

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

Description

Psychology has had a reputation for focussing on people's problems and weaknesses. At the Wellbeing Practice, we believe that people also have enormous strengths and inner resources that can be tapped into and used far more effectively. Research now suggests that thinking about personal strengths and playing to our strengths can increase our mental tenacity, ability to accomplish our goals, feel a greater sense of satisfaction with life and reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

People often struggle to think of their strengths and so this exercise asks you to identify some key people in your life that know you well enough to recognise your strengths and tell you what they are so that you can become more aware of them and then consider how best to use them. Playing to your strengths also means using them in appropriate situations, at the right time and to the right degree. When people overuse their strengths, it leads to exhaustion and that is not helpful on a long term basis.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Make a list of all the people you have a regular and meaningful interaction with (e.g. friends, family, teachers, tutors, coaches, managers, peers, employees, customers, colleagues, neighbours, team members).
2. Identify those whose feedback would be most interesting and valuable. You can approach as few or as many people as you wish (5 or 6 is usually more than enough).
3. There are hundreds' of strengths that people can select and you could give each person a list of the strengths below and ask them to take some time to select the 6 strengths they most value in you or just think of their own selection.

Action orientated, determined, kindness, social intelligence, citizenship, enabler, competitive, adventurous, storyteller, optimistic, ordered, timekeeper, time optimiser, persistent, responsible, persuader, planner, rapport builder, courageous, driven, compassionate, emotionally aware, empathic, authentic, catalyst, ideas generator, centred, self-aware, strategic planner, creative, improver, resilient, resolver, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, innovator, listener, mission orientated, perspective, bravery, persistence, integrity, vitality, love, , fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, optimism, humour, spirituality.

4. Ask them to explain each choice and share examples of how they see you demonstrate each strength. Having written examples such as shown below can be really helpful although some people may prefer to give you verbal feedback in which case you could make your own notes as they are talking.

You could offer to do the same for someone else if that makes the process easier / more interesting / fun for both people.

Example:

Strength that shows you at your best: Determination

Examples of how strength is demonstrated, why it is of value and to whom: You decided to get fit and healthy and this enabled you to have a better connection between your mind and body. A healthier you has inspired the rest of your family to be healthy and it is giving you more time to spend with your family rather than being at work all the time. You have also inspired colleagues around you to become fitter and healthier.

5. Whilst you are waiting for feedback from others, carry out the same exercise for yourself so that you are choosing your own strengths and how you see them being played. This will also enable you to compare how you perceive your strengths compared to how others see them.

6. Once you have collected all the feedback, think about the following:

- What strengths are consistently picked out? Do they reflect the ones you identified in yourself?
- Where are the differences? Why might that be?
- Are there strengths that you tend to undervalue in yourself?
- How does it make you feel when you see what others value in you?
- Which strengths could you make more use of (e.g. in a particular context or relationship)?
- Are there strengths which you'd like to be more visible to some people? How might you be able to achieve that?

WHY IT WORKS

While working to improve shortcomings is important for well-being, we are not always able to change some of our ingrained weaknesses and have to accept them and live around them. It is therefore important to nurture your strengths and put them to use. Reflecting on your strengths can help remind you that you do have important positive qualities, and this reminder can build your confidence and self-concept and, in turn, increase your well-being. Putting strengths to use can help enhance them, and using strengths in new and different ways can reveal how useful these strengths can be in a range of contexts.