



Strengths Action Plans

Background

There are many reasons to build and use strengths. We can use strengths to solve problems, achieve goals, build relationships, and help others.

Strengths require action. Kind thoughts alone do not make a person kind. We consider others kind when they behave in kind ways repeatedly and regularly over time.

We can build strengths by engaging in relevant actions repeatedly over time (e.g., Aristotle, Franklin). If we want to develop the strength of kindness, we can engage in kind actions repeatedly. Through repetition, actions may become habits. We become stronger through effort and practice.

We can also build strengths by applying our signature (or well-developed) strengths more frequently, in new ways, and in new contexts (e.g., Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2002). We may find that a signature strength blossoms at home but not at school or at work (or vice versa), or that we use a strength in some relationships but not others. Some contexts may not seem to call on our signature strengths. As a result, we may find that we aren't our being our "best selves" or engaging as fully as we'd like.

Activities

1. Building a non-signature strength

- Identify a strength that is important to you that you do not consider a signature (or top) personal strength. This could be a strength that you value highly and/or a strength that you believe would be helpful in your life.

- Develop a specific plan to use this strength a few times over the next week.
Important: Your plan must involve doing, not merely thinking. Make sure that your plan includes the strength you will use, when and where you will use the strength, and specific actions and behaviors related to that strength.
- As you develop your plan, you may find it helpful to think about others you know who regularly show this strength. What might they do in the situations you are thinking about?
- Carry out your plan! As you do this, also keep an eye out for new, unforeseen opportunities to build this strength. Try to go through your day with strengths glasses that have a lens for the particular strength you are trying to build. Notice others' behaviors related to the strength as well as opportunities for you to act in ways that are consistent with this strength.
- Repeat with the same strength or with a different non-signature strength.

2. Using a signature strength

- Identify a signature strength that you would like to apply even more in your life. This could be a strength that you use primarily in one context (e.g., at home but not at school or work; when playing soccer but not in the classroom).
- Develop a specific plan to use this strength in new ways over the next week.
Important: Your plan must involve doing, not merely thinking. Make sure that your plan includes the strength you will use, when and where you will use the strength, and specific actions and behaviors related to that strength.
- As you develop your plan, try to think about the variety of contexts you find yourself in each week and the different people you interact with. Identify new opportunities (contexts and people) for applying the strength. How can you use your signature strength in these settings and with these people? Where might this strength be particularly useful? What specific actions can you take?
- Carry out your plan! As you do this, also keep an eye out for new, unforeseen opportunities to extend this strength. Try to go through your day with strengths glasses that have a lens for the particular strength you are trying to use. Notice others' behaviors related to the strength as well as new opportunities for you to act in ways that are consistent with this strength.
- Repeat with the same strength or with a different signature strength.

References and Further Reading

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Franklin, B. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

Linkins, M., Niemiec, R., Gillham, J., & Mayerson, D. (2015). Through the lens of strengths: A framework for educating the heart. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*, 64-68.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Rashid, T., & Anjum, A. (2005). 340 Ways to USE VIA Character Strengths.

This resource contains suggestions for movies and activities related to a wide variety of strengths.

- Available online at Tayyabrishid.com and at VIAcharacter.org
- Search for: "Rashid use VIA strengths"

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY, US: Free Press.

Seligman, M.E.P., Ernst, R., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive Education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*, 293-311.

Web Resources

Rashid, T., & Anjum, A. (2005). 340 Ways to USE VIA Character Strengths.

This resource contains suggestions for movies and activities related to a wide variety of strengths.

- Available online at Tayyabrishid.com and at VIAcharacter.org
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Niemiec, R. M. (2014). Boosting happiness: One of the best exercises you can do. *Psychology Today*.

- Available online at psychologytoday.com
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