

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Benefits of Building on Your Strengths | December 2021



“A true strength is a sweet spot – something that you do well, want to use as often as you can, and makes you feel energized and your best self.”

- Lea Waters, Ph.D., Australian psychologist

Benefits of Building on Your Strengths

When asked to tell a group of people something about himself, Joe would often quip, “My mother said I was special.” This introduction always solicited a laugh and helped break the ice.

Like Joe, we all have strengths that make us special in the eyes of the beholder. There are people who see a glass as half full or half empty, and some who tend to focus on strengths rather than dwell on weaknesses.

Of course, it’s not all that simple. No one is perfect. There’s a difference between being confident in one’s

abilities and overestimating them (which suggests a lack of self-awareness). Counseling with a behavioral health professional or other trusted adviser can provide helpful insights for those who are willing to do the work.

Experts say the ability to leverage strengths is a cornerstone of positive psychology, or the study of what makes life worth living. Martin Seligman, a leader in the field, said that people who understand what they do well are empowered to live a good life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There are 24 examples of strengths cited in *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* by Seligman and co-editor Christopher Peterson, including zest, grit, creativity, love of learning, kindness and discretion.

Strength-oriented people are likely to be happier, healthier and more productive than those who are mired in self-criticism and feelings of inadequacy. When applying strengths at work, studies show you are likely to have greater job satisfaction, better performance, and stronger feelings of engagement and well-being. On a personal level, you’ll find that people respond favorably when you play to your strengths and have a positive outlook on life.

Identifying Strengths

To identify and build on your strengths, think about what truly sets you apart. Lea Waters, Ph.D., an Australian psychologist, researcher and author of the parenting book, *Strength Switch*, describes a true strength as a sweet spot – something that you do well, want to use as often as you can, and makes you feel energized and your best self.

In a [Psychology Today article](#) on “Making Sense of Character Strengths,” Todd Kashdan, Ph.D., suggests strengths can be defined as dispositional qualities people possess that enable or promote well-being. “Researchers and practitioners can use the term ‘personality strengths’ rather than character strengths to illustrate that positive psychology is simply building upon basic personality science,” he said.

Gallup, a global analytics and advice firm, defines strengths as activities for which one can provide consistent, near-perfect performance. Skills, knowledge and talents, along with the time spent developing them, combine to create strengths.

Lyn Christian, founder of Soulsalt, Inc., cautions against pursuing the development of what she calls “pseudo strengths.” For instance, someone who is great at public speaking or closing a sale may appear to be contented with their performance when they actually feel uncomfortable and don’t enjoy what they are doing.

Tools to Use

There are many free and fee-based assessment instruments that can be used to confirm strengths you know you have and uncover others you haven’t developed. For example, in the workplace, you may be introduced to the [CliftonStrengths](#) assessment method Gallup offers clients to “bring out the best in employees and improve organizational success.”

There are 34 CliftonStrengths themes designed to help people develop their dominant talents into strengths. In the five top categories – learner, harmony, individualization, achiever and responsibility – Gallup researchers say the chance of any two people having identical scores is just one in 33 million.

If you want to follow a simple do-it-yourself model, consider applying a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to yourself. The SWOT approach may be familiar to you as way to evaluate an organizational challenge or group readiness for action.

Here are some additional resources

- [Survey of Character Strengths](#) – Free online survey of 24 strengths offered by the VIA Institute on Character.
- [Strengths Profile](#) – Free starter profile and related materials sold by United Kingdom-based Cappfinity to help you identify what you do well and love to do.
- [Signature Strength Questionnaire](#) – 80 questions used to assess 24 core character strengths sponsored by Strengths-Based Resilience (SBR) and

the University of Toronto Scarborough to help people develop their ability to cope with adversity.

- [SDI 2.0 Strength Deployment Inventory](#) – Leadership assessment from Corestrengths focuses on understanding behaviors and the “art of influence.”
- [Reflected Best Self Exercise](#) – Center for Positive Organizations’ exercise to assist teams and individuals with the development of strengths-based self-portraits that correlate with leadership.
- [Leadership Practices Inventory](#) – Leadership Challenge inventory of behaviors to help build a culture of leadership in organizations.
- [High5 Strengths Test](#) – Free test promoted as a way to help people discover what they are naturally good at.
- [DiSC Profile Assessment](#) – Personal assessment tool from Resources Unlimited to provide insights on behaviors and attitudes to improve teamwork, communication and productivity.

Using Your Strengths

Once you are fully aware of your strengths, you can start to use them more effectively to reap the benefits. Here are five tips:

- Capitalize on strengths that are the best fit for the circumstances; don’t overpower others.
- Deliberately volunteer to use your strengths to help your team and family members succeed.
- When possible, avoid situations that don’t emphasize and take advantage of your strengths.
- Focus on positive qualities (your own and others) before addressing flaws and weaknesses.
- Invest in building on your strengths with life-long learning.

Finally, [Indeed.com](#) recommends surrounding yourself with positive people and letting your core values be your guide.