

Transcript - SEEK THE REWARDS OF USING YOUR STRENGTHS AT WORK

There's a part of me that seems hardwired to focus on deficits rather than strengths in myself, despite being able to see strengths in others. Having worked in the social service industry for the last 25 years I have grown accustomed to helping others see the best in themselves, and to understand how they can move towards their potentials. How can I as a leader be kinder to myself, and allow my strengths to shine through?

There was a time in the last two years where I was very uncertain about what I had to offer as a leader. I had the trappings of success and position, but had lost a sense of who I was as a leader. I was doing the practical and management parts of my work, and was keeping things going, but I was lost.

I had become focussed on what could go wrong, or what I should have done (ie. looking backwards), or what I could be doing (ie. looking forward), and not paying enough attention to what I could actually do in the present. With hindsight I recognise that I was not at all mindful of who I "was" in the work i was doing, or of how I wanted to show up in the day to day presence of leading.

The culmination of this period was a time of pretty severe depression.

One of my experiences of depression is being very disconnected from my current reality, and being caught in the past and the future. I couldn't see my strengths or skills at this time.

The reason I mention it here is that as I was recovering from depression I took the Via Character Strengths Profile survey and working through the survey results that I received was very helpful for me to regain a sense of who I am and what I want to do with my working life.

Hopefully you don't have to experience a major episode of depression before you take some time to focus on what your strengths could bring to your work. As I said earlier I think that focusing on strengths can bring some benefits to leaders and can help the people we work with to work towards their potentials.

I think that there are some things that all leaders can do that can help themselves better understand their strengths, and to explore what the strengths of their teams and organisations are as well. In doing so I think that we can create value and meaning in work, for ourselves and for others.

As I mentioned earlier I completed the Via Character Profile survey, which only took about 15 minutes to complete and is free. I received an email with the short Strengths Profile, which ranked my 24 strengths in rank order. I was intrigued with the results and what I could do with them, and then spent a few dollars and got more detailed reports that helped me to better understand what I could do with these strengths. It is a report that I've gone back to again and again as I come to understand how I can improve my lesser strengths and benefit from my signature strengths.

This Via Character Profile tool comes from the "Via Institute on Character", which is a non-profit organisation that has been generating and using positive psychology research over the last 15 years. They have identified that there are six key virtues of

- wisdom,
- courage,
- humanity,
- justice,
- temperance and
- transcendence

- which make up a universal understanding of Character, and that each of these virtues have a number of components. In all they have identified 24 Character strengths that each of us have to varying degrees. The Profile Tool shows that we are naturally stronger in some than others. However, they also believe that it is possible to improve your lesser strengths if some focus is put on them.

My results on the Via Character Profile survey identified my 6 signature strengths as

1. Fairness

Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.

2. Judgment

Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.

3. Forgiveness

Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others' shortcomings; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

4. Prudence

Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.

5. Perspective

Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself/others.

6. Honesty

Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretence; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.

Seeing the results of this report was not a surprise. What I was also able to see is that I have been in jobs that have used many of my lesser strengths on a regular basis. But that doesn't

seem to make them move into being my signature strengths. In fact, all my middle strengths were very tightly bunched together and included most of the practical strengths that I needed to be able to successfully lead an organisation.

Now each of us will have different results. I have worked with a couple of people who have also done this survey, and their results have been very different from mine. But like me, these other people have gone back a few times to their report and thought about what it means to them. What can they do to better use their key strengths, and what can they do to improve their lesser strengths.

So what do I learn from all of this?

I think the most important thing is that I have more energy working from a strengths perspective. Even focusing on my lesser strengths, as strengths reframes them into a positive light. Seeing that Hope and Zest are two of my lesser strengths has given me information about myself that I can work with. It has given me an opportunity to give some focus to them and to build them up slowly over time. And I am coming at it from a positive frame of mind - I already have some skills and strengths in these areas - but what can I do to improve them, and be stronger in these areas.

I think that its worth thinking about how you show up in the workplace from a strengths perspective. Are you making the most of your signature strengths, and are are you working on your lesser strengths. But not to focus just on the lesser strengths - I think that it is really important to work out ways to engage the best of you and reach the potential of these signature strengths.

I really encourage you to go and do the free test at the Via Institute on Character at www.viacharacter.org.

See what you learn, maybe get the Via Me! Pathways report for \$20 - I found the report really helpful.

I'd love to hear from anyone who takes up this challenge. What did you learn about yourself? What are doing more of? And what are you going to focus on to bring your strengths to the workplace?