



# REDEFINING HIGH PERFORMANCE

SIX PRINCIPLES THAT EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE TO DO THEIR BEST WORK

WRITTEN BY

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# AN INTRODUCTION

## OUR POINT OF VIEW

Pretty much every leader wants high performance in the workplace. We can't remember the last time that we heard a leader sharing her goals of achieving only average or moderate performance. High performance is a tagline added to everything imaginable, from cars to coffee (no, really). So wouldn't it be great if everyone understood how to empower people to be high performers?

We've found six principles that guide our thinking in designing and developing solutions for high performance. They are accessible, practical ways of thinking about performance, powered by scientific findings from social psychology, cognitive science, applied behavioral science, and neuroscience.

Let's go into detail about each principle, sharing research and examples to help illustrate what these principles look like in action. You'll also find the books that we've found represent some of the best thinking on the topics. Keep reading to discover new ways of thinking about performance and see how this fresh perspective can impact your organization's performance.

## THE PRINCIPLES



### EXPERIENCE DRIVEN

To provide meaningful context.



### LEADER LED

To inspire and engage people.



### STRENGTHS BASED

To build momentum and positive ROI.



### BRAIN FOCUSED

To work with (not against) the mind.



### CULTURE CALIBRATED

To develop the right strategies.



### PERFORMER CENTERED

To drive and accelerate performance.



*Experience driven.*

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*Thinking about the  
full experience of a  
performance solution.*

# EXPERIENCE DRIVEN.

## PERFORMANCE AT THE MOMENT OF NEED IS VITAL.

**Creating an experience to make that happen helps people behave and act differently for the right reasons.**

**Experiences** are not the same as **events**. It's great when employees attend a class, but attending that class alone probably won't change their performance. It's the **experience** of that class in the context of their development path that helps a person change their behavior or learn a new skill. In other words, we have to think about the full experience of a performance solution.

And that means starting with the moment of need (or the point at which a person creates value).

Imagine you're a customer service representative and there's a customer in the process of making a decision. To create value for the customer (and the organization), you need to be able to help the customer. There's a variety of things that play into your ability to help that customer at that moment of need. You would need to embody the right culture, retain

the right knowledge, and demonstrate the right skills to create value for the customer.

So, to fully prepare someone to be a customer service representative, start with where they create value for customers and the organization. Then, work your way backwards to design the right experience for helping that person eventually create value in the moment of need.

All learning is specific to the context and the role. One way to design experience-driven learning is creating scenarios for people to work through (rather than just telling people about what they should learn). Scenarios help people reflect on the decisions they make and provide a real-world representation of whatever is being studied. (Using scenarios in onboarding, for example, can help someone understand their future role by doing it, rather than only hearing about it in a PowerPoint presentation.)

**Want to learn more about how experiences affect learning and performance?  
We recommend these books as a jumping off point:**

The Design of Everyday Things by Don Norman

Made to Stick by Chip and Dan Heath

Influence by Robert Cialdini



# *Leader led.*

*“The first responsibility of  
a leader is to define reality.”*

Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art*

# LEADER LED.

## LEADERSHIP MATTERS.

**By empowering leadership behaviors at all levels of the organization, individuals can influence and define a reality aligned with the organization's desired state.**

We subscribe to different qualities of great leadership published by Zenger and Folkman, Kouzes and Posner, and others. But if we had to pick just one to follow, it would be *living the ideal or standard* that you want to see in others. Or, as Max De Pree puts it: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality."<sup>i</sup>

When it comes to what we say vs. what we do, actions speak louder than words. This maxim is especially true for leaders. Yet, both words and actions are important when defining reality in any organization. The words and actions of a leader should align, both with themselves, and to the desired culture or change of the organization.

Organizations and their solutions go in the direction of leaders. If they've got good leaders, then they'll go in a good direction—and vice versa. IBM has found that the most

important factor to making an organizational change successful and sustainable is having leaders who sponsor and lead the change.<sup>ii</sup>

Part of talking the talk and walking the walk is providing leaders with opportunities to get in front of their people (whether they're new hires or fellow leaders) and engage them. When leaders engage with their people, they can set expectations, provide a vision for the journey ahead, and bring people into the community of the organization.

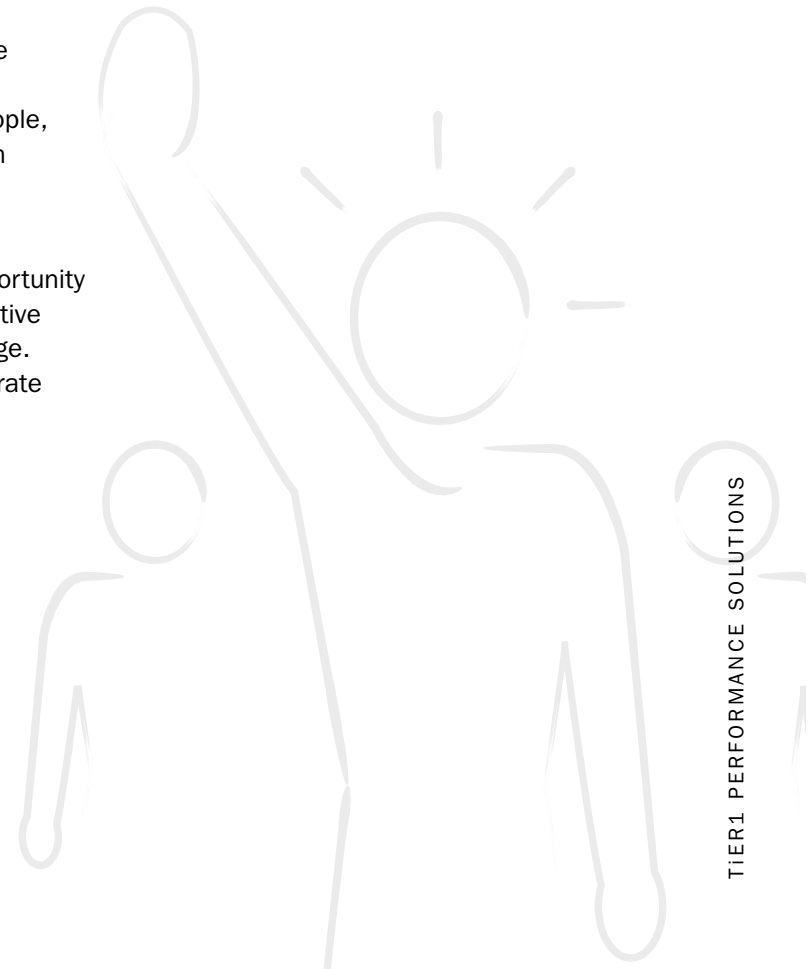
Leader-led solutions provide a unique opportunity to inspire people to engage in a new initiative or get on board with a major system change. When leaders communicate and demonstrate the reasons behind the change, they can help their people believe in the change.

**Check out these books if you want to read more about leadership and its impact on performance:**

Leadership Is an Art by Max De Pree

Primal Leadership by Daniel Goleman

The Leadership Challenge by James Kouzes and Barry Posner





# *Strengths based.*

*Gaining a clearer sense of people's  
impact on the organization's  
strategy, culture, and mission.*

# STRENGTHS BASED.

WHEN PEOPLE START WITH WHAT THEY'RE GOOD AT, THEY FEEL STRONG, CAPABLE, AND READY TO TACKLE ANY CHALLENGE.

That builds momentum and positive ROI, so it's a win-win for individuals and organizations.

Following the strengths-based performance principle requires us to shift our thinking about people and performance. Rather than looking at people's weaknesses and flaws to be improved upon, we view people as a bundle of strengths and values to be brought out and nurtured.

It can seem counterintuitive. How do people become high performers without fixing what's wrong with them? Yet, the data speaks for itself.

- When people use their strengths every day in their job, they are **six times more** likely to be engaged.<sup>iii</sup>
- When people believe their supervisors focus on strengths, they are **twice as engaged** than the average employee nationwide (61% versus 30%).<sup>iv</sup>
- When people first learn about their strengths, they become **more productive** (7.8%).<sup>v</sup>
- When teams begin to focus on strengths every day, they have 12.5% **greater productivity**.<sup>vi</sup>

Increased engagement and productivity can have a ripple effect throughout organizations as turnover decreases and profitability rises.<sup>vi</sup> And it's all because organizations, teams, and people understand and utilize an individual's strengths.

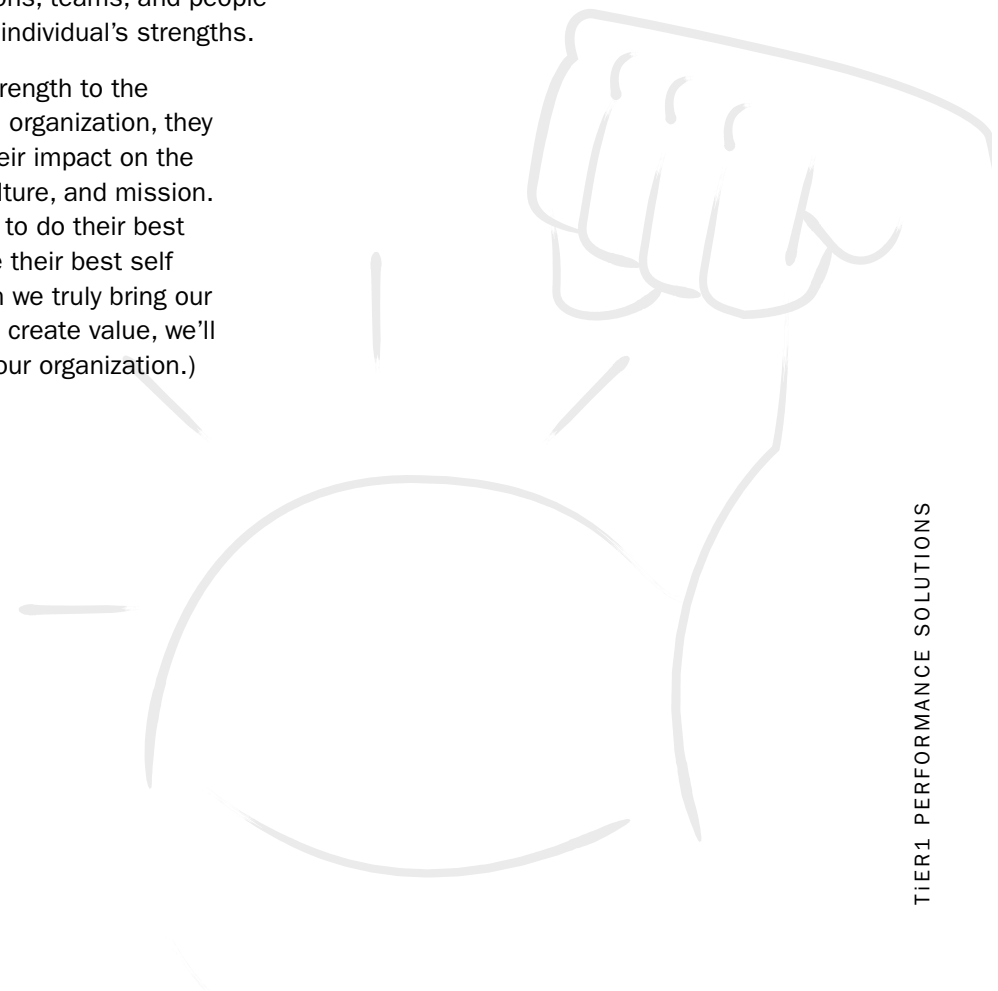
When we tie a person's strength to the value that they bring to an organization, they gain a clearer sense of their impact on the organization's strategy, culture, and mission. That can inspire someone to do their best work on a project and give their best self for their team. (Plus, when we truly bring our strengths to the table and create value, we'll generate positive ROI for our organization.)

Intrigued by the strengths-based performance principle?  
These books can provide even more insight:

Appreciative Inquiry by David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney

StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath

The Extraordinary Leader by Joseph Folkman and John Zenger





# *Brain focused.*

*Neuroscience teaches that, for our  
brains, context is the true king.*

# BRAIN FOCUSED.

**PEOPLE ARE COMPLEX AND MESSY—YET, NEUROSCIENCE CAN TEACH US ABOUT HOW OUR BRAINS PROCESS INFORMATION.**

**By leveraging how the brain works best, we can create memorable and effective experiences.**

Some of the traditional ways of designing performance solutions actually go against best practices advised by neuroscientists. Such as providing too much content—or worse, providing content as a stream of facts coming one after the other, without a narrative or story to weave the individual threads together. Neuroscience teaches that, for our brains, context is the true king. We need context to help us sort and organize information as we process it.

Another neuroscience no-no is forgetting to factor in simple things like glucose, the sugar energy that powers our cells. Our brains use more energy than any other organ in our body, meaning it devours half of the glucose that we consume.<sup>viii</sup> Asking people to process information for eight hours straight means nobody wins. Their brains will simply be too tired to take in the information.

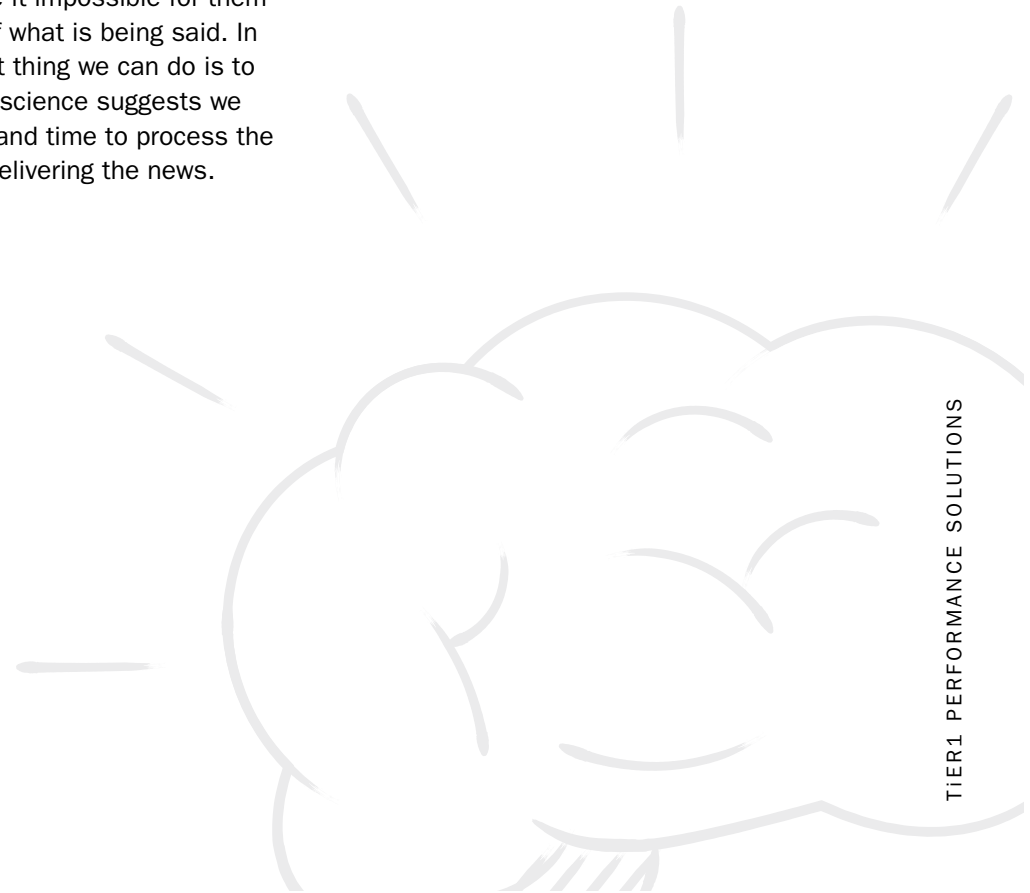
Brain-focused solutions are especially important for change initiatives or difficult transitions, such as mergers and acquisitions. When people get bad news (or news they think is bad news), they seem to shut down. What's happening is that hormones are being secreted in their brain that literally make it impossible for them to comprehend most of what is being said. In this situation, the worst thing we can do is to continue talking. Neuroscience suggests we give the person space and time to process the information after first delivering the news.

**Make sure your performance solutions keep the brain in focus.  
These books can help you better understand how the brain works at work:**

Your Brain at Work by David Rock

The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman





# *Culture calibrated.*

*When an organization has a great culture, it becomes the basis of how they work, what they work on, and why they work on it.*

# CULTURE CALIBRATED.

## WE BELIEVE IN CULTURE AS A STRATEGY.

**But the ideal Marine Corps culture might not work in the Peace Corps.  
Finding the right calibration helps people get to where they want to be.**

Let's unpack this idea. First, how can culture be a strategy? Well, when an organization has a great culture, it becomes the basis of how they work, what they work on, and why they work on it. It's the foundation of all that they do. Culture impacts the organization's ability to execute on strategies for their departments, initiatives, and overall business. Focusing on culture as a strategy is what enables all other strategies to be effective.

That's why it's vitally important that strategies and solutions fit an organization's culture. Otherwise the culture will reject the solution, and the desired change or improvement or strategy won't occur.

Imagine that you're the Director of R&D. Your company culture encourages innovation, and you believe that your culture can empower employees to be more innovative and creative in their thinking. Yet, the company's talent development strategy is overly procedural and constrictive, and there's a real lack of innovative learning opportunities at your company. Those two things are incongruent. Your company is saying one thing to employees but doing another.

When a solution is calibrated to your culture—when your talent development strategy is agile and reflects an innovative culture—then the solution can have the intended impact on your organization.

**We think culture is an important strategy for any organization.  
These authors have great insights on making that culture great:**

Start with Why by Simon Sinek

Speed of Trust by Stephen Covey

Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux





# *Performer centered.*

*When we authentically have an empathetic, person-first mindset, we can design solutions to get the best that people have to offer.*

# PERFORMER CENTERED.

## ALL WORK STARTS WITH PEOPLE.

**Great organizations are comprised of good people performing together at their best. Aligning values and beliefs at an individual level can drive engagement, which drives behaviors and, ultimately, performance.**

It begins with developing an empathetic mindset: Put the person first. What's best for the person should take priority over what's best for the company. This can feel counterintuitive, but when we authentically have an empathetic, person-first mindset, we can design solutions to get the best that people have to offer. This ultimately benefits the organization.

It's easy to come up with solutions that aren't performer-centered, that instead come from the viewpoint of the organization. It can feel like a simple math equation: Get X from this department plus Y from that function to equal success. Unfortunately, simple doesn't always equal right.

When you flip your mindset to think empathetically—which is hard at times—you begin to look at the world through others' eyes. This allows you to design solutions that put people first. The bonus is that, when a solution is centered around the performer, you drive up the potential adoption rate and increase the chances of improving the

organization. That's because when we focus on the organization first, we haven't spent time considering an individual's motivation to adopt the new behavior or change, and so we're just hoping that the person attaches to the solution.

Consider your typical onboarding program. A department has an immediate need for a resource, and they want the new hire to be brought up to speed in a matter of days to begin contributing to the team. So they design onboarding that's most convenient for the department: a week-long deep dive into specific business functions where they need help.

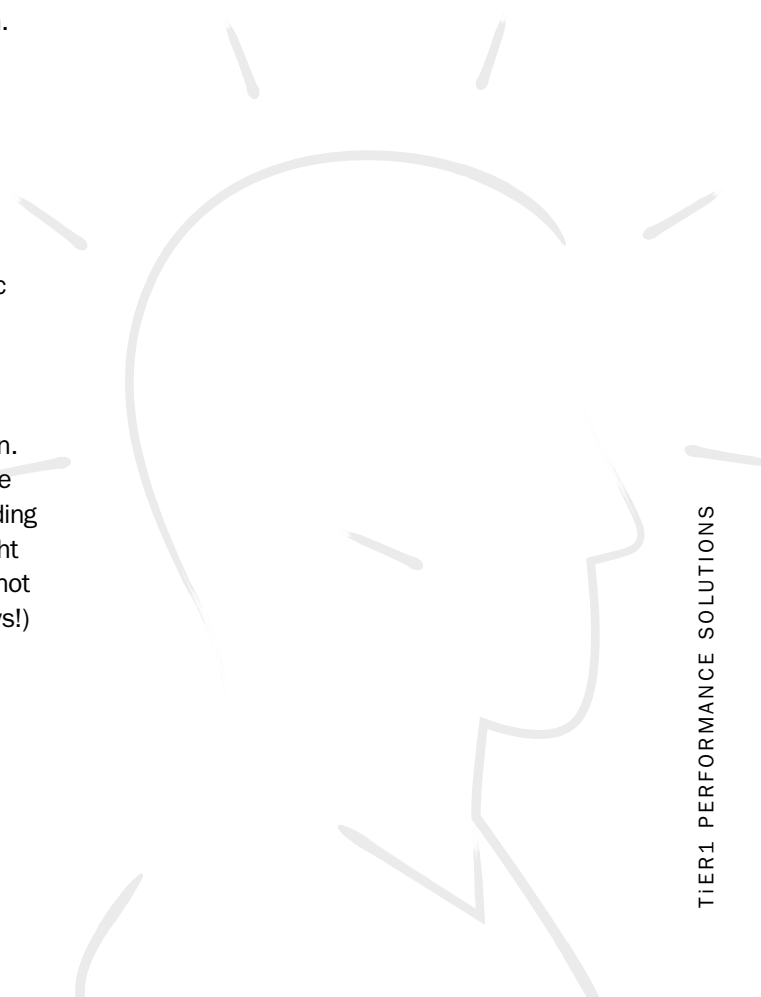
But what about that new hire? What might be most convenient for the company might not be the most convenient or suitable for each person. The department head forgot to think through the new hire's individual experience of that onboarding program. That person might get tired. They might have questions or other interests. (They might not want to sit in the same room all day for five days!)

**Understanding the performer's needs is vital to designing successful performance solutions. Here are some books that we find particularly helpful:**

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

The Progress Principle by Teresa Amabile

Drive by Daniel Pink



# EMPOWERING HIGH PERFORMANCE.

## THE PRINCIPLES

**The six performance principles we've developed aren't just ideas; they're meant to be applied to real-world business challenges to help improve and empower performance at every organization.**

No part of your organization operates in a vacuum. The same can be said of performance principles. By understanding and embracing all six principles, you can leverage scientific thinking and best practices to ultimately define the high performance you want at all levels of your organization.



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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## JERRY HAMBURG

**Vice President of Solution Services**

For over 20 years, Jerry has crafted and led results-driven performance solutions in the spheres of talent development, organization effectiveness, knowledge and learning systems, and strategic change for more than 100 clients across industry sectors that range from broad efforts in Fortune 500 companies to targeted missions in not-for-profit settings. He is part of the leadership team at TiER1. Jerry has a master's in education from The Ohio State University and a bachelor's in marketing from University of Cincinnati.



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## DANYEAL HARRIS-THOMPSON

**Principal Change Management Consultant and Strategist**

Danyeale has over 15 years of experience developing people-centered solutions that help organizations achieve their goals. This includes capturing and translating expert knowledge, assessing organizational needs and opportunities, and building and executing integrated change management strategies. She's relationship-focused and loves to check in with former clients, even if it's been a while since they've worked together. She enjoys knowing how they and their teams are doing. Danyeale has a master's in organization development from Bowling Green University and a bachelor's in psychology from Wheeling Jesuit University.

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This publication was edited by Kaitrin McCoy and designed by Amanda Rapien and Mike Hasselbeck.

# WANT TO LEARN MORE?

This whitepaper only scratches the surface of using performance principles to design great solutions. We really geek out on this stuff, because we've seen firsthand how effective this kind of thinking is in helping people perform beautifully.

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*improving*  
**ORGANIZATIONS**  
*through the*  
**PERFORMANCE**  
*of PEOPLE* *to* **BUILD**  
**A BETTER**  
*World*

**WHO IS  
TIER1?**

TIER1 was founded in 2002. We're an employee owned company, so we believe in long-term success—in the way we design solutions and in how we operate. We're passionate about developing people-centric solutions to solve business challenges in organizational evolution, strategic change, and talent development.

We've done this for many high-performing organizations including GE, P&G, NASA, Delta, Humana, Pier 1 Imports, SAP, AbbVie, Macy's, Carnival, McDonald's, and FedEx...to name a few.

We believe that the potential of organizations is rooted in the potential of people. By unleashing the best of both, we will change the world.

**LEARN MORE AT [TIER1PERFORMANCE.COM](http://TIER1PERFORMANCE.COM)**

# REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Random House, 2004), 11.
- <sup>ii</sup> Hans Henrik Jørgensen, Lawrence Owen, and Andreas Neus, *Making Change Work* (IBM, 2008), 14.
- <sup>iii</sup> Susan Sorenson, “How Employees’ Strengths Make Your Company Stronger,” Gallup, last modified February 20, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/167462/employees-strengths-company-stronger.aspx>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>vi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>vii</sup> Jim Asplund, Shane Lopez, Tim Hodges, and Jim Harter, *The Clifton StrengthsFinder® 2.0 Technical Report: Development and Validation*, (Gallup, 2007), 23-26.
- <sup>viii</sup> Scott Edwards, “Sugar and the Brain,” The Harvard Mahoney Neuroscience Institute Letter, accessed June 1, 2017, <http://neuro.hms.harvard.edu/harvard-mahoney-neuroscience-institute/brain-newsletter/and-brain-series/sugar-and-brain>.