



Use Your Strengths

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To get started on this activity, you'll first need to identify your strengths by taking the values in action [\(VIA\) Survey](#). The VIA Survey measures 24 character strengths. The results are simply a rank order of your own strengths. Your results are not compared to others. Also, the survey doesn't measure which strengths you value the most; it measures the strengths that you report as most often showing up in your actions and thoughts. It's an effective way to identify your own strengths, which you then can use to spur your thinking about how to use those strengths more and in new ways to improve your and others' happiness.

The VIA is based on the VIA Classification, which resulted from an extensive 3-year research project. Researchers explored the best thinking from all over the world on virtue and positive human qualities in philosophy, virtue ethics, moral education, psychology, and theology over the past 2500 years.

VIA CLASSIFICATIONS

Six core themes emerged, which were found across religions, cultures, nations, and belief systems. These "virtues" were subdivided into 24 universal character strengths:

Wisdom: Creativity, curiosity, judgment/open-mindedness, love of learning, & perspective

Courage: Bravery, perseverance, honesty

Justice: Teamwork, fairness, & leadership

Humanity: Love, kindness, & social intelligence

Temperance: Forgiveness, humility, prudence, & self-regulation

Transcendence: Appreciation of beauty & excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality, & zest

Character strengths are stable, universal personality traits that show themselves in how you think, feel, and behave. They are considered to be the basic building blocks of human flourishing. They are not fixed; they can be developed. Most people likely can enhance their capacity for expressing each of the 24 character strengths.

"Signature strengths" are your top character strengths that really resonate with you and feel like they are at the core of who you are (Peterson, 2006).



INTERPRETING THE VIA REPORT

- The VIA report is about your strengths. It doesn't measure weaknesses or problems. So, lower strengths still are strengths.
- The VIA Survey measures your view of yourself, not facts about your character. The results are broad brushstrokes. So don't sweat the details.

WHY USE YOUR SIGNATURE STRENGTHS?

Studies show that using your signature strengths more or in new ways can improve well-being.

- Regularly using strengths is linked to work satisfaction and engagement at work, lower turnover, greater psychological well-being, less stress, goal achievement, and lower depression levels as much as 6 months after participating



in a strengths-based exercise (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Gурpal, 2012).

- Two of the most important predictors of employee retention and satisfaction are: Reporting use of your top strengths at work and that your immediate supervisor recognizes your top strengths.
- Character strengths buffer people from the negative effects of vulnerabilities (e.g., perfectionism and need for approval) and play an important role in depression recovery.
- As you learn more about your 24 strengths, you can begin to develop your competence in using them all in the right proportion that each situation calls for. This can improve your interpersonal effectiveness and other aspects of personal performance and sense of well-being (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Gурpal, 2012).

PUT YOUR STRENGTHS INTO ACTION

Now that you've identified your character strengths and know why it's valuable to use them, it's time to put them into action...

Think of a specific time when you were at your best—when you really were feeling and behaving at a high level and you felt that you were being your authentic self. Describe that time.

LIST YOUR TOP STRENGTHS

Now, list your top strength from your VIA survey report.

Strength 1:

Strength 2:

Strength 3:

Strength 4:

Strength 5:

Strength 6:

Strength 7:

IDENTIFY YOUR SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

Next, you'll identify your signature strengths, which are strengths that you easily recognize in yourself, regularly exercise, and celebrate. You feel that they describe the "real me." You have a rapid learning curve and feel joy and enthusiasm when using them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011).

- Review your top VIA strengths and ask the following questions:
- Is this strength the real, authentic you? Does it come naturally to you? Is it easy for you to express?
- Do you feel more energized when you're using this strength?
- Would your family and friends be quick to identify this strength in you?
- Do you use this strength frequently at home, at work, and in your social life?
- What character strengths have you used in your past and current successes?

When you're happiest, what strengths are you using?

REFLECTING ON YOUR STRENGTHS

- What was your initial reaction to your survey results?
- Did anything from your survey results surprise you? If so, why?
- What strengths can you identify in the story of you at your best?
- Which one of your signature strengths seems most evident in your every-day life right now?
- What are examples of how you use that strength now?



USING YOUR SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

Our work doesn't end with identifying our strengths. Having strengths and values in the abstract is not enough to flourish. What we do makes the difference (Peterson, 2006). According to Seligman (2002) and Peterson (2006), the regular use of signature strengths—especially in service to others—cultivates well-being.

A good place to start is with a well-tested exercise in which you pick a signature strength and, for the next week, use it in a new way every day (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Peterson, 2005).

The strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, curiosity, and love, have the strongest link to life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). So you might consider them as top targets if they are among your signature strengths.

For ideas on activities that incorporate your signature strengths, take the Person-Activity Fit Diagnostic test developed by Sonja Lyubomirsky (2008). You'll likely find that such activities improve your well-being through engagement.

THREE WAYS TO USE YOUR STRENGTHS

What are three ways in which you can use your signature strength more or in a new way in the next three weeks to help you progress toward something important to you? For ideas, review [340 Ways to Use VIA Character Strengths](#) (Rashid & Anjum, 2008),

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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