

Maximize Your Strengths

How often do you compare yourself to another and feel you fall short? I am here to tell you, don't worry about your weaknesses and try to improve upon them. How often do you wonder if you have what it takes to realize your goals? If you want to be happy, fulfilled and successful, you do have what it takes. Everyone has strengths; they are acquired and developed throughout one's life. Using your strengths to their greatest potential can create the life/work you desire.

Strength is a trait that can be observed across different situations and overtime which produces positive consequences such as joy, knowledge, career/business success, and love. Value is a quality considered to be desirable and highly regarded. We acquire strengths based on what we value. Early on in life our choices are not necessarily intentional. We behave in certain ways in response to positive feedback we receive from others which encourages this behavior and becomes your strength. What you do with your time, choices you make for friends reflect what you value. To the extent you make your choices with intention based on your strengths and values will determine how fulfilled your life will be.

According to Martin Seligman author of *Authentic Happiness*, there are 3 paths to happiness:

The Pleasant Life- consists of having as many pleasures as possible and having the skills to amplify these pleasures.

The Good Life- consists of knowing what your signature strengths are, and then recrafting your work, love, friendship, leisure and parenting to use those strengths to have more flow in your life.

The Meaningful Life- consists of using your signature strengths in the service of something larger than yourself.

Finally, Seligman suggests, *a full life* consists in experiencing positive emotions about the past and future, savoring positive feelings from the pleasures, deriving abundant gratification from your signature strengths, and using these strengths in the service of something larger to obtain meaning. Wow, how inspiring!

Read on if you want such a life.

Seligman outlines six virtues, each having several signature strengths to achieve it.

(1) Wisdom and knowledge:

curiosity, love of learning, judgment, ingenuity, social intelligence, perspective

(2) Courage:

valor, perseverance, integrity

(3) Love and humanity:

kindness, loving

(4) Justice:

- citizenship, fairness, leadership
- (5) Temperance:
self-control, prudence, humility
- (6) Spirituality and transcendence:
appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, humor, zest

Identify Your Strengths

Seligman offers a signature strengths questionnaire at www.authentichappiness.com in which based on your responses you will find out what values are your strengths in your everyday life. Be as authentic in your response as possible. The results will provide you with your top signature strengths. *This is who you are at your very best.* You do not need 24 strengths to be happy or successful. However tempting it may be to look at your bottom and feel the need to work on them, the goal is to build upon your top ones.

Several career assessments such as MAPP, Myers Brigg, and Strong Interest Inventory will highlight what motivates and inspires you to do your best, your skill set and strengths to be leveraged and how you can best utilize them.

What do your peers, family and co-workers suggest are your top strengths? Their responses can provide you with observations about yourself you may not have realized.

How to maximize your strengths to live the good, pleasant, or meaningful life

Use them even more!

Use your signature strengths each day at work, with your children, friends, partner and you will see your quality of life improve. You will find your current job more interesting and motivating or will create a new job/career path.

Make choices and actions which matter to you and are aligned with your values otherwise don't do it. Take a look at what you are doing when time passes quickly and what charges you up. Do more of that. Yes, this could mean making important changes that are initially uncomfortable. It does not necessarily mean you have to quit your job, get a divorce.

Create new possibilities and opportunities in life areas.

Which of your strengths cause success, satisfaction in areas of your life?

When have you relied on them to solve a problem, reach a goal?

Which will better areas needing improvement?

Choose an area, how can you use these strengths in these area? Think of 3 things you can do which reflect your top strength.

When feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, unmotivated with something that needs to be done, you can take advantage of one of your top strengths to get it done. Use your strengths with roadblocks. You can challenge yourself to improve a limitation you might have which may be necessary to work on in order to reach your larger goals. This

challenge can be taken on using your strengths which makes it much easier, fun and motivating.

So, when you have a goal, but do not know how to work on it, look to your strengths with regards to problem solving.

Let's take specific goals.

You want to finally commit to an exercise regimen. Your top strengths include creativity, learning, love, perseverance. Design a creative exercise regimen which can consist of other of listening to audio book, connecting with another individual, changing your routine throughout the week. How have you persevered in past? What motivates and inspires you to persevere?

You want to grow your business. Using the same strengths as above, you can begin by choosing something you will commit to persevering with. Set a goal and go out and make appointments. Design a service marketing plan which reflects your passion to contribute to others with your business. Use your curiosity to gain knowledge from others who are successful.

You want to advance in your career. Identify what you love about your work and what you want to do more of which reflects that which you love. When time passes quickly, what are you doing? Align your skills with the current job market through skill development, training. Learn what the current and future trends are in your career path. Avoid being ordinary, stand out. Be creative with how you can stand out.

For managers, career advancers and transitioners, I suggest you read the article, How to Play to Your Strengths in the January 2005 issue of Harvard Business Review. This article outlines the recent research on leveraging your strengths to gain results in the workplace. It also includes a description of a successful method, the Reflected Best Self exercise which I highly recommend in order to reach your highest potential.

Hopefully, you have the idea and you can apply this to parenting, improving your relationships, etc.

Additional free questionnaires at www.authentic happiness.com

Work-Life Questionnaire measures work/life satisfaction

VIA measures 24 character strengths (also one for children)

Optimism questionnaire measure opt for future

Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire measures current happiness

General Happiness Scale measures enduring happiness

Authentic Happiness Inventory Questionnaire measure overall happiness

Purpose in Life measures meaningfulness

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