

# Strengths Definitions and Applications / Activities

Many of you have already identified your strengths and hopefully savor using them. But if you still need a quick way to discover them and understand why they are so important to your well-being, here is information to guide you from the VIA Institute on Character:

"Each one of us possess all 24 of the VIA character strengths in varying degrees making up our own unique profiles. The VIA Classification of Character Strengths is comprised of [24 character strengths](#) that fall under six broad *virtue categories*: **wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence**. They are morally and universally valued, encompass our capacities for helping ourselves and others and produce positive effects when we express them.

Knowing [your constellation of character strengths](#) is the first step towards living a happier, more authentic life. Discover your personalized Character Strengths Profile by taking our free personality test, the [VIA Survey](#)."

Strengths are a constellation of stars that shine bright lights into your life and into those of your clients. One star may shine at a time, or several beam their brilliance in a symphony of positivity.

Most coaches have a very sweet spot for strengths-spotting. It is downright fun once you get in bed with your own strengths, cuddle up, and really get to know them. How fun it is to notice your own and those of others.

Do you need to get more comfortable with strengths?

Here's how:

[Print out your strengths](#). Put them in your car, on the fridge, keep them on your desk, and download them in all your tech devices. Great strengths-spotting habits are created the more you are mindfully aware of strengths.

Developing your strengths requires self-examination, self-discovery, and mindful reflection. Look inward. That's where your strengths reside. Close your eyes. Relax and let go as you think, feel or engage your gut about strengths. They may arise easier that way. Remember to enjoy your strengths and thank yourself when they show up for you. Notice which ones grace you with more energy and which ones really reflect your values.

I challenge you to have fun with your strengths. Learn to be friends with ALL your strengths. Please don't short-change yourself and appreciate only your top five. Strengths are a savory smorgasbord of positivity (with no calories!) I encourage you to sample them all. You gain well-being and happiness will expand. There are

no weak strengths, only strengths at the end of your profile that you may not often use. They are still usable strengths!

Make sure and ask yourself if your top five fit you the most, as sometimes they don't. No matter, as they all count. Make friends with them all. The more familiar you are with yours, the more you will be able to comment and appreciate your family, friends, co-workers, or clients' strengths, too. Folks usually beam when you mention them, too. Strengths are great to use when your client is stuck. Asking them to write them down when they notice them is also a great adjunct to learning them.

Here are some sure-fire positive psychology applications/actions to ignite your strengths and help your clients fire up theirs, too:

**1. Defining Moment Exercise** (Niemiec, 02-08-2016, *Psychology Today*):

(This exercise is similar to "Me at My Best" Exercise)

*Directions:*

Think about a time in your life that really impacted you. When you needed or chose to bring forth your greatest attributes. It was a defining moment in your life. A time when you raised the flag in your identity development. A time that stood out when you garnered your energy to serve you in a positive way. Maybe a time you overcame fear and rose to the occasion. Maybe you overcame your

inner critic. Maybe you stretched to a new level of positive awareness about yourself. Many times an act of courage is involved.

Use these 4 steps, according to Ryan Niemiec of the VIA Institute on Character:

1. Define the moment in which you took action that had a positive effect on you.

It does not have to be dramatic, but it does need to be meaningful. You don't have to save some one's life. You might have had an aha moment of joy and clarity as you walked on a secluded beach. Perhaps you noticed how your awareness of all things beautiful took wing. Or maybe you mastered a very hard decision, completed a tough activity, or helped another.

2. Get out your 24 strengths survey ([viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)). Write down all the strengths you used in that situation. Which ones ranked the highest? How did you express them?

3. Identity. Explore how that moment shaped who you are. How did it contribute to your identity? No matter how small, how has it effected your view of yourself?

4. *Courage, Wisdom, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and/or Transcendence.* The six virtues under which all 24 strengths live. Step back and look at the big picture. Were you enacting virtues that helped you mobilize your strengths in that moment? Many people rally their courage in order to take action in their defining moment.

The *Defining Moment Exercise* is being researched. Anecdotal evidence reveals the following benefits:

~ Increased savoring. Individuals understand their past more clearly and cherish impactful moments in their life.

~ Greater self-efficacy. Individuals realize past successes are connected to their internal strengths, therefore they move forward in future endeavors with greater confidence.

~ Improved positive recall. While every defining moment may not be positive, the opportunity to see the core events of the past is always present in this exercise. Why? It helps to access the positive autobiographical memory. Once again we see how positivity and neuro-science are linked.

~ Enhanced positive self-perception. More positive emotions and augmented feelings of well-being.

Note: Some folks have a hard time when asked to complete this exercise. As a coach, please remind them to take their time and see what arises. It may take them a few days, especially those with humility near the top of their profile (but these folks are relatively rare). I struggled at first with it, but soon came up with several times I stepped away from my too-careful self and took a risk. Like the times I talked myself onto three hospital staffs who did not allow Ph.D's on staff!

## 2. Best Possible Self Exercise (Laura King, 2000):

This science-based exercise is lauded by psychologists and coaches for helping increase happiness and productivity. Neuro-science in positive action.(discussed in Sonja Lyubromirsky's lauded book, [The How of Happiness](#)). It is an effective tool for creating a compelling personal vision while also increasing optimism and well-being.

### Directions:

You might close your eyes to help you envision yourself 6 months to 5 years down the road (or longer) as you notice successful you! Imagine what you would be doing at home or work whereby you reach your maximum potential. Write down the details as specifically as you can about what is positive, engaging and meaningful to you. Focus on what is within reach and positive for you. You are therefore identifying the best possible way that things might turn out in your life in order to help guide your decision now. You may not have thought of yourself this way before. That's OK. Research suggests that doing so can have a strong effect on your mood and satisfaction.

Ask yourself this narrative:

*“Think about your life in the future. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realization of all of your life dreams. Now, write about what you imagined.”*

After completion, do strengths-spotting: What strengths did you notice you used to get where you wanted to go to accomplish your goals? Who helped and how did you feel about that? What got in your way, and how did you hurdle those humps. How much did this challenge you? Why?

Review and reflect on this over time. Savor it and celebrate your planning, goal accomplishment and wins. Keep strengths-spotting on your radar. See how many you harness individually as well as together in strengths constellations.

### 3. Gratitude and Random Acts of Kindnesses (RAK's) Activities:

Did you know **Gratitude**, **Love of Learning** and **Hope** were the three strengths most closely related to **well-being**? Gratitude supersedes them all! Note that love, honesty, hope and humor came close, too. (*Scientific American*, Scott Barry Kaufman, 2015). The least powerful strengths for prediction well-being are prudence, judgment and self-regulation.

Gratitude is a powerful strength. It increases overall well-being, resilience, energy, self-esteem, pro-social behavior, contentment, happiness, and longevity. What a bang for the positive psychology buck! It also decreases depression, blood pressure and chronic pain. See my blog 09-13-2016, [Unleash Your Gratitude Guru - 12 Positive Psychology Tips](#) for more detailed gratitude fun learning. I think of gratitude as a fine sparkling diamond as it makes my life shine!

You probably already know about writing a gratitude letter and reading it out loud to the person for whom you are grateful. Perhaps you also know about writing

your three blessings before you go to bed. Did you know why bed time is important? It revives the brain's dopamine and serotonin in the pre-frontal cortex, the feel good chemicals that add to feelings of well-being and calmness. Love that neuroscience!

Research on gratitude also enlightens that gratitude may be more powerful if you focus your good attention on *others*. not just yourself. How better to harness this gratitude strength than doing Random Acts of Kindness (RAK's)? Looking for the best in others will improve your relationship, too. Also, noticing strengths in others and commenting on them reminds you to use your own strengths more often.

The more you language the strengths you observe the better. And folks are delighted when you comment on their strengths. Strengths-spotting is acutely fun, as you watch or feel your clients and others smile when you acknowledge them. It's a double dip of delight.

RAK's create new mindfulness and savoring habits. They also add to a wallop to your well-being. Here's an positive psychology application/activity to do just that:

[Directions:](#)

Select a day. On that day, give yourself time to do five RAK's during that one day. Why do them all in one day? Because research reveals your brain can reinforce this habit better if you concentrate on this activity. (Sonja Lyubowmirsky). And the RAK needs to be something different than you usually do.

For super busy or introverted folks, it's OK if you decide to select to do one RAK a day for a few days. Even a smile can be a RAK if you look at the other person for 15-30 seconds in a meaningful exchange. These micro-moments of happiness builds up our positivity reserve and adds to your upward spiral of happiness. (Barbara Fredrickson). I love that this works even with strangers.

Write down your RAK's for review later. Be as specific as you can describing WHY your RAK added feel good moments for you as well as for the others you blessed. Remembering them in a journal also reinforces your positivity effect.

Do you recall the research done with folks at the end of their life? They regret what they *didn't do* far more than what they did do. Many times it was activities with friends and family that they declined in order to work or to do other more pressing responsibilities. Regrets diminish life satisfaction.

This brings to mind our beloved positive psychology pioneer, Chris Peterson who often said, "Other people matter" and "Thank everyone for everything." RAK's reflect his lovely legacy.

Like smiles, gratitude is contagious. A genuine smile is like an art form that can be an RAK intervention all by itself. RAK's can be big or small, and the recipient might not even know you are the gift-giver.

Want some easy strengths-infused RAK's?

1. Tell someone they look nice or give them another compliment.
2. Thank someone on your work team.
3. Give your cleaning lady a hug, or your pharmacist, or others who help you.
4. Salute your kids when they clean their room (Are you spotting strengths yet?:)
5. Pay for the coffee for the next person in line.
6. Praise your kid when you see them thinking before they act. Like putting on their bike helmet.
7. Comment how great when you see a friend forgiving another or letting go of a grudge.
8. Open the door for another.
9. Celebrate another's achievement, even the very small ones count.
10. Donate to someone who has lost everything in a fire.
11. Give blood.
12. Give a book to a friend.
13. Take a treat to someone who needs a lift.

14. Have a conversation with someone you don't know (Great way to get a new client, too!)

Savor the smiles when you see the happiness of others take flight. Savoring solidifies your meaning and engagement and jacks up your positive emotions, too. These are superlative strengths wins.

Relationship savoring is consciously focusing on your moment with another. It blesses you with more feelings of connection. We all need connections. As Chris Peterson said, "There are no happy hermits!"

**4. Have a Strengths-Spotting Party, Strengths Spa Day or Phone-a-Friend telephone call. (This one is not science-based, but I created it for myself almost 10 years ago.)**

**Directions:**

One of the most fun ways to learn strengths is to play with them. Get a few family, friends and/or colleagues together. Meet for coffee or at a spa, or anywhere. Or do a conference telephone call. Each person brings their strengths survey. One by one, each person tells about an interesting, enjoyable, challenging or just plain fun time they had in the last several weeks. They tell their story. This works best with about 4-6 people. If you have a large group, just break them down into small groups.

Go around the room and ask each participants to see how many strength they can spot in the story they heard. It's really fascinating to hear the unique interpretations about what strengths others noticed. The strengths they see may be way different than the ones you pinpointed. Laughter is frequent, and so is meaningful learning and joyful pleasure.

To enhance learning fun, ask each person to make a list of the reported strengths for their story. Later on, each person can review and appreciate as positive reminiscing gifts them again. Great memories to savor.

Another way to do this activity is to ask each member of the group to write each strength they noticed in the story on a post it note. Have fun as you stick it on the wall near the person who told the story. After the activity, see how many you have in common with others. Be curious! Openly discuss what you like, are surprised about ,or perhaps what you had not noticed yourself. Celebrate and compliment each other. Save the post-it notes for your journal. Enlightening fun!

After the activity, you might also enhance your learning by establishing a "positivity partner." Weekly communicate verbally or in writing what strengths you used that week. Or what you did to increase a strength. Maybe how you used a strength in a new way, like tried a new flavor of coffee. Celebrate each other's forwarding the action as you get your strengths mojo movin'! You might call this a brain-power boosting "*Strengths Status Report*"!

All these activities re-train your brain and superglue strengths to your psyche.

Another fun example. The other day, I was talking on the phone with my close coach friend in the USA. She unexpectedly was cast in a small movie role with esteemed actor Jon Voight. To do this out of character novel activity, she inadvertently called upon a ton of strengths resources she had been storing in mothballs. I asked her if I might share what strengths that popped up for me, as I had so much fun listening to her exciting escapades. She was game. We ended the call with me joyfully regaling her with the ton of strengths I felt or saw her using. She loved it, and so did I. Other people matter, yes indeed. Sharing is fun caring.

*Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day.*

*-- Sally Koch*

Celebrating your strengths-spotting joyful journey!