**Abstract:** In services where knowledge is transferred (e.g., teaching, training, mentoring), instructors whose mastery in the domain is believed to be the product of effort (“strivers”) will be perceived as more effective than instructors whose mastery is believed to be the product of natural talent (“naturals”). We suggest that our implicit beliefs about effort and the superior mastery of naturals might lead learners to perceive strivers as more effective, clear, and making instructors. We find consistent results across five studies in both traditional teaching environments and organizational settings, using a multi-method approach that included both archival data from the largest publicly available teaching evaluation database and experiments. Quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that the higher overall ratings and preference for strivers as instructors may be mediated by perceptions about their superior clarity and ability to motivate.

**Methods**

**Study 1: Field Study: Student Evaluations**

- **Sample:** Reviews from student evaluations (June 2001-April 2019)
- **Methods:** Multinomial Regression (OLS) & Proportion Score Matching (PSM) for robustness checks
- **Controls:** Overall Performance, Willingness to take the course again

**Study 2: Online Experiments: Traditional Teaching Environment**

- **Methods:** Randomized experiments (Mturk) & Conditions: “Natural”, “Striver”
- **Participants:** Sample = 145; N=131.32, SD=9.14
- **Measures:** Clarity, Ability to motivate

**Study 3: Online Experiment: Corporate Training**

- **Methods:** Randomized experiment (Qualtrics Panels)
- **Participants:** N=155

**Results**

**2a. Baseline**

- **Clarity explaining course materials*** p<0.001, ** p<0.05
- **Ability to motivate*** p<0.001, ** p<0.05

**2b. Adding Identical Information About Teaching Credentials**

- **Clarity explaining basic concepts*** p<0.001, ** p<0.05
- **Clarity explaining complex concepts*** p<0.001, ** p<0.05

**Discussion**

1. Sheding light on how the perceived source of achievement impacts evaluations, providing the first empirical case of how strivers are valued more favorably than naturals.
2. Further understanding why effort might be rewarded in the evaluation of products and services.

**Implications for decision-making:** Beyond encouraging and praising hard work, teachers, trainers, coaches and mentors might want to make more transparent to their trainees, mentees and coaches how hard they had to work to acquire their mastery.

**Next steps:** Understanding preferences for hard work or natural talent in services where the quality of the personal interaction is highly valued.

**References:**


**Data Availability:**

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