

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is lying on her back on a grassy field. She is wearing a red and white striped t-shirt, black-rimmed glasses, and a black mustache. She has a wide-eyed, playful expression. A large pink circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

# Can you Discover Your Strengths?

BEACON 2.0 Chapter  
3 ENGAGEMENT  
Lesson 1

**ThriveAbility**

“Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.” —Arnold Schwarzenegger

**Can knowing and using our strengths help us thrive?** One of the first steps in cultivating thriving is to identify our strengths. Unfortunately, it turns out that most of us have no idea what our strengths are, making it hard to use and develop them to be at our best more often. We're often more focused and knowledgeable on what we're not good at, we can describe with ease our weaknesses and tend to focus on fixing them. However, it's in the zone of our strengths that we will find greater engagement, success and happiness. Science is repeatedly finding that it is our strengths, rather than our weaknesses, that hold our greatest potential for growth and that when we have the chance to develop our strengths, it improves both our wellbeing and performance and reduces depression.

### **Can you get into the zone of your strengths?**

Identifying our strengths provides insight into who we are at our best, indicating ways to spend our time that will both feel good and help us function most effectively. Each of us has a unique constellation of strengths that makes us who we are. Knowing we have strengths that can be harnessed as super powers to make life easier, is uplifting. Knowing our strengths, may free us from comparison with others, knowing that none of us are good at everything. We can have more compassion for our weaknesses, knowing that each of us has things we're good and and love doing and things that are lesser strengths. Our character strengths are often things we value deeply such as honesty or fairness and the perceived absence of these in others might us upset us immensely. Seeing this as a difference in strengths helps us understand each other better and let go.

### **How do strengths help us in our relationships?**

We can spot strengths in others and see that they may think differently and value different things to us. This helps us avoid potential conflict and to value interpersonal differences. Once we identify and understand our strengths, we can be free to be ourselves, to find people, places and ways to pass time that fit well with what we value, making life happier, easier and more meaningful. We can partner up with others who compliment us. We can look for and celebrate strengths in others. We can observe the shadow side of our strengths and learn to “turn them up or down” to serve us best in different situations and to do the same with others, to preserve our relationships.



**“IF YOU JUDGE A FISH BY IT'S ABILITY TO CLIMB A TREE, IT WILL ALWAYS BELIEVE IT IS STUPID”**

*Professor Chris Peterson*

### **What is a Strength?**

In its simplest form, a strength is something you are good at and enjoy doing. They represent patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving that, when exercised, will excite, engage, and energise you, and allow you to perform at your optimum level (Linley, Willars & Biswas-Diener, 2010).

They might comprise your talents, interests, resources and/or character. When you use your strengths, you feel like the “real me” is coming through. They’re things you look forward to doing, you feel absorbed while you’re doing them and you feel invigorated and **fulfilled** after you’ve whereyou done them. They are where your greatest successes are most likely to happen and where you experience enormous growth (McQuaid & Lawn, 2015).

Developing strengths builds on neural pathways that are already dominant in your brain - advancing you towards the estimated 8,000 - 10,000 hours of deliberate practice required for mastery. Whereas, overcoming a weakness requires you to literally rewire your brain, needing substantially more practice and effort to enhance poor neural connections (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

### **How might strengths help us thrive?**

Using your strengths should feel **EASY**, make you feel more **ENERGISED**, **ENGAGED** and like this is the **ESSENTIAL** you coming through. It should be easier for you to perform well and reach your potential. Using strengths help you find a feeling of **FLOW** (getting lost in an activity) helping you to **THRIVE**.



# WHY DO STRENGTHS MATTER?

*People who use their strengths more have been found to be:*



## BE HAPPIER:

They report lower levels of depression, higher levels of vitality, and good mental health.



## BE MORE CONFIDENT:

Both strengths knowledge and strengths-use are significantly associated with self-efficacy, self-acceptance, and self-confidence.



## EXPERIENCE FASTER GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT:

Positive self-monitoring and strengths building are particularly suited to circumstances when you're learning something new, something difficult, or something perceived as difficult.



## BE MORE ENGAGED:

People who use their strengths each day are up to six times more engaged in what they're doing.



## FEEL MORE SATISFIED AND EXPERIENCE MORE MEANING:

People who use four or more of their top character strengths are more likely to experience job satisfaction, pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

## “AN ASSESSMENT SURVEY IS A TOOL, NOT A MAGIC ORACLE”

*Professor Chris Peterson*

### How Can You Discover Your Strengths?

You can measure your character strengths by taking the free VIA Survey at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org).

The VIA (Values In Action Survey) is based on the research of over 53 social scientists from around the world who spent three years gathering examples - and the means to measure and improve them - that represented humanity at its best from history, philosophy, religion, psychology and modern culture.



More important than your actual results however, we suggest is how you feel about your results, most people tend to have one of three responses:

**“Yes, that’s me, and I feel proud of these results”.** If this is your response, the challenge then becomes finding ways to use these strengths consistently.

**“Why is that strength down there?”** If this is your response, the challenge then becomes finding ways to put more energy into the strengths you value but haven’t been using lately. Remember, each of your character strengths is buildable of you choose to put in the effort.

**“That doesn’t look anything like me.”** If this is your response, then share your results with people who know you well. Ask them what they think your top strengths are, and trust their guidance and your own experiences to prioritise the strengths you want to develop.

It’s also important to be aware that character strengths are shaped by context. They don’t operate in isolation from the settings you find yourself in. This means that it’s worth retaking the survey annually or whenever big shifts are going on in your life. You’ll find that many of your character strengths remain fairly consistent, but several move around depending on your current context and the strengths you’re drawing on most in these situations (McQuaid & Lawn, 2014).

# WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?



(Seligman & Peterson, 2004 )