



## Flexing Your Strengths

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Have you ever been in 'flow' – that mental state of operation in which you are fully immersed in what you are doing. There is a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity? You may also know it as being '*in the zone*' or '*in the groove*'. In the state of flow your emotions are not just contained and channeled, but positive, energised, and aligned with the task at hand.

Positive psychology research studies indicate that people are happier, more creative, more productive and more likely to be in 'flow' when utilising what psychologists have come to call 'signature strengths'.

We're not only happier when we utilise our signature strengths, we're also more productive. Think about the best contributions you've made in your lifetime; those accomplishments that filled you with pride when you completed them and are still very pleasant memories. It's highly likely that you achieved these accomplishments primarily using signature strengths.

### So What are Signature Strengths?

Signature Strengths refer to the top five character strengths and virtues of a particular individual. Your signature strengths are displayed consistently across different situations. Signature strengths are an integral part of who you are; they are stable personal characteristics. We feel excited and motivated to use them and in fact if you look, you may find that many of your pursuits are centred around your strengths.

Imagine for a moment that your top signature strength was curiosity. You would be interested in how things work and would happily spend hours tinkering in a shed, taking things apart and putting them together again. What kind of job would make you happy? Maybe being an inventor, or a repair-person. You would happily pour over the bit that doesn't function, forget about lunch, and wonder, "Why doesn't the bl..dy thing work?"

But put you in a highly constrained job as a store manager or as a factory worker at a conveyor belt and you would be unhappy and unfulfilled.

Signature strengths are the things we like doing and are good at. For example, I love learning; it excites me!

### We find more happiness and satisfaction in our life if it is aligned with our signature strengths.

Signature Strengths were first published by Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman in "Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification" – a book that documents positive traits. Twenty-four possibilities (strengths) have been defined.

Knowing your strengths helps you tackle difficult situations more easily and using your strengths in novel ways contributes to your sense of well being.

### What is the Point of Understanding our Signature Strengths ?

Becoming aware of and consciously using your signature strengths enhances personal growth, achievement and pleasure. Using your signature strengths invigorates you to get the most out of your life.

### How do I work out my Signature Strengths

You can identify your top 5 strengths by undertaking the **VIA Signature Strength Inventory** at <http://www.authentic happiness.org/>. There is no charge to complete the inventory and receive your results. It's a comprehensive but straightforward questionnaire that requires you to answer questions about 24 different character strengths.

Based on your answers, you'll get a rank ordering of the 24 strengths included in the questionnaire from your top strengths to your bottom "strengths" (or challenging traits)



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The idea is for you to look at what the automatically-generated test results suggest your top 5 strengths are, decide which resonate the most, and determine for yourself what you consider to be your key “signature strengths”. You should base your decision about whether something is a Signature Strength on whether

- You perceive yourself as naturally good at it
- It’s an important source of positive emotions for you (when you’re using a Signature Strength you typically feel joy, excitement, serenity etc.)
- When you’re your most creative and/or engaged you’re probably using one or more of your signature strengths.

For a detailed description of the 24 Strengths, please contact me as I did not want to overburden this article.

### **So how do I applying my Signature Strengths?**

The basic concept is that people are likely to be happier when their life gives them plenty of opportunities to utilise (“flex”) their signature strengths.

From your questionnaire results, consider the following questions

- a) How can I increase the activities in my life that utilise my top strengths, or transform existing activities so that the way I do those activities better utilizes my strengths?
- b) When in a challenging situation ask yourself – how can I use my strengths to manage this better?
- c) How can my strengths lead me to greater happiness today and in the moment
- d) Is your life aligned with your strengths? If not, what would you need to change?

Consciously identifying your unique strengths as well as those of others in your relationships or at work will help you appreciate these special abilities and what others also bring to the relationship.

By raising you awareness to your least preferred strengths (those towards the bottom of the list) and knowing there are times when you so need to exercise these traits it’s likely to be easier to identify when something is hard because it doesn’t suit you, rather than jumping to harsh judgments of yourself.

### **In Conclusion**

Research has shown that people who spend time using their signature strengths in their everyday life generally experience more positive emotions and less negative emotions over time

Identifying your personal strengths and then consciously incorporating them into daily activities will bring greater satisfaction, happiness and life satisfaction.

### **Want to Know More...**

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