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strengthsfinder 2.0

Strengths Discovery and Action-Planning Guide



What makes *you* stand out?

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Your Top 5 Themes

Strategic

Connectedness

Ideation

Context

Input

What's in This Guide?

- For each of your top five themes, you will find:
 - A brief Shared Theme Description
 - Your Personalized Strengths Insights, which describe what makes you stand out from others with the same theme in their top five
 - Some examples of what the theme "sounds like" — real quotes from people who also have the theme in their top five
 - 10 Ideas for Action
- A Strengths Discovery Activity to get you thinking about how your talents and your investment work together to build strengths that you can apply to your work and personal life
- A Strengths-Based Action Plan for review with a friend, manager, or colleague

STRATEGIC

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

Because of your strengths, you might generate certain types of ideas quickly. Occasionally you draw links between facts, events, people, problems, or solutions. You may present numerous options for consideration. Perhaps your innovative thinking fosters ongoing dialogue between and among associates, committee members, teammates, or classmates. By nature, you may be viewed by some people as an innovative and original thinker. Perhaps your ability to generate options causes others to see there is more than one way to attain an objective. Now and then, you help certain individuals select the best alternative after having weighed the pros and cons in light of prevailing circumstances or available resources. Driven by your talents, you customarily pinpoint the core problems and identify the best solutions. You artfully and skillfully eliminate distractions. This helps people gain a clear understanding of what is happening and why it is happening. You frequently identify ways to transform an obstacle into an opportunity. Instinctively, you long to know more so you remain on the cutting edge of your field or areas of interest. Your inventive mind usually generates more possibilities than you can handle or fund. Nonetheless, you are committed to acquiring knowledge and/or skills. You study everything involved in a situation and conceive entirely new ways of seeing or doing things. What you already know prompts you to ask questions and delve even deeper into a subject or problem.

Strategic sounds like this:

Liam C., manufacturing plant manager: "It seems as if I can always see the consequences before anyone else can. I have to say to people, 'Lift up your eyes; look down the road a ways. Let's talk about where we are going to be next year so that when we get to this time next year, we don't have the same problems.' It seems obvious to me, but some people are just too focused on this month's numbers, and everything is driven by that."

Vivian T., television producer: "I used to love logic problems when I was a kid -- you know, the ones where 'if A implies B, and B equals C, does A equal C?' Still today, I am always playing out repercussions, seeing where things lead. I think it makes me a great interviewer. I know that nothing is an accident; every sign, every word, every tone of voice has significance. So I watch for these clues and play them out in my head, see where they lead, and then plan my questions to take advantage of what I have seen in my head."

Simon T., human resources executive: "We really needed to take the union on at some stage, and I saw an opportunity -- a very good issue to take them on. I could see that they were going in a direction that would lead them into all kinds of trouble if they continued following it. Lo and behold, they did continue following it, and when they arrived, there I was, ready and waiting. I suppose it just comes naturally to me to predict what someone else is going to do. And then when that person reacts, I can respond immediately because I have sat down and said, 'Okay, if they do this, we'll do this. If they do that, then we'll do this other thing.' It's like when you tack in a sailboat. You head in one direction, but you jinx one way, then another, planning and reacting, planning and reacting."

Ideas for Action:

- Take the time to fully reflect or muse about a goal that you want to achieve until the related patterns and issues emerge for you. Remember that this musing time is essential to strategic thinking.
- You can see repercussions more clearly than others can. Take advantage of this ability by planning your range of responses in detail. There is little point in knowing where events will lead if you are not ready when you get there.
- Find a group that you think does important work, and contribute your strategic thinking. You can be a leader with your ideas.
- Your strategic thinking will be necessary to keep a vivid vision from deteriorating into an ordinary pipe dream. Fully consider all possible paths toward making the vision a reality. Wise forethought can remove obstacles before they appear.
- Make yourself known as a resource for consultation with those who are stumped by a particular problem or hindered by a particular obstacle or barrier. By naturally seeing a way when others are convinced there is no way, you will lead them to success.
- You are likely to anticipate potential issues more easily than others. Though your awareness of possible danger might be viewed as negativity by some, you must share your insights if you are going to avoid these pitfalls. To prevent misperception of your intent, point out not only the future obstacle, but also a way to prevent or overcome it. Trust your insights, and use them to ensure the success of your efforts.
- Help others understand that your strategic thinking is not an attempt to belittle their ideas, but is instead a natural propensity to consider all the facets of a plan objectively. Rather than being a naysayer, you are actually trying to examine ways to ensure that the goal is accomplished, come what may. Your talents will allow you to consider others' perspectives while keeping your end goal in sight.
- Trust your intuitive insights as often as possible. Even though you might not be able to explain them rationally, your intuitions are created by a brain that instinctively anticipates and projects. Have confidence in these perceptions.
- Partner with someone with strong Activator talents. With this person's need for action and your need for anticipation, you can forge a powerful partnership.
- Make sure that you are involved in the front end of new initiatives or enterprises. Your innovative yet procedural approach will be critical to the genesis of a new venture because it will keep its creators from developing deadly tunnel vision.

CONNECTEDNESS

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Connectedness theme have faith in the links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

It's very likely that you may be fascinated with the mystery of life. Perhaps your capacity to feel good about yourself does not hinge on having logical or rational explanations for everything. Maybe you sense you are part of the lives of other individuals and accept they are part of your existence. Maybe this outlook on life influences what you say and do for people as well as how you care for the environment. Instinctively, you may assert -- that is, declare or affirm -- that every person comes into your life for a purpose. This partially explains why you launch into discussions or engage in small talk with people you are meeting for the first time. Perhaps you want to figure out why your paths in life have crossed. By nature, you might argue that hard work influences the course of your life more than anything else. Perhaps you make your own good fortune by preparing yourself to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. When you are successful, you may be able to outline what you did to reach a particular goal. Maybe you link together facts, incidents, conversations, or available resources to understand your accomplishments. Sometimes you resist the notion that life is nothing more than a game of chance. Chances are good that you occasionally set out to build bridges of understanding between diverse people. Perhaps you accept individuals as they are rather than as

you wish them to be. Maybe this frees your mind to search for ideas, interests, or personal experiences you share with others.

Connectedness sounds like this:

Mandy M., homemaker: "Humility is the essence of Connectedness. You have to know who you are and who you aren't. I have a piece of the wisdom. I don't have much of it, but what I do have is real. This isn't grandiosity. This is real humility. You have confidence in your gifts, real confidence, but you know you don't have all the answers. You start to feel connected to others because you know they have wisdom that you don't. You can't feel connected if you think you have everything."

Rose T., psychologist: "Sometimes I look at my bowl of cereal in the morning and think about those hundreds of people who were involved in bringing me my bowl of cereal: the farmers in the field, the biochemists who made the pesticides, the warehouse workers at the food preparation plants, even the marketers who somehow persuaded me to buy this box of cereal and not a different one sitting next to it on the shelf. I know it sounds strange, but I give thanks to these people, and just doing that makes me feel more involved with life, more connected to things, less alone."

Chuck M., teacher: "I tend to be very black and white about things, but when it comes to understanding the mysteries of life, for some reason, I am much more open. I have a big interest in learning about all different religions. I am reading a book right now that talks about Judaism versus Christianity versus the religion of the Canaanites. Buddhism, Greek mythology -- it's really interesting how all of these tie together in some way."

Ideas for Action:

- Consider roles in which you listen and counsel. You can become adept at helping other people see connection and purpose in everyday occurrences.
- Explore specific ways to expand your sense of connection, such as starting a book club, attending a retreat, or joining an organization that puts Connectedness into practice.
- Within your organization, help your colleagues understand how their efforts fit in the larger picture. You can be a leader in building teams and helping people feel important.
- You are aware of the boundaries and borders created within organizations and communities, but you treat these as seamless and fluid. Use your Connectedness talents to break down silos that prevent shared knowledge.
- Help people see the connections among their talents, their actions, their mission, and their successes. When people believe in what they are doing and feel like they are part of something bigger, commitment to achievement is enhanced.
- Partner with someone with strong Communication talents. This person can help you with the words you need to describe vivid examples of connection in the real world.
- Don't spend too much time attempting to persuade others to see the world as a linked web. Be aware that your sense of connection is intuitive. If others don't share your intuition, rational argument will not persuade them.
- Your philosophy of life compels you to move beyond your own self-interests and the interests of your immediate constituency and sphere of influence. As such, you see the broader implications for your community and the world. Explore ways to communicate these insights to others.
- Seek out global or cross-cultural responsibilities that capitalize on your understanding of the commonalities inherent in humanity. Build universal capability, and change the mindset of those who think in terms of "us" and "them."
- Connectedness talents can help you look past the outer shell of a person to embrace his or her humanity. Be particularly aware of this when you work with someone whose background is very different from yours. You can naturally look past the labels and focus on his or her essential needs.

IDEATION

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

Because of your strengths, you tune in to people and figure out what they are saying and thinking about you. You are acutely aware of how individuals regard you. You probably curry -- that is, try to win -- the favor of some and seek to impress others. Driven by your talents, you might be a bit selective about the historians with whom you collaborate. Perhaps you prefer to work with experts who look beyond the obvious. Sometimes you want to evaluate the details that caused armies to clash on a global scale. It's very likely that you might be the person people look to for original thoughts during discussions or meetings. Your reputation for innovative thinking partially explains why groups attempt to recruit you. Perhaps you embrace opportunities to be creative. Chances are good that you might engage in life with gusto. You sometimes approach assignments, tasks, projects, opportunities, or problems with a creative flair. You might take the innovative path rather than follow the traditional or tried-and-true ways of doing things.

Ideation sounds like this:

Mark B., writer: "My mind works by finding connections between things. When I was hunting down the Mona Lisa in the Louvre museum, I turned a corner and was blinded by the flashing of a thousand cameras snapping the tiny picture. For some reason, I stored that visual image away. Then I noticed a 'No Flash Photography' sign, and I stored that away too. I thought it was odd because I remembered reading that flash photography can harm paintings. Then about six months later, I read that the Mona Lisa has been stolen at least twice in this century. And suddenly I put it all together. The only explanation for all these facts is that the real Mona Lisa is not on display in the Louvre. The real Mona Lisa has been stolen, and the museum, afraid to admit their carelessness, has installed a fake. I don't know if it's true, of course, but what a great story."

Andrea H., interior designer: "I have the kind of mind where everything has to fit together or I start to feel very odd. For me, every piece of furniture represents an idea. It serves a discrete function both independently and in concert with every other piece. The 'idea' of each piece is so powerful in my mind, it must be obeyed. If I am sitting in a room where the chairs are somehow not fulfilling their discrete function -- they're the wrong kind of chairs or they're facing the wrong way or they're pushed up too close to the coffee table -- I find myself getting physically uncomfortable and mentally distracted. Later, I won't be able to get it out of my mind. I'll find myself awake at 3:00 a.m., and I walk through the person's house in my mind's eye, rearranging the furniture and repainting the walls. This started happening when I was very young, say seven years old."

Ideas for Action:

- Seek a career in which you will be given credit for and paid for your ideas, such as marketing, advertising, journalism, design, or new product development.
- You are likely to get bored quickly, so make some small changes in your work or home life. Experiment. Play mental games with yourself. All of these will help keep you stimulated.
- Finish your thoughts and ideas before communicating them. Lacking your Ideation talents, others might not be able to "join the dots" of an interesting but incomplete idea and thus might dismiss it.

- Not all your ideas will be equally practical or serviceable. Learn to edit your ideas, or find a trusted friend or colleague who can "proof" your ideas and identify potential pitfalls.
- Understand the fuel for your Ideation talents: When do you get your best ideas? When you're talking with people? When you're reading? When you're simply listening or observing? Take note of the circumstances that seem to produce your best ideas, and recreate them.
- Schedule time to read, because the ideas and experiences of others can become your raw material for new ideas. Schedule time to think, because thinking energizes you.
- You are a natural fit with research and development; you appreciate the mindset of visionaries and dreamers. Spend time with imaginative peers, and sit in on their brainstorming sessions.
- Partner with someone with strong Analytical talents. This person will question you and challenge you, therefore strengthening your ideas.
- Sometimes you lose others' interest because they cannot follow your abstract and conceptual thinking style. Make your ideas more concrete by drawing pictures, using analogies or metaphors, or simply explaining your concepts step by step.
- Feed your Ideation talents by gathering knowledge. Study fields and industries different from your own. Apply ideas from outside, and link disparate ideas to generate new ones.

CONTEXT

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

It's very likely that you occasionally turn to historians for information about the past. Perhaps you narrow your quest for knowledge to specific topics or eras. Instinctively, you periodically investigate some of the events, policies, or people whose actions contributed to worldwide wars. You might delve into materials that reveal how these global conflicts were brought to an end. Driven by your talents, you may gravitate to people who love to think about or talk about the past. Your taste in books and other written materials sometimes leads you to the history sections of bookstores, libraries, or Internet sites. Perhaps your passion for reading about humankind's ever-unfolding story allows you to feel comfortable in the presence of specific historians. Because of your strengths, you occasionally read about major wars. While some people find this particular topic boring or irrelevant, you might be fascinated with it. If you read about a specific global conflict, perhaps you feel impelled to collect additional information. Maybe one book or article leads you to another. You sometimes experience the story of humankind unfolding before your eyes on the printed page.

Context sounds like this:

Adam Y., software designer: "I tell my people, 'Let's avoid vuja de.' And they say, 'Isn't that the wrong word? Shouldn't it be déjà vu?' And I say, 'No, vuja de means that we're bound to repeat the mistakes of our past. We must avoid this. We must look to our past, see what led to our mistakes, and then not make them again.' It sounds obvious, but most people don't look to their past or don't trust that it was valid or something. And so for them, it's vuja de all over again."

Jesse K., media analyst: "I have very little empathy, so I don't relate to people through their present emotional state. Instead, I relate to them through their past. In fact, I can't even begin to understand people until I have found out where they grew up, what their parents were like, and what they studied in college."

Gregg H., accounting manager: "I recently moved the whole office to a new accounting system, and the only reason it worked was that I honored their past. When people build an accounting system, it's

their blood, sweat, and tears; it's them. They are personally identified with it. So if I come in and blandly tell them that I'm going to change it, it's like me saying I am going to take your baby away. That's the level of emotion I was dealing with. I had to respect this connection, this history, or they would have rejected me out of hand."

Ideas for Action:

- Before planning begins on a project, encourage the people involved to study past projects. Help them appreciate the statement: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
- If you are in a role that requires teaching others, build your lessons around case studies. You will enjoy the search for the appropriate case, and your students will learn from these precedents. Use your understanding of the past to help others map the future.
- At work, help your organization strengthen its culture via folklore. For example, collect symbols and stories that represent the best of the past, or suggest naming an award after a person who embodied the historical traditions of your organization.
- Partner with someone with strong Futuristic or Strategic talents. This person's fascination with what "could be" will stop you from becoming mired in the past, while your deep understanding of context will stop him or her from ignoring the lessons of the past. Together you are more likely to create something that lasts.
- Accept change. Remember that your Context talents do not require you to "live in the past." Instead, you can actually become known as an active agent for positive change. Your natural sense of context should allow you to identify more clearly than most the aspects of the past that can be discarded and those that must be retained to build a sustainable future.
- Use fact-based comparisons to prior successes to paint a vivid picture for others of "what can be" in the future. The real-life illustrations you create can build confidence and emotional engagement.
- You recognize that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Probe your friends and coworkers about actions that might have contributed to their current successes so you can help them make better choices in the future. This will help them put their decisions into an overall context.
- Read historical novels, non-fiction, or biographies. You will discover many insights that will help you understand the present. You will think more clearly.
- Compare historical antecedents and situations to your current challenge. Identifying commonalities may lead you to a new perspective or an answer to your problems.
- Seek out mentors who have a sense of history. Listening to their memories is likely to spark your thought process.

INPUT

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

By nature, you may feel better about life when you can take the mystery out of complicated procedures. Sometimes you outline in detail the steps to understand exactly what is happening and why. Chances are good that you may have a reputation for being well-read. Perhaps this partially explains why certain people seek you out to solicit your point of view on specific topics. Others' questions sometimes inspire you to delve more deeply into specific subjects. By reading, you now and then add fresh ideas to your mind's storehouse of information. Instinctively, you may choose to

associate with specific people who think big and think smart. Perhaps exchanging ideas, concepts, or theories with them exhilarates you. You might pull together a few thoughts from these animated conversations. To be sure you don't overlook a potentially valuable suggestion, you mentally file away or physically document those bits of insight or wisdom for easy retrieval. Driven by your talents, you sometimes sit down with a book simply because you are eager to discover new ideas. Through the printed word, you have made the acquaintance of some very interesting fictional characters and real people.

Input sounds like this:

Ellen K., writer: "Even as a child, I found myself wanting to know everything. I would make a game of my questions. 'What is my question today?' I would think up these outrageous questions, and then I would go looking for the books that would answer them. I often got in way over my head, deep into books that I didn't have a clue about, but I read them because they had my answer someplace. My questions became my tool for leading me from one piece of information to another."

John F., human resources executive: "I'm one of those people who thinks that the Internet is the greatest thing since sliced bread. I used to feel so frustrated, but now if I want to know what the stock market is doing in a certain area or the rules of a certain game or what the GNP of Spain is or other different things, I just go to the computer, start looking, and eventually find it."

Kevin F., salesperson: "I'm amazed at some of the garbage that collects in my mind, and I love playing Jeopardy and Trivial Pursuit and anything like that. I don't mind throwing things away as long as they're material things, but I hate wasting knowledge or accumulated knowledge or not being able to read something fully if I enjoy it."

Ideas for Action:

- Look for jobs in which you are charged with acquiring new information each day, such as teaching, research, or journalism.
- Devise a system to store and easily locate information. This can be as simple as a file for all the articles you have clipped or as sophisticated as a computer database.
- Partner with someone with dominant Focus or Discipline talents. This person will help you stay on track when your inquisitiveness leads you down intriguing but distracting avenues.
- Your mind is open and absorbent. You naturally soak up information in the same way that a sponge soaks up water. But just as the primary purpose of the sponge is not to permanently contain what it absorbs, neither should your mind simply store information. Input without output can lead to stagnation. As you gather and absorb information, be aware of the individuals and groups that can most benefit from your knowledge, and be intentional about sharing with them.
- You might naturally be an exceptional repository of facts, data, and ideas. If that's the case, don't be afraid to position yourself as an expert. By simply following your Input talents, you could become known as the authority in your field.
- Remember that you must be more than just a collector of information. At some point, you'll need to leverage this knowledge and turn it into action. Make a point of identifying the facts and data that would be most valuable to others, and use this information to their advantage.
- Identify your areas of specialization, and actively seek more information about them.
- Schedule time to read books and articles that stimulate you.
- Deliberately increase your vocabulary. Collect new words, and learn the meaning of each of them.
- Identify situations in which you can share the information you have collected with other people. Also make sure to let your friends and colleagues know that you enjoy answering their questions.

Strengths Discovery Activity

As you begin to think about your talents, consider this equation:

$$\begin{array}{l} \mathbf{Talent} \text{ (a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving)} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ } \mathbf{Investment} \text{ (time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building} \\ \text{your knowledge base)} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ } \mathbf{Strength} \text{ (the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance)} \end{array}$$

Here is an example:

$$\begin{array}{l} \mathbf{Talent is:} \text{ Truly listening to your customers' wants and needs} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ } \mathbf{Investment is:} \text{ Researching products and keeping up-to-date on the industry} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ } \mathbf{Strength is:} \text{ Consistently providing near-perfect customer service} \end{array}$$

Now, think about what *you* naturally do best. How can you invest in that talent to build strength?

Do your own Strengths Discovery Interview:

$$\begin{array}{l} \mathbf{Your Talent is:} \text{ _____} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ } \mathbf{Your Investment is:} \text{ _____} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ } \mathbf{Your Strength is:} \text{ _____} \end{array}$$

My Strengths-Based Action Plan

Now that you have discovered your top five themes and considered action items for development, choose 1-3 themes that describe you best, and list them below. Talk to people who know you well, and ask them to describe how you embody these themes. Ask them for specific examples of times when they have seen you using each theme in action or how each theme manifests itself in you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, write down some specific actions that you could take in the next week, month, and year to build and apply your strengths. Refer to your Personalized Strengths Insights and Ideas for Action if you need help.

In the next week, I will:

-
-
-

In the next month, I will:

-
-
-

In the next year, I will:

-
-
-

Next, list the name of at least one person who you will meet with to review this plan. Be sure to choose someone who can help you to keep these goals "top of mind" and who will help you leverage your talents to build strengths.

Name: _____ Date reviewed: _____

Name: _____ Date reviewed: _____