emerge and kind of blow up, and one of the questions he and I had been talking about was he'd been doing these interviews of human talents for 20 or 30 years at that point, but they'd been in person interviews that took an hour, hour and a half or telephone based interviews in more recent years. And one thing we just wondered aloud with a group of teams at Gallup was can we convert this to something online so we can reach even more people? And in those early days we sat around and Don said, "Do you think we could ever reach 10,000 people with this?" That was one of our big stretch goals in those early years, so it's fun for me to have a chance like now to look back and see how far that's come since then.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, and what you said before, that is not what my parents or teachers ever said growing up. I think for 99% of people, in fact, when I talk to a lot of particularly entrepreneurs or people who are very creative or business people, there's kind of a lot of pain in that. There's a guy, Dave Randell, he's a great speaker on something called The Freak Factor and he's really tall and wears pink shoes and he said all in school, he was told to sit down and shut up. And if anyone ever told him he could make \$10,000 an hour standing up and talking to audiences, he would've said, "Yeah, I want to do that. I want to be that." So, I mean, that was very progressive for that era. Do you think we're making any progress in terms of personalization, particularly in today's sort of achievement and standards driven culture?

Tom Rath: You know, I don't know. I'm now in this situation, I've got a daughter who's 10 years old and a son who's eight and it's hard to stick to some of those core beliefs and things that I was taught on on many days. I'll admit that. But you know, it is interesting. It's been fun for me to see how more and more school programs are saying, how do you look at each young person as an individual and of course teach them the value of hard work and everyone needs to learn some universal concepts and some universal history and science and math and reading and the like, but how can you try and help each person over time, at least have a little bit of time each day to explore areas where they could excel more than ten other people or maybe more than a hundred other people eventually. So I think keeping that mindset in there that you're trying to find very unique talents that could be compounded over time, that's the real challenge for teachers and parents alike.

Robert Glazer: Is there sort of a time period do you think when we should be really in that sort of experimentation and exposure with kids to shifting into, hey, now we're starting to really see some patterns here and why don't we lean into what works and pull away from what doesn't.

Tom Rath: Boy, that's a fun way to think about it or a smart way to think about it that you just suggested, about a time period. Because what I'm observing myself and when I look at a lot of the research that I've reviewed over the years, I think in those early kind of grade school years as formative period, there may even need to be more exposure to a lot of elements than you see right now. Or to your point, things have gotten so competitive today where my daughter at 10 years old is probably way too old to ever be a great swimmer because that all happened by age six in this day and age, right?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Tom Rath: So some of those have already narrowed in so much that kids feel like they have to narrow too fast. So there probably is a process of learning about areas and essentially litmus testing where you might have some potential and some curiosity and some desire and some skill.

But then in my experience, there's probably a period, I would say late high school and in particular the earliest years of college, where we start to go in the wrong direction the other way where it's encouraging kids to have this total breadth and to try to be a little bit good at everything, when in reality that's probably a period in life where you need to start honing in on what you could be great at and enjoy doing over time. And most importantly, what I've been thinking about lately is how can you start to zone in in your last years of high school, first years of college on a place where you could really make a positive contribution in the world that helps other people in a real practical way?

Robert Glazer: Yeah. Well, we'll talk about actually who's, I don't want to put the cart before the horse about maybe where this is sort of permeating outside of businesses, but at a high level, can you just explain for everyone what the Clifton StrengthsFinder test is and how it can help them? I guess what it can do and what it can't.

Tom Rath: Yeah, and a lot of that research actually started, and I mentioned, I began working with Don on this in 1998 roughly. And the first project we were working on, it was actually kind of a StrengthsFinder for students that we called StrengthsQuest. And so we were trying to think about if you have a freshman in college in particular, and she's thinking about, "Well, what should I study? How can I make friends on this new campus? What are all the common talents that could manifest itself in almost anyone? So that's where we went through all the thousands of interviews that Don had developed and used over the years and said, "What are some of the questions we can test in order to determine the most consistent and reliable themes of talent across a population? Not just for great teachers or great sales people, for example."

That's what we've been working on in assembling the StrengthsFinder assessment. And what we were trying to do there is say, "Relative to these 34," it was originally almost 40 themes and we finally narrowed down to 34, "Relative those 34 themes of human talent, how do you stack up against

yourself?" So that's what the Clifton StrengthsFinder is, is really an intrapersonal comparison of how those talents stack up within you. It's not saying if you have Achiever as your number one theme that you have more Achiever than the person sitting next to you who also has Achiever in their top five. It's more a way of kind of stacking who you are from the inside out. I think it's a very good tool for serving as a basis point for self discovery and self development. What it's not, to your other part of the question, is it really wasn't designed to be a comparative tool to say this person has more talent for this role, another person has more talent for that given role and so forth.

Robert Glazer: Great. And I know people probably ask this question a lot, but what differentiates the Clifton Strengths from assessments like DISC or Myers-Briggs?

Tom Rath: You know, in the early years when we were putting it together, I'm sure a lot of us who were involved with the development, we were familiar with the Myers-Briggs in particular. It had been used for a long time and it was very widespread and common. And in my own experience, I know a lot of people, from a psychometric standpoint, we'd question and debate some of the research behind it and that's its own parlor game.

But it creates pretty good conversation about broad types and buckets that people can talk about in one on one conversations, they can talk about in groups. And as we started to put all this research into one big database around the talents that Don and Gallup had been studying, what we realized was that we had, because he'd spent 30 years studying great salespeople, great teachers, great nurses, great truck drivers, top students and people who excelled in all these areas, essentially we were able to create a much more detailed and specific taxonomy of human talents.

And we were also trying to look at over time, what are the elements of someone's personality or talent that are less malleable over time? So if you take that today and you take StrengthsFinders six months later, what are the things that are more reliable and measured from time one to time two versus being situational? So those are a few ways that I think it's differentiated itself as something kind of unique from a lot of the tools that are out there.

Robert Glazer: All right, so what are your top five?

Tom Rath: You know, I've, especially back in the early days, I took it 10 or 15 times. When you're ranking three or four elements of anything, even if two or three stay the same, that's kind of a statistical miracle, where our research is now. But my consistent top three are always Futuristic and Intellection and Analytical, and then the themes were Later and Learner and a few others usually come in right behind that there.

Robert Glazer: But they've moved around a little bit as you've taken it?

Tom Rath: A little bit. Yeah, I can always see what's going on behind the scenes. So usually what happens is if someone takes it once and they take it again a year or two later, you'll have two or three on average out of the five stay the same and the ones that fall out are really in the top 10 usually when we look at it. It's rare to see grand changes unless you have some major life event or you take it 10 years apart. Then there might be some more variance.

Robert Glazer: Can you give some examples on how you have kind of awareness of those principles and how you've applied it in your own life in terms of where you've chosen to focus and do and not to do? I'm sure in the writing all the books, it was right into your Analytical and Futuristic. But a lot of times I think for people it's as much about what they shouldn't do as what they should do, right?

Tom Rath: Right. Yeah. Well, the thing that was helpful for me when I was working on the book Strengths Based Leadership in particular, we looked at, so back to our conversation about where do you need to be when do you want to be well rounded and when do you want to be really sharp and spiky and great in one area. When we looked at what the most effective teams have in common, teams do need to be well rounded, just like individuals essentially don't, in the career world. And what teams really need to thrive and grow and stay together over time is someone who's good at building relationships. I took that for the first time and I think I had maybe one of my themes in there have relationships. On leadership teams, at least that I've worked with, in Western cultures, they are lacking in that relationship area so much. It's hard to describe.

So that was a good learning for me to say, you know, anytime I join a team, I need to look around and say, "Who can be five or 10 times better than Tom at building relationships and making sure we go do fun team activities and we're communicating about what's going on in our lives?" Because I'll just walk into a meeting and get right to business and brush past some of that stuff that really matters a lot.

So I've learned a lot from that team research about how to surround myself in areas of relationships. And another example, I know one of my bottom themes is harmony. And so I'm not sitting around making sure that no one's offended either when we're talking, I'm trying to crack through things as fast as possible. And so I need to have awareness of those elements because I do believe that it's important to be aware of blind spots as well, and to know what you're not going to bring to the team.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. And you know, when I've been in a facilitated session around StrengthsFinders or DISC or otherwise, when I've loved the exercise and when the facilitator does is kind of like, "Okay so this sort of project or opportunity comes up. Who in the room wants to do it?" And you start to see, tied to the strength of the personality of who wants to do and who doesn't want to do it. And it makes you think about, in the course of an organization, who you ask to do things and he was saying like, "Oh look, if you want an idea for a new project, you're going to ask these people. If you want someone to get it started, you're

going to ask these people." And it just starts to really be clear. I think a lot of times our own strengths bias us and we assume that, "Oh, well, no one would want to do that." Or we've even done Delegate and Elevate exercises, and people are shocked at like the thing that they want to take off their plate, someone else is desperate to put on their plate. And I always find that interesting.

Tom Rath: Yeah, I think you're right that one of the things I did has taken me aback, because I've studied teams and leadership groups in particular over the last decade, is that the biggest deficit among most teams is that people just don't know exactly what they're supposed to be doing as a member of that team. They don't have clear expectations. And so if you can have a conversation early on when you're bringing a team together or adding new people to the team and level set and say, "Here's what I think I could contribute most and here's where I think I could make a difference." And what you find is that you have a lot of people moving in the right directions without overlapping efforts and so forth over time. If you just take whether it's a half hour or an hour and have a good level setting conversation about people's talents and what they want to do and where they think they can have the most substantive contribution.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. There there's some data around that. Daniel Coyle wrote this great book called The Culture Code and he talked about belonging in an organization. He had this, I don't know if you read it, the story of where this call center actually split new hire orientation, and in one they sort of put a sweatshirt with their name versus their name and the company's name and talked about how they could connect to the company's mission and changed like 15 minutes of the onboarding to be more about them and how they can kind of contribute to the team and show up and they were all shocked six or 12 months later when the turnover of that group for just wording it all a different way was much lower than the control group.

Tom Rath: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. It's remarkable what a difference that can make with new teams.

Robert Glazer: So it's even the act of doing it, right? Even just when you start-

Tom Rath: Right.

Robert Glazer: Even if you don't act on it, which you should because again, it needs exercise. It becomes really clear, hey, if I need a group to go brainstorm, then I probably want the people who were good at that and then they're probably not the people that go execute on it. It's probably a different group of people.

Tom Rath: Yeah. In addition to relationship use. I mean, I've personally learned the hard way where if I'm on a team with four or five people and they're expecting me to be the person who's making sure things get kind of sold and closed and new business like that, boy, that team is gonna starve pretty quickly. Right? I think

there are those kind of big areas about... All teams have to build relationships. They need to influence and kind of sell why their mission is important to the world. They need to innovate and have some good strategy and so forth, and they need to operate or execute and I have yet to see a task or an outcome or dependent variable where this doesn't apply. If they're not doing those four things, they're really open to a big blind spot there.

Robert Glazer: All right, well now I'll put you in the hot seat. As I told you before we started, we recently did a whole company exercise and I had mine redone and I knew them from the past, but really I spent like a day with it. So you have any guesses on top five?

Tom Rath: This one might seem too easy to start with, but I'm going to start with Communication.

Robert Glazer: No, but there's a closely associated one.

Tom Rath: Ideation.

Robert Glazer: No, I was surprised about that one too.

Tom Rath: What about Relater?

Robert Glazer: Yeah, that was number one.

Tom Rath: That was number one. All right. One out of three. That's not bad. What else did you have in there?

Robert Glazer: But those are similar. I had Relator, Activator, Command, Focus and Responsibility. Interestingly in that like, and they can be six, seven, eight, nine, but not as many in the strategic bucket as I would've thought of. But what was interesting for me was, well a couple of things. One was, there was a synopsis. It said kind of what you give and what you bring. And I thought that was really accurate and I was trying to see whether they felt right, but there was a section on there, I don't remember the wording, but what you don't like or what kind of takes your energy. And as I went through all the ones on on that, I was like, "If you were to make that into a person that would be like my mortal enemy." but I would really, really, really not like that person.

I always find that the contrast sometimes when you're talking about core values, people trying to figure out their core values. I'm like, "Picture the opposite and then you're in a conversation with that person." Like does it have to be over right away? So I did think that that was interesting.

The second one was around the Focus one, given that I have been diagnosed with ADD, focus is sometimes a contra-indicator, but it is that I'm very good at focusing. But if I get distracted from my task, then I'm often not good at going

back to it. So it really said, "Hey, you need a lot of, you need kind of quiet time and space." And that's actually something that my coach had told me too, that he thought I just needed more quiet time. So that one was... Across the board, it was actually really interesting.

Tom Rath: You know, that's the thing, the part about Focus that's fascinating to me because when you go back to the items we created that kind of scored and went into Focus, that's really about being good at focus when you're in that zone. It's not saying you're great at just on a whim, just tune everything out and doing that all the time. It's when you do it, you're really good at it. Which gets harder and harder to do in this day and age. So it's interesting. You're right, that's more about depth of focus and breadth.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. I think for me, the guys from 37signals I think coined this REM work. You know, like REM sleep?

Tom Rath: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Glazer: If I get two to three hours uninterrupted, I'm often able to do what most people do in two days. Therefore, the cost of being interrupted is fairly high as you were saying.

Tom Rath: Absolutely.

Robert Glazer: Because I just get deep into it.

Tom Rath: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's cool.

Robert Glazer: So how does understanding this help individuals and companies improve their ability and build capacity? What is it that the company needs to do with this information and what is it that the individual needs to do with this innovation? Information, sorry.

Tom Rath: Yeah. You know, at the individual level... To me, I mean I'm, one of my top strengths is analytical and so I'm kind of a numbers guy at heart. And if you think about it from a simple distribution of time and math standpoint, if I spend all of my time in a given day trying to be a little bit good at everything, that just statistically eliminates my chances of being great at anything.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Tom Rath: Because I didn't focus on practice and repetition and doing something at a level of excellence. And so I think at an individual level, we've got to think about are we just spreading ourselves thin so we can keep our head above water? Which is kind of the default and easier to do nowadays. Or are we taking at least some time in a given week to make a deep investment in something that we think can make a difference for people over time and we think we can be really good at

and make a real positive contribution to society. So that's the individual part of it.

At a company level, and I've even go up to a kind of a macroeconomic level, I would argue that one of the greatest opportunities in the next 25 years for businesses is just kinda fixing the huge arbitrage between the jobs that are available out there today and people who are not in the right jobs right now.

I think if we can even get the overall fit between a person's talents and the jobs that are out there, if that could be 20% better across a large company, for example, it has enormous implications for productivity and for employee wellbeing and for retention and all kinds of outcomes that I've seen and studied. I mean, people are happier. They get more done in less time when they're in that kind of zone of focusing on strengths. And of course, there are always going to be times in all of our careers where early on in your work life where you have to do a job that you know is, you might be doing it primarily for a paycheck and you enjoy it for 10% of the time, but eventually you kind of keep inching in the right direction, and sometimes you end up a decade or two later in a spot where you're enjoying it half the time or whatever it might be.

But I think we've got to get to the point. One of my really good friends and someone I've admired for many years is a guy named Jeff Pfeffer at Stanford who's been a professor there for a long time and he just wrote a book called *Dying for a Paycheck*. And boy does that bring it home for me because I think on average right now, the average person in the US, their health is probably worse off because of the job that they're in today. On average. You just put everything together. And so I think there's a big opportunity to improve human health and wellbeing just by kind of fixing the relationship that we have with our work. And so that's kind of why I choose to spend all my time trying to kind of get people done through work essentially.

Robert Glazer: No, it's a great point. And is that because they're in the wrong company, like, culturally, or I guess it could be both or they're just not doing the right things? Do you have a sense of that from what he was focused on?

Tom Rath: Well, yeah, I mean there are a few aspects there. There's a lot of people who are in the wrong jobs, who are... I mean all, almost every company I've worked with is still guilty of if somebody continues to excel in a sales or marketing role, you finally promote them to manage people. And that's probably the last thing most people are really talented at selling should be doing today. And so you see that play out time and time again, so you have people in the wrong roles. The other element is, when I've gone back and studied this, we kind of evolved in our economy, at least here in Western economies, from this industrial mindset where it was a fixed fee for hours of labor and kind of a command and control relationship between management and hourly workforce isn't alike, and I think we're still kind of trying to get out from under that and recover from that to a degree where most companies have, they're finally starting to figure out, are our employees engaged emotionally and are we getting as much out of our

Tom Rath: I still hear leaders say we're trying to figure out if we get as much out of our people as we can. But ironically, there are not many companies, if any, big ones at least, who could prove to me right now that their people are better off because they work for that company, if that makes any sense.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Tom Rath: And so I think we've got to turn that equation around a little bit and, we've got a generation coming into the workforce now who is really unlikely to accept that kind of monetary bribe knowing their life's getting worse. And so I think it'll change over time and expectations will change. I just don't know if it'll take 10 years or 25.

Robert Glazer: interesting. And you touched a little bit on this before, but I'm curious, do you think people and leaders should focus on improving their weaknesses?

Tom Rath: I think they should be very aware of their weaknesses. Personally, I think that telling people to ignore their weaknesses is reckless advice at best. I would never advocate that someone should just ignore their weaknesses and only focus on their strengths. Right?

Robert Glazer: It needs to be a known weakness, right? That that's the issue.

Tom Rath: Correct. Right. Yeah, you need to know where your weaknesses are and you need to figure out how do you surround yourself with the right people to manage that, how do you create more awareness and systems to make sure that your weaknesses aren't derailing you regularly.

You know, when I asked people about the most memorable experiences they've had from a leadership development standpoint in particular, they often point to some of those settings where they've been observed or they've had 360 degree peer rating feedback and they've realized some things that they haven't been able to see and no one's had the courage to tell them for many years. So I think there's a place for that. It's just we've kind of got the balance wrong where a lot of the performance feedback over the years, you've had an 80% focus on what you need to fix and 20% focus on what you're doing right. And it's probably better just to flip that around. If you look at all the research that followed from positive psychology, you kind of need a four to one ratio in the other direction where you've got 75% of the time on reviewing victories and focusing on how you can do more of what you do well and 25% of the time on how you manage your weaknesses.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, and what's interesting is when we did that advanced leadership session, we did a 360 leadership exercise and then we did StrengthsFinders the next day and we had people kind of look at it all together and we did some stuff on core values and yeah, their weaknesses were usually the opposite of their strengths. So it's all connected and so again, I think they just had to understand

where their strength became a weakness. That's probably, I think the word mitigate with weaknesses is better than either spending time on it or avoiding it. Again, if you avoid it then, then you don't know and it's got the potential to hurt you.

Tom Rath: Right. Yeah. That's a good way to think about it, mitigating.

Robert Glazer: All right. Let's switch gears a bit. We talked a little bit about, you've written six New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestsellers, which is quite an achievement. But it was your first book, *How Full Is Your Bucket?*, you actually coauthored with your grandfather in the final year of his life. What was that experience like and how did it affect your trajectory as an author?

Tom Rath: Oh, it was the only reason I have any trajectory as an author to start with.

Robert Glazer: Had he written any books?

Tom Rath: He'd written a book before. But he was actually more in my world where he was a researcher and more comfortable with numbers than the writing stuff. But Don and I were extremely close and about a year or two after we started working on *StrengthsFinder*, I found out that he had Stage IV gastroesophageal cancer and I immediately said, "I'm going to set aside everything I'm doing work-wise and just focus on going around the country with Don to figure out how we could keep him alive longer." And I had been personally battling cancer since I was 16 so I had already accumulated a lot of knowledge on the topic. So as we built binders full of research on everything you should be doing and flew around to Mayo Clinic and Houston and all these other places, we started talking about some of his most important life learnings.

And I remembered while we were in Houston that I used to go listen to Don talk about this different bucket metaphor, an idea, when I was a little kid. And one of the things he always said in that talk was that he thought it was crazy that we wait to eulogize people until after they die. He said, "Why do we wait to celebrate people until after they're gone?" And so I stayed up for several nights and I always thought of myself as a math guy and I was told to not taking any writing courses in college by my high school English teacher, as background. And so I thought, "I know that I'm not comfortable sharing my writing, but I need to tell Don everything he's meant to me and what he's done." And so I wrote him a 10, 12 page handwritten letter, and I handed it to, it took me some courage, honestly, to hand it to him because I was so un-proud of my writing.

But I handed that letter to him. And of course I'm glad I did. He was deeply moved emotionally and we talked about it a lot. But what surprised me was he came back to me two days later and said, "You know, I've been studying this letter and reading it and rereading it." And he said, "I think you have a talent for bringing things to life with words." And I kind of looked at him and said, "What?" And he said, "I think you could help me to write a book about this

different bucket thing I've been talking about." And I looked at him a little puzzled and kept listening and he said, "Do you think we could do that? And you think we could do that in the next two months?"

And I don't think, under any other circumstances I would not have come close to a project like that. I wouldn't have wanted to. I wouldn't have had the courage to. But one person that's still probably one of only people who has said to me, "You have a talent for bringing things alive with words and writing. Try this."

I mean, I had been through StrengthsFinder 15 times at that point and I'd done all the little tests as a kid. No one ever suggested writing. Don said he noticed something and I figured this is a once in a lifetime time to spend time with my grandfather and learn from him and asking him about what he's learned over his lifetime. And so we just plowed forward as quickly as we could. And we were able to keep down alive another 12, 14 months, even though doctors originally thought he only had couple of months. And we were able to finish your first draft of that book before he passed away. So that's really, to your question, that's what got me into it and there's no way I would have written any subsequent books if not for Don identifying something there and challenging me in a really unique and meaningful way.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. There's a friend of mine, Dr Malik Muhammad, he's got this formula. He says that change equals connection plus challenge. It sounds like a similar thing here and that it's actually the people who connect with us and challenge that are able to get us to do things that we didn't think we could do. So you said you finished the draft, so had you sold the book or how did the book then actually get to market after?

Tom Rath: Oh yeah. It's interesting. So Don and I, where we started with the StrengthsFinder thing was we were working on a book for college freshmen so they could figure out what to major in and how to make friends on campus, and that was before any of the books around StrengthsFinder were released. And so Don and I had gone out to Maryland and found a place that printed books because we were sending them right to the college bookstores. So we realize all of a sudden that the costs of printing a book is like \$1.50 for a paperback roughly. Or it was at the time. And we figured we could just print these ourselves and send them to the bookstores and then we're don't have to pay all these distributors and book retailers and so forth. And it was a much higher margin project, essentially.

So we'd been printing our own books with the book called StrengthsQuest back then that he wrote with an academic, a guy named Chip Anderson at UCLA. And that's what gave us the idea to say, "Is there any chance we could do this with more of a popular business nonfiction book?" And so we got our teams together and figured out how to make all that happen with the real distribution, with a large national distributor and so forth. And that was the first book that Gallup Press published. And we've published many, many books after that. And it led to a great track of bestselling business books after that. And it gave us a lot more

flexibility and control over what we wanted to do with that content, with all of our programs and assessments and everything else. So that was kind of a fun learning along the way as well.

Robert Glazer: That sounds like a great start. Do you have any plans for your next book? Is it in process or do you know what it'll be?

Tom Rath: Yeah, I've been working on some new material and some new tools and applications that are kind of about how people can be more diagnostic in determining how their work makes specific contributions to other people. I've had a couple of influential conversations recently on this topic and my initial research on it was in part driven by just a lot of reflection and thinking on my favorite quote of all time from Dr. King where he said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is what are you doing for others?" And I wake up almost every day and when I'm walking my kids to school or driving to my office, I try and ask myself that question. How am I orienting my effort today about what I can do that will make a difference for other people? And how can I see that and make sure it happens?

And it helps me to ensure that I'm working on things that will really make a difference potentially a year from now, 10 years from now or longer, and not just kind of responding to the demands of the day. So I'm trying to find ways to help people do more of that. It was interesting. I watched a commencement speech a couple of years ago and then had a conversation with a brilliant guy, Ben Horowitz, who was one of the founders of Andreessen Horowitz, and he gave, if anyone listening has a chance to check it out, it's on YouTube, a commencement talk at Columbia, where he made the really eloquent case that graduates should focus their time on finding their greatest contribution instead of focusing on their own passions.

So that's where a lot of the work I've been writing about and working on is headed. It's about how can you orient your talents and how can you orient your daily efforts towards specific contributions they have towards other people, because in the whole world of business books and self help, I think we've done a pretty good job of spending enough time focusing inward and people need some help in focusing on how their efforts are reaching other people. Because in addition to helping to guide what you do each day, it makes your work a lot more meaningful when you can see the actual influence it has on someone you serve.

Robert Glazer: That is a great perspective and one that really resonates with me. There's a quote, I don't know who said it, but something about sort of lift while you climb and that one of the reasons to improve is to help pull other people up with you on your journey.

Tom Rath: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Glazer: All right, so last question that I'd like to ask. What's a personal or professional mistake, it could be singular or repeated, that you have learned the most from in your career?

Tom Rath: Boy, that's a good one. I think one of the mistakes that I've learned the most from is especially early on in my career when I was younger is being too cautious and too.. Politically correct is the wrong word, but essentially not putting yourself out there enough. And one of the things that we talked about, how it [inaudible 00:35:59] a little bit, but boy, that forced me in the opening pages to share a very personal story about losing my grandfather who was kind of my best friend and mentor. And it forced me to share a personal story about my own battles with cancer and losing an eye when I was young and a lot of things that I wouldn't have even told, like, five people that worked around me that any of those things that occurred if not for having to write that publicly in a book.

So that helped me to understand a lot of the concepts, and it's since been researched really well, about vulnerability and disclosure pretty well. So I've learned that if you want business to be meaningful and work to be effective, you've got to make it personal. You've got to have work that makes your family better, that makes you a better parent, and if you're not there yet, I think it's important to take some risks so you're at least on a path to get there in the next 10 years.

Robert Glazer: That is wise advice, and thank you for sharing. Tom, where can people get ahold of you and your work?

Tom Rath: Most of it's at tomrath.org and through all the books that are out there online.

Robert Glazer: Okay, great. Tom, it's been an honor talking with you. Your work and research on employee engagement, discovering strengths, leadership and wellbeing are all things I know I'm very passionate about and you've done an amazing job bringing that research to the forefront and writing about it in a really interesting way. So thank you for all the work you've done and for joining us today.

Tom Rath: Thank you. It's been a fun conversation. I appreciate it.

Robert Glazer: To our listeners, thanks for tuning in to the Elevate podcast. We'll include links to Tom as well as to as books on the episode page at robertglazer.com. If you enjoyed today's episode, I'd really appreciate it if you could leave us a review as it helps new users discover the show. If you're listening in Apple Podcasts, just scroll right down to the bottom of the episode page to leave your review. And if you're listening in a browser or on a different app, you can find easy links to review on other services such as Google Play, Stitcher, and more by following the link on the subscribe page under the podcast link at robertglazer.com. Thanks again for your support and until next time, keep elevating.