

Positive Psychology | Signature Strengths

According to Positive Psychology research findings, you are happiest when you are living consistently with your *virtues* and utilizing your *signature strengths* to successfully craft your life. Conversely, when you are experiencing unpleasant emotions (about yourself), you are most likely behaving inconsistently with your virtues or (about others) someone else is behaving in ways that are inconsistent your virtues. After you have completed the VIA Survey of Signature Strengths assessment at www.authentichappiness.com, review your top 5 strengths and utilize the reflection worksheets at the end of this packet of information to begin to re-craft your life in a way that will promote *authentic happiness*.

Wisdom and Knowledge:

Love of learning

You love learning new things, whether in a class or on your own. You have always loved school, reading, and museums—anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn. Love of learning involves experiencing positive feelings in the process of acquiring skills, satisfying curiosity, building on existing knowledge, and/or learning something completely new. This strength has important motivational consequences in that it helps people to persist in the face of setbacks, challenges and negative feedback—when positive feelings may be temporarily infused with negative feelings associated with frustration until a path or resolution for the problem is identified. People who have this strength are likely to endorse:

- I can't do this task now, but I will likely be able to do it in the future
- I like to learn new things
- I will do whatever it takes in order to do the task correctly
- Learning is a positive experience
- I care more about doing a thorough job than whether I receive a good grade
- Relative to other things I know, I know a lot about (content area)
- Relative to other things I like, I really like (content area)
- I spend as much time doing (content area) as possible
- Working on (content area) is hard work, but it never really feels like hard work
- I know that if I put my mind to it, I can figure out how to do (content area) really well

Love of learning as a strength is typically intrinsically motivated in nature; as it provides a challenge, satisfies curiosity, and creates interest and enjoyment. In contrast, extrinsic motivation involves learning as a means to an end; get good grades, win a promotion, or please someone else. Individuals with this signature strength also place a higher value on the content on what they learn (or expect to learn). Love of learning attitudes/traits:

- Have positive feelings about learning new things
- Have an ability to self-regulate efforts to persevere, despite challenge and frustration
- Find connections in the content being learned, generate strategies for approaching this content, and then take time to rethink their understandings and strategy selection
- Feel autonomous
- Feel challenged
- Have a sense of possibility
- Be resourceful
- Self-efficacious
- Feel supported by others in their efforts to learn

Judgment, critical thinking, and open-mindedness

Thinking things through and examining them from all sides are important aspects of who you are. You do not jump to conclusions, and you rely only on solid evidence to make your decisions. You are able to change your mind. Open-mindedness increases with age and education. Truth emerges from a process of critical inquiry in which both sides must be considered. Endorses:

- Abandonment of previous held belief as a sign of strong character
- People should always take into consideration evidence that goes against their beliefs
- Beliefs should always be revised in response to new evidence

Social intelligence

You are aware of the motives and feelings of other people. You know what to do to fit in to different social situations, and you know what to do to put others at ease.

Effective problem-solving through the use of these strengths:

- Accurately assesses motives
- Effectively uses social information to get others to cooperate
- Identification of social dominance and sociopolitical relationships among individuals and groups
- Acts wisely in relationships

Perspective (wisdom)

Although you may not think of yourself as wise, your friends hold this view of you. They value your perspective on matters and turn to you for advice. You have a way of looking at the world that makes sense to others and to yourself. If modesty did not intrude, individuals with this character strength would strongly endorse the following statements:

- I have self-knowledge.
- I bring both feelings and rationality into decisions.
- I realize larger patterns of meaning or relationships.
- I have a wider perspective.
- I have a strong need to contribute to others and society.
- I take into consideration the needs of others.
- I understand the limits of what I know and do.
- I am able to see the heart of important problems.
- I have an accurate view of my strengths and weaknesses.
- I am turned to for advice.
- I behave in a manner consistent with my own personal standards.

Perspective and wisdom strengths are often developed over the life-span and are enhanced by specific career tasks that provide structured training, continued/varied/staged experience, and interpersonal experiences, particularly mentoring relationships.

Creativity, ingenuity, and originality

Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible. Creative individuals generate ideas or behaviors that are novel, surprising, unusual, and adaptive. Your originality makes a positive contribution to your life and to the lives of others. Highly creative persons tend to be independent, nonconformist, unconventional, even bohemian, and they are likely to have wide interests, greater openness to new experiences, and a more conspicuous behavioral and cognitive flexibility and risk-taking boldness.

The ten year rule: It is widely believed that no personal can make a creative contribution to a particular domain without first devoting a full decade to the mastery of necessary knowledge and skills. Creative productivity first increases to reach a maximum output rate somewhere in the late 30s through the early 40s and thereafter gradually declines. Practical/pragmatic forms of everyday creativity – problem solving devoted to issues arising in life and work – peak much later in life and is often associated with the *wisdom of old age*.

Brainstorming activities and the use of heuristics, like SCAMPER: substitution, combination, adaptation, modification, putting to other uses, elimination, and rearrangement are useful techniques that nurture creativity.

Curiosity and interest in the world

You are curious about everything. You are always asking questions, and you find all subjects and topics fascinating. You like exploration and discovery. Curiosity, interest, novelty-seeking, and openness to experience represent one's intrinsic desire for experience and knowledge. Curiosity involves the active recognition, pursuit, and regulation of one's own experience in response to challenging opportunities. Positive affect related to curiosity promotes a willingness to challenge stereotypes, creativity, preference for challenge in work and play, perceived control, and negative relationships with perceived stress and boredom. Curiosity involves making one's life more fulfilling as manifest in mundane activities involving:

- Being absorbed in the plot of a movie
- Completing a crossword puzzle without awareness of time passing
- Opening and reading with eagerness a handwritten letter
- Watching the flight of a seagull
- Conversing with an intriguing stranger
- Examining a picture of Siamese twins conjoined at the head
- Pondering the aftermath of a date
- Listening carefully to a new song on the radio

Curiosity is inextricably bound to anxiety and approach-avoidance conflicts as it involves a fear of the unknown as dangerous. Individuals with a strong endowment of curiosity also profit because attention is more fluid, and novel ideas, objects, and relationships can be found, enjoyed, explored, and integrated into an expanding sense of self. Curiosity aids survival. Knowledge fuels rather than quells curiosity.

Optimal stimulation/dual process theory posits that the pursuit of optimal subjective experiences entails curiosity and anxiety. When curiosity is stronger, individuals explore their environment (diverse curiosity). When anxiety is stronger, individuals tend to disengage from goals to reduce stimulation to a more manageable level. Optimal stimulation consists of subjective pleasantness and challenge, accentuated with mild anxiety. Information seeking behaviors (specific curiosity) are activated to reduce some of the initial uncertainty arising from novel activities, sustaining more moderate, optimal levels of stimulation.

Courage:

Honesty, authenticity, and genuineness

You are an honest person, not only by speaking the truth but by living your life in a genuine and authentic way. You are down to earth and without pretense; you are a "real" person, sincere. You accurately represent your internal states, intentions, and commitments. You accept and take responsibility for your feelings and behaviors, owning them, as it were, and reaping substantial benefits by doing so. You endorse:

- More important to be myself than popular
- Things work out when people tell the truth
- I would never lie to get something I wanted from someone
- My life is guided and given meaning by my code of values
- It is important for me to be open and honest about my feelings
- I follow through on commitments even when it costs me
- I dislike phonies who pretend to be what they are not

Spiritual practices, particularly Zen, Taoism, and other approaches entailing meditation, reflection and enlightenment contribute to enhancing/better utilization of this virtue. Involves an integration of thought, feeling, and action through shared experiences (reciprocal learning).

Bravery and valor

You are a courageous person who does not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain. You speak up for what is right even if there is opposition. You act on your convictions. You are willing to voluntarily act, perhaps fearfully, in a dangerous circumstance, where the relevant risks are reasonably appraised, in an effort to obtain or preserve some perceived good recognizing that it may not be realized. Bravery involves significant forethought which promotes doing what is right, as it relates to moral/social conscience, and acceptance of the consequences related to the action. Thoughtful courage is easily distinguishable from rashness, boldness, and fearlessness which have no forethought. This strength is enhanced by the virtues of prudence, ingenuity/creativity, perseverance, and teamwork/cohesion. Bravery helps one to conquer their fears, thus promoting psychological health. Correlates of disposition to bravery include:

- Prosocial orientation
- Internal locus of control
- Self-efficacy or self-confidence
- Valuing independence or freedom

- Valuing socially important achievements
- Ability to delay gratification
- Ability to experience multiple emotional states at once
- Risk taking
- Action orientation
- Contextual knowledge
- Low levels of arousal under stress
- Experienced oneness with others or with humanity
- Tolerance for ambiguity or uncertainty
- Ability to assess risk across situations
- Inclination toward reflection
- Involvement in socially worthy aims

Bravery can be promoted through practice (moral habit), by example (modeling) and by developing certain attributes of the individual (self-confidence) or group (cohesion) through secure attachments (mutual responsibility) and activities that promote self-awareness (cognitions/emotions/behaviors). The Buddhist practice of Tonglen involves becoming aware of thought patterns by breathing in fear and breathing out bravery and kindness. It promotes physiological awareness, positive habitual thought, and appropriate emotional regulation.

Industry, diligence, and perseverance

You work hard to finish what you start. No matter the project, you "get it out the door" in timely fashion. You do not get distracted when you work, and you take satisfaction in completing tasks. Perseverance does not guarantee success, but success is often unattainable without it. This strength has a high correlation to positive self-esteem and is further enhanced by optimism, hope and a future minded orientation. Perseverant individuals endorse:

- I am good at resisting temptations
- People would say I have iron self-discipline
- I am not easily discouraged
- I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals

The benefits of persistence are widely recognized. Persistence increases one's chances of attaining difficult goals, enhances the person's enjoyment of subsequent success, improves skill development and resourcefulness, and enhances self-efficacy as success is actualized. Persistence can be improved through practice and by attributing failure to lack of effort rather than lack of ability.

Humanity and Love:

Kindness and generosity

You are kind and generous to others, and you are never too busy to do a favor. You enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if you do not know them well. Kindness and altruistic love require the assertion of a common humanity in which others are worthy of attention and affirmation for no utilitarian reasons but for their own sake. Individuals with this signature strength would strongly endorse the following statements:

- Others are just as important as me.
- All human beings are of equal worth.
- Having a warm and generous affect seems to bring reassurance and joy to others.
- Giving is more important than receiving.
- Doing good for others with love and kindness is the best way to live.
- I am not the center of the universe but part of a common humanity.
- People who are suffering need compassion.
- People in need require care.

Individuals who value the greater good of humanity as a whole often are attentive to the emotional state of those they come into contact with. Their moral agenda is best suited towards activities that promote prosocial interactions based on one's personal ethical responsibility to care for the welfare of others.

Capacity to love and be loved

You value close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated. The people to whom you feel most close are the same people who feel most close to you. Love represents a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional stance toward others that takes on three prototypical forms. One love is for the individuals who are our primary sources of affection, protection and care. We rely on them to make our welfare a priority and to be available to us when needed. They make us feel safe, and we feel distressed by prolonged separations from them. Another form of love is for the individuals who depend on us to make them feel safe and cared for. We comfort and protect them, assist and support them, make sacrifices for their benefit, put their needs ahead of our own, feel happy when they are happy. The third form is love that involves passionate desire for sexual, physical and emotional closeness with an individual who we consider special and who makes us feel special. Relationships can involve more than one kind of love and can start as one type which evolves to another over time. Individuals with this strength would likely agree with the following statements:

- There is someone with whom I feel free to be myself.
 - There is someone I trust to help and support me.
 - There is someone I hate to be away from for very long.
 - There is someone for whom I would do almost anything for.
 - There is someone whose happiness matters as much to me as my own.
 - There is someone whose welfare I am committed to.
 - There is someone with whom I am physically affectionate.
 - There is someone in whose company I feel deep contentment.
 - There is someone I am passionate about.
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Justice:

Citizenship, teamwork, and loyalty

You excel as a member of a group. You are a loyal and dedicated teammate, you always do your share, and you work hard for the success of your group. Those with this signature strength feel a sense of obligation to a common good that includes the self but stretches beyond one's own self interest. You are likely to be active in the civic affairs of your community, working to make the future a better place for future generations. Loyal citizens endorse the following beliefs:

- I have a responsibility to improve the world in which I live.
- Everyone should give their time for the good of their town or country.
- Working to correct social or economic inequalities is important for me.
- I wish to help others overcome difficulties.
- Taking care of our environment is important to me.

Good citizens exercise informed judgment in the interest of the whole. Loyalty connotes an unwavering commitment, a bond of trust- whether in friendship or in fidelity to a group, its principles, and cause. You are at your best when you are cooperating and collaborating with others in a group, working for a common purpose.

Fairness, equity, and justice

Treating all people fairly is one of your abiding principles. You do not let your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people. You give everyone a chance. Fairness is the product of moral judgment – the process by which people determine what is morally right, morally wrong, and morally prescribed. This strength involves being committed to fairness in all of one's social relations, developing skill in the abstract logic of equitable arrangements, becoming sensitized to issues of social injustice, coming to embody compassion and caring for others, and developing the perceptiveness necessary for relational understanding. Individuals with this strength endorse the following statements:

- Everyone should get her fair share.
- It's wrong to use people.

- I wouldn't want to cheat anyone, any more than I would want to be cheated.
- I try to be kind to everyone.
- Everyone deserves respect.
- We're all in this together.
- We are responsible for our own behavior.
- I won't do something that doesn't match my personal sense of what's right, even if society says it's all right to do.

One judges their own moral character through:

- Perspective taking - the ability to have empathic understanding (walk in another's shoes). This requires a melding of cognitive(aware) and affective (moved) sources of knowledge to broaden one's awareness involving moral contexts, deliberation, action and likely consequences.
- Self-reflection – coming to see oneself as this kind or that kind of person; as a person who is committed to this standard and that cause; as a person who is or is not likely to do certain things.
- Relational problem solving – involves being sensitive to the fact that a relational problem exists; assembling relevant facts; making a determination regarding the moral demands of the situation; and deciding on the appropriate action to take.

Leadership

You excel at the tasks of leadership: encouraging a group to get things done and preserving harmony within the group by making everyone feel included. You do a good job organizing activities and seeing that they happen. Individuals with this predisposition aspire to dominant roles in relationships and social situations. Personality attributes that correspond to leadership include socialized power, authority, dominance, charisma, ascendancy, and social assertiveness. Individuals with this strength are likely to endorse the following statements:

- I prefer to take on the leadership role in the group.
- I am often able to plan a course of action for my group.
- I am often able to motivate others to act in a certain way.
- I am often able to help others do a task better.
- I am often able to organize others so that they can work together more effectively.
- People generally look to me to help solve complex problems.
- People generally look to me to resolve conflicts and keep the group together.
- I am often the spokesperson for the group.
- I generally take the initiative in social situations.
- I usually take charge in emergencies.

Leadership reflects an orientation to promote, direct, and manage social action. This orientation is grounded in a need for dominance and constructive power. The effective engagement of leadership processes follows from high self-confidence and from significant cognitive and social capabilities.

Temperance:

Self-control and self-regulation

You self-consciously regulate what you feel and what you do. You are a disciplined person. You are in control of your appetites and your emotions, not vice versa. Self-regulation involves directing one's thoughts beyond where the mind naturally wanders, changing emotional responses away from how they initially feel, and restraining themselves from carrying out impulses and desires.

Modesty and humility

You do not seek the spotlight, preferring to let your accomplishments speak for themselves. You do not regard yourself as special, and others recognize and value your modesty. Humility involves a nondefensive willingness to see the self accurately, including both strengths and limitations. Humble individuals will not distort information in order to defend, repair, or verify their own image.

Humility (internal orientation)/Modesty (social orientation of expression) involves:

- An accurate sense of one's abilities and achievements.
- The ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations.
- Openness to new ideas, contradictory information and advice.
- Keeping one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective.
- Relatively low focus on the self or an ability to "forget the self".
- Appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world.

Caution, prudence, and discretion

You are a careful person, and your choices are consistently prudent ones. You do not say or do things that you might later regret. Prudence is a cognitive orientation to the personal future, a form of practical reasoning and self-management that helps to achieve the individual's long-term goals effectively. Prudent individuals show a farsighted and deliberate concern for the consequences of their actions and decisions, successfully resist impulses and other choices that satisfy shorter term goals at the expense of longer term ones, have a flexible and moderate approach to life, and strive for balance among their goals and ends.

Everyday prudence involves: saving for the future, planning for the unexpected, avoiding situations known to have previously led to impulsive decisions, consideration of distant and immediate benefits and costs when making life decisions, paying heed to probable consistency and conflict with one's plans, and deliberation about one's personal goals.

Prudence involves:

- Flexible, moderate self-management rather than self-denying inhibition or radical compliance.
 - Goals and interests relate to establishment of positive relationships and the well-being of others.
 - A whole life orientation rather than narrowly conceived achievements related to money, work, etc.
 - Moderate, flexible, proactive and goal directed reasoning involving a harmonization of multiple goals within the context of a long-term orientation.
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Transcendence:

Hope, optimism, and future-mindedness

You expect the best in the future, and you work to achieve it. You believe that the future is something that you can control.

*Hope involves goal-directed determination, and pathways, or planning ways to meet goals. Developing hope involves clarification of goals, simplifying the goals into smaller steps, developing alternative plans, taking pleasure in the process, and being strategic in overcoming obstacles.

Optimistic international: www.optimist.org/index.html

Promise yourself –

- To be strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind
- To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet
- To make your friends feel that there is something in them
- To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true
- To think only of the best, to work only for the best and to expect only the best
- To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own
- To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future
- To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile
- To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others
- To be too large to worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble

You are likely to endorse the following beliefs:

- Despite challenges, I always remain hopeful about the future
- Look at the bright side
- I am confident that my way of doing things will work out
- Good will triumph over evil
- I expect the best
- I have a clear picture of what I want to happen in the future
- I have a five year plan
- I know that I will succeed with the goals I set for myself
- I never go into a game or competition expecting to lose
- I focus my efforts on planning to do better

Gratitude

You are aware of the good things that happen to you, and you never take them for granted. Your friends and family members know that you are a grateful person because you always take the time to express your thanks. Personal gratitude involves thankfulness to a specific person for the benefits they have provided. Transpersonal gratitude involves the belief in a higher power, typically experienced during periods of “peak performance”, evidenced by an “I don’t deserve this” reaction. I feel lucky, fortunate, graced. Comfort with receiving other’s generosity.

Individuals with this strength endorse these beliefs:

- Appreciate each day that you are alive
- My life is easier because of the efforts of others
- Life is a gift rather than a burden
- Thanksgiving is one of my favorite times of the year
- I am thankful of the parenting that was provided to me
- I could not have gotten where I am today without the help of many people
- I can find reasons to be thankful for the bad things that have happened to me
- I feel grateful when I am struck by beauty or am in awe of something

Humor and playfulness

You like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. You try to see the light side of all situations. Playful recognition, enjoyment, and/or creation of incongruity; a composed and cheerful view on adversity that allows one to see the light side and thereby sustain a good mood; and the ability to make others smile or laugh. Strongly endorses:

- Whenever my friends are in a gloomy mood, I try to tease them out of it.
- I welcome the opportunity to brighten someone’s day with laughter.
- People consider me fun to be around.
- I try to add humor to whatever I do.
- I never allow a gloomy situation to take away my sense of humor.
- I can usually find something to laugh or joke about even in trying situations.

Elements of humor include wit, fun, nonsense, sarcasm, ridicule, satire, and irony. Humor, as a strength, is typically associated with a cognitive-affective style of dealing with adversity. It reflects a sympathetic heart rather than superiority, ridicule, or vitality. Humor is a capacity to perceive, interpret, enjoy, create, and relay incongruous communications. Humor, related to disposition can be positive (good humor) or negative (bad humor). Good humor is considered the sovereign attitude of exposing oneself to the criticism and mockery of others. It is from the heart and benevolent in nature, involving common sense, tolerance, and compromise. A person with a humorous attitude is one who understands the insufficiencies and shortcomings of life but also tolerates them and ultimately forgives. It is based on the wisdom that nothing earthly and human is perfect (contemplative, pensive, and profound).

Vitality: Zest, enthusiasm, vigor, and energy

Regardless of what you do, you approach it with excitement, enthusiasm, and energy. You never do anything halfway or halfheartedly. For you, life is an adventure. You long to engage in experiences in which you feel alive. At a somatic level, vitality is linked to good physical health; freedom from fatigue and illness. At a psychological level, it reflects experiences of volition (desires), effectance (meaningful), and integration of the self at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Psychological tensions, conflicts, and stressors detract from experienced vitality, especially when avoided/repressed. Individuals with a high level of vitality endorse the following statements:

- I feel alive and vital.
- I have energy and spirit.
- I nearly always feel awake and alert.
- I feel energized.
- I am full of pep.
- I rarely feel worn out.

Concepts of organismic energy and vitality are central topics in a variety of Eastern philosophies and healing traditions (acupuncture, reiki and Yoga). Vitality is a preferred human state, and people often seek out restorative contexts in which to recover vitality and energy.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence

You notice and appreciate beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.

Forgiveness and mercy

You forgive those who have done you wrong. You always give people a second chance. Your guiding principle is mercy and not revenge.

Spirituality, sense of purpose, and faith

You have strong and coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe. You know where you fit in the larger scheme. Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you.

Sources:

Seligman, Martin (2002) *Authentic Happiness*, Simon and Schuster Publishing, NY.

Peterson, Christopher and Seligman, Martin (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues*, Oxford University Press, NY.

Practice Resilience: *Transforming* your life to *reenergize* and *reconnect* to daily living.

Find a quiet place where you can think uninterrupted about your life and ask yourself...

- What do I have in my life that I want more of?
- What is something that I don't have that I would like added to my life?
- What do I have or do that I would like to eliminate?
- What do I always dream about that I have not yet taken steps towards doing?
- What kind of person am I and what do I truly value in my life?
- What could I do to *be* different in my life?

Now that you have taken some time to think about your life, see if you can come up with some ideas as to how to transform your life, improve your motivation, feel more satisfaction and prevent burnout.

Step 1: think about your life differently

ReEnergizing Beliefs

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Step 2: do your life differently

ReConnecting Behaviors

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Step 3: get a life [maybe you are working too hard]

Self Care and Fun Activities

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.