

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

The Shared Catalyst Model: A Common Language for Uncommon Results

How a shared language of human talent transforms education, workforce, and community, inspired by the proven model used in Rhode Island and deployed at Nicolet College.

AUTHOR

Jo Self, Founder & Chief Impact Officer

ORGANIZATION

Practical Strengths L3C

PUBLISHED

2026

CONTACT

jo@practicalstrengths.org

— EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations and communities across the country are facing the same invisible crisis: their people are capable, committed, and chronically misunderstood. Engagement is dropping. Talent is leaving. Initiatives fail to scale. The problem is not a lack of effort or investment. It is the absence of a **shared language of human talent** that connects individuals to each other, to their work, and to their community.

This white paper proposes the **Shared Catalyst Model**, a proven, replicable approach to building that language across education, workforce, and civic sectors simultaneously. The model is based on the "Strengths-Based State" initiative pioneered in Rhode Island, with additional evidence drawn from Nicolet College in Wisconsin. It is affordable, internally sustainable, and designed to outlast the consultant who installs it.

— THE CHALLENGE

**We don't have a talent problem.
We have a **language** problem.**

Across every sector, leaders are making the same observation in different words: people aren't connecting. Students graduate without knowing how to articulate their value. Employees disengage not because they stopped caring, but because no one ever helped them understand what they bring. Communities lose young talent not because there are no opportunities, but because there is no shared sense of belonging.

Previous initiatives have failed to fix this for three structural reasons:

1 High Cost

Executive coaching and strengths development have historically been reserved for senior leaders, creating a "haves and have-nots" dynamic that fractures culture rather than building it.

2 Complexity

Frameworks that work in the boardroom often fail in the classroom or on the front line. When the language isn't accessible to everyone, it becomes another tool that divides rather than unifies.

3 Dependency

Most models rely on an external consultant to maintain momentum. When the consultant leaves, so does the culture. Sustainable change requires internal ownership, not ongoing dependency.

7%

of people worldwide are thriving in all five dimensions of well-being

GALLUP GLOBAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH

22%

of employees strongly agree their organization cares about their well-being

GALLUP STATE OF THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE

12,000+

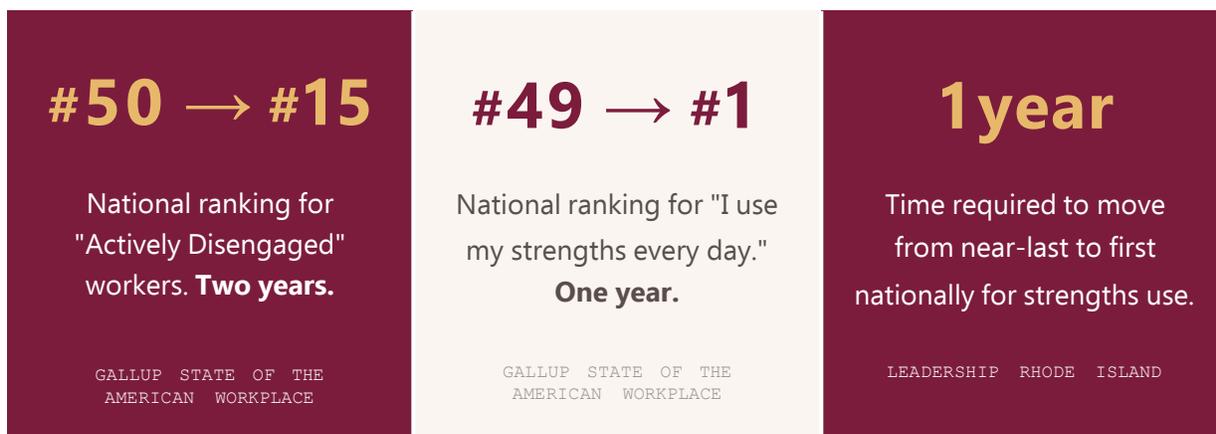
people engaged in Rhode Island through one shared strengths initiative

LEADERSHIP RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island didn't invent this. They just **proved** it works.

Under the leadership of Mike Ritz and Leadership Rhode Island, the state launched the "Make RI Stronger" initiative with a single audacious goal: to become the first strengths-based state in the nation. The change they made was deceptively simple. They added a shared language of strengths to their existing leadership programming.

They didn't just train executives. They trained police officers, teachers, nonprofit directors, and government officials in the same vocabulary. **The results were measurable, rapid, and significant.**



Rhode Island's population is approximately 1.1 million. The model is replicable at the state level, the county level, the institutional level, and the departmental level. The size of the community is not the variable. The presence of a shared language is.

SCALE OF OPPORTUNITY	
Rhode Island (proven)	~1.1M residents
Average U.S. County	~100K-300K residents
Mid-size institution	500-5,000 people
Single department	10-100 people

Why This Matters for Your Community

The Rhode Island model succeeded because it crossed sector boundaries. Schools, government, business, and nonprofits all spoke the same language.

That cross-sector fluency is what made belonging possible, not just within organizations, but across an entire community.

A Strengths-based language gives young people a reason to stay. It gives employers a way to recognize and retain talent. It gives civic leaders a common framework for solving people problems together.

— EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

The Nicolet College Model: Proof at the institutional level.

The Practical Strengths Shared Catalyst Model has been deployed at Nicolet College in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. The engagement began with cross-sector faculty and expanded rapidly into the Nursing Program, one of the highest-stress environments in any institution.

- **Speed to Competence** Integration was measured in weeks, not months. Faculty described the language as "immediately transferable" to real team and classroom situations.
- **Fiscal Responsibility** By moving to a Capacity Model, the college achieved campus-wide reach at a fraction of the cost of ongoing per-session consulting.
- **Sustainable Momentum** The engagement grew from a single cohort to a yearly retainer, annual cohort program, and onsite engagement. The relationship compounds because the results do.

This experience didn't just deepen strengths knowledge. It built capacity and momentum at a pace that would not have been attainable otherwise.

NURSING FACULTY LEAD · NICOLET COLLEGE, RHINELANDER, WISCONSIN

The Nicolet model demonstrates a critical principle of the Shared Catalyst approach: **when you train internal people to own the language, you remove the dependency on the external consultant.** The institution keeps the culture. We stay as strategic partners, not as a billing line that grows every year.

One philosophy. Multiple experts. A culture that sustains itself.

The Shared Catalyst Model is not a workshop. It is a three-phase system for installing a common language of human talent across your organization or community. It is designed from the beginning to make itself unnecessary, by building internal capacity that outlasts the formal engagement.

PHASE 01	PHASE 02	PHASE 03
The Language of You Individuals move past surface-level self-awareness into genuine self-appreciation. Strengths become a lived identity, not an abstract label. This is the prerequisite for everything that follows.	Speakeasy Lab Teams learn to adjust how they communicate based on each other's talent profiles. Organizational noise drops. The same people collaborate more effectively without adding headcount or changing structure.	Strengths as a 2nd Language Strengths become embedded in daily workflows, decisions, and conflict resolution. Internal Catalysts take ownership. The meter is removed. The organization owns the tool permanently.

Why a Shared Cohort accelerates results.

The most powerful version of this model brings together leaders from multiple sectors, education, workforce, government, and business, in a single shared cohort. This is not just cost-efficient. It is transformationally different from sector-specific training.

1 Fiscal Efficiency

By sharing the training cost across multiple organizations, every partner significantly lowers their per-seat investment. The model becomes accessible to organizations and communities that could not otherwise afford it.

2 Silo Busting

A school superintendent, a chamber president, and a township supervisor in the same cohort, using the same language, solving the same problems. That cross-sector fluency creates trust that no policy or memo can manufacture.

3 Talent Retention

When young people learn their strengths in school and encounter those same strengths reflected in their local workplace, they feel understood. Communities that feel understood retain their talent. It is that direct.

This is bigger than engagement scores. It is a public health issue.

The data on human well-being is not abstract. It connects directly to workforce performance, community health, and the fiscal reality of every organization that depends on people to deliver its mission.

- **Only 7% of people** are currently thriving across all five dimensions of well-being. While 66% are doing well in at least one domain, systemic improvement requires addressing all dimensions, not just the most visible ones. (Gallup)
- **Just 22% of employees** strongly agree their organization cares about their overall wellbeing. That gap is not a perk problem. It is a language and culture problem. (Gallup)
- **Poor wellbeing is linked to** **15.8 additional overdose deaths per 100,000 residents** in lower well-being communities. The stakes are not abstract. (Gallup)
- **Depression rates have** **Doubled among young adults** since 2017, affecting the exact population that communities and institutions most need to reach and retain. (U.S. Health Data)

The Shared Catalyst Model addresses well-being through the one thing that makes it structurally sustainable: a culture where people are seen, understood, and deployed in alignment with their natural strengths. It scales to fit any organization or community, from a single department to a county-wide initiative. Every engagement begins with a low-risk, high-value entry point that lets decision-makers experience the model before committing to a full deployment.

Three entry points. One clear direction.

ENTRY POINT	PILOT PROGRAM	ONGOING PARTNERSHIP
<p>The Catalyst Briefing</p> <p>A 90-minute working session for your leadership team. We map your specific talent challenges to the model and deliver a clear, honest recommendation.</p> <p>Investment: \$500. <i>Applies in full toward any engagement.</i></p>	<p>The Shared Cohort</p> <p>A structured cohort experience that trains internal Catalysts to own the methodology. Deployable across a single organization or shared across multiple sector partners.</p> <p>From \$6,000 per cohort.</p>	<p>Fractional Leadership</p> <p>Embedded strategic support on a monthly retainer. Jo and the Practical Strengths bench integrate with your leadership structure to sustain and expand the culture over time.</p> <p>From \$1,250/month.</p>

THE NEXT STEP

Ready to explore what this looks like for your organization?

We work with educational institutions, workforce development organizations, chambers of commerce, nonprofits, and civic bodies globally. Every engagement starts with an honest conversation about what you need.

BEST FIRST STEP

Book the Catalyst Briefing

\$500 · 90 minutes
Applies to any retainer
Virtual or in-person

NOT SURE YET

Free 30-Minute Discovery Call

<http://calendly.com/joelf/consult>
Available globally via Zoom



Jo Self is the Architect of the Practical Strengths Methodology and the **Founder and Chief Impact Officer of Practical Strengths L3C**. A globally recognized Gallup Certified Strengths Coach and strategic thought partner, Jo is on a mission to democratize coaching by teaching CliftonStrengths® as a second language to bridge the gap between individual talent and systemic impact.

The creator of the **Catalyst Path certification** and **author of the Practical Strengths book series**, Jo blends the science of Strengths with Strategic Foresight and Conscious Capitalism to build leadership "benches" for organizations worldwide. Her goal is to leave behind sustainable, self-sufficient frameworks that empower teams to thrive - turning innate potential into a measurable, strategic advantage.

Practical Strengths L3C · jo@practicalstrengths.org · practicalstrengths.org · +1716.394.3761

© 2026 Practical Strengths L3C. All rights reserved. Gallup® and CliftonStrengths® are trademarks of Gallup, Inc.