

DEVELOPING
OUR STRENGTHS
TO BUILD
PSYCHOLOGICAL
SAFETY

EPISODE FOUR

THE WELLBEING LAB PODCAST SERIES FOR XERO



THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

1. CAN YOU NAME YOUR TOP 5 STRENGTHS?

Can you name what your top five strengths at work are – those things you're good at and enjoy doing? Don't overthink it – you either know these or you don't. Quickly list them down now.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

2. STEP ON THE STRENGTHS SCALE

Think about the last month you've spent at work and what you've typically spent your time doing most days. What percentage of this time has provided opportunities for you to develop your top five strengths and do what you do best?

_____ %

3. APPLY YOUR PERMAH 3 POINT CHECK

Looking at your score, answer the following questions:

- How** do I feel about my results?
- Why** am I feeling this way?
- Who** do I want to be as I step forward with this new insight? What wellbeing action do I want to prioritize to help develop my strengths now?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Your strengths are the things that you're good at and enjoy doing. We like to think of them as your neurological superpowers because over time you've spent so much time practicing these particular thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that you've built up neural pathways through your brain that make these ways of being in the world easier, more effective, more energizing and more enjoyable for you.
- More than a decade of studies have consistently found that people who regularly use their strengths experience more confidence and less stress, have more energy and are happier, and are more creative, engaged, and satisfied at work.
- Not only is developing your strengths good for your own wellbeing and performance, but researchers also suggest that in teams where most people have a chance to do what they do best each day, on average they are up to 36% more productive, up to 44% more likely to have happier customers, and up to 50% more likely to have lower staff turnover. Not surprisingly, when we enjoy our work more this has a positive ripple effect on everyone we encounter.
- Strengths assessment tools are great ways to build a common language around our strengths at work because unfortunately our brains are wired to do much better at spotting weaknesses in ourselves and others and feeling a very evolutionary pull to fix them than we are at looking for ways to build on our strengths. In fact, researchers estimate that we spend about 80% of our time focused on fixing weaknesses, and only about 20% of our time focused on building on our strengths. However, their recommendation is that we try to flip this equation given it can take up to 8,000 to 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to really take a weakness and turn it into a strength.
- To be clear, researchers are not suggesting for a moment that this means that you don't need to know what your weaknesses are and how to address them. Given the amount of energy and effort it takes to build up your neural pathways, however, Dr. Alex Linley suggests that it's worth considering if the weakness is something you can: avoid or minimize doing; delegate to someone else who has a strength in this area; use one of your existing strengths to make the task easier; or if it's important enough to put the time, effort and energy into climbing the mastery curve that will enable you to build the neural wiring necessary in this area.
- In order to develop your strengths intelligently at work, it's important that you be aware of when they are being underplayed. For example, when you find yourself procrastinating and putting things off, or lacking the confidence to dive into a task or have a conversation that's needed this is often a sign that your strengths are being underplayed and need dialing up in this moment.

- In order to develop your strengths intelligently, it's also important that you be aware of when they are being overplayed. For example, when you feel like you're giving your all to a task or a relationship but missteps or mistakes keep happening, other people are not that appreciative of your hard work or are maybe even complaining about you're doing, or you feel on the verge of burning ourselves out. In our experience, if you scratch the surface of most of the "weakness" or "improvement" feedback you've ever been given you'll probably find it is a strength being overplayed and needs dialing down in this moment.
- And of course the best ways to develop your strengths at work is to find more opportunities to create moments where you're completely engaged in what you're doing, you feel like you're in the zone, and you're truly performing at your best. Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, of Claremont Graduate University, calls these moments 'flow' and he has found that they occur when: you have a clear goal you're trying to achieve; the task you're tackling is well matched to your strengths; and you're getting feedback on how you're doing so you can continue building on your strengths. You're neither bored nor anxious; you're just genuinely enjoying what you're working on.
- Studies have found that when you strike this state of flow, you feel more involved in your life, rather than isolated from it. You have a stronger sense of control, rather than feeling helpless or overwhelmed. And you have more self-belief, higher levels of confidence, and more like to feel like you're thriving at work.
- It's important to remember that while your strengths represent your neurological superpowers and how your brain is wired to perform at its best right now, your strengths are also shaped by your environment. So if you look at your strengths reports and find yourself going "why is that strength down there" then there are things you can do to move a strength up. Just be aware that moving a strength up requires motivation and commitment so make sure it's something you care enough about to put your time and energy into.
- One of the best ways to build psychological safety in teams is to start looking for the strengths, rather than the weaknesses, in each other. Just remember that it is the willingness to look for people's strengths, more than the finding of them, that matters most when it comes to building psychological safety – because we all share the same deep psychological need to be seen, respected and appreciated for who we are at our best.
- The Corporate Leadership Council found in a study of more than 20,000 people around the world, in different industries and different roles that when managers give people strengths-based feedback on average for a period of time after their performance improves by 36%. However, if managers focus more on people's weaknesses over the same period of time on average performance declines by 27%, which is massive gap all for the sake of conversations every leader should be having.

WHAT CAN I TRY?

- **CREATE STRENGTH SURGES** – Use whatever method you prefer to plan your days – like a to-do list or your diary – and pick one or two tasks that would benefit from the intentional use of your strengths. Write the strength you want to apply in capital letters next to this task. For example, if your diary says ‘Meeting with Beck’ you might write ‘CURIOSITY’ if this is the strength you want to draw upon when you meet.
- **CONDUCT A STRENGTHS SEARCH** – As you head home take a few minutes to reflect on: “What worked well today and which strengths made this possible? What was I struggling with and which strengths might I have underplayed or overplayed? How could I use my strengths tomorrow?” This small reflection is a great way to be more mindful and intentional about how you’re putting our strengths to work each day.
- **MEET YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF** – If you want to turn the job you have into the job you love, researchers suggest taking 15 – 20 minutes to write about what your best possible self could look like at work if you were using your strengths more consistently each day. We find this can be a great starting point to get clear about the kind of roles that would really make the most of your strengths, so you know what opportunities you need to start putting your hand up for more or creating for yourself. **Grab our guided visualization here** if you’d like some help to meet your best possible self.
- **TRY STRENGTHS SPOTTING** – Look for where other people light up. When people’s strengths are being used their pupils tend to dilate, their body language and their voices become more animated, and their speed of speech tends to quicken. Pay attention to what they’re doing or talking about in these moments and you’ll be able to start spotting their strengths in action (use **the VIA Strengths table** to help you if needed).
- **NAVIGATE STRENGTHS COLLISIONS** – Sometimes our strengths collide with others, a little like oil and water, and this can make it difficult to value strengths that are very different to our own. Look for where they light up and see if you can name the strengths you’re seeing in action. How are these strengths different from your own? Might they be colliding with the strengths you value most? How can you use these insights to build a bridge of respect and compassion for what you each do best so you can find better ways of working together?
- **ASK FOR STRENGTHS FEEDBACK** – Next time you’re being given feedback about your latest failures or weaknesses ask: “So I have the full context for your feedback, can you help me understand as a percentage how much of what I’m doing is and isn’t working?” Then follow up with: “So I also understand what I should keep doing and build upon, can you tell me a bit more about the parts that are working?”
- **HOLD STRENGTHS CHECK-INS** – Check-in on how people are developing their strengths at work with three simple questions: What lit you up last week? What are you looking forward to this week? Is there any support you need to continue developing your strengths? These simple questions that can be incorporated into any catch up are a great way to understand how people are practically developing their strengths as they go about their jobs.

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT TOOLS

THE VIA SURVEY (WWW.VIACHARACTER.ORG)

Created by a team of leading social scientists who scoured the world for ways to identify, measure and develop what is 'good' in people, the VIA Survey identifies your character strengths. These positive personality traits reflect what is good (moral), practical (valued outcomes) and authentic (existential) about you (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The 24 strengths fall under six broad virtues, including:

- **Wisdom (strength of head):** Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment, Love of Learning & Perspective
- **Courage (strength of heart):** Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty & Zest
- **Humanity (strength of others):** Love, Kindness & Social Intelligence
- **Citizenship (strength of community):** Teamwork, Leadership & Fairness
- **Temperance (strength of self):** Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence & Self-Regulation
- **Transcendence (strength of spirit):** Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor & Spirituality

They are 'how' you like to go about your work, regardless of whether anybody pays you or recognizes you for it because they're aligned to the values you hold. It's also important to note, that while your strengths exist within you, they are also shaped by the situations you find yourself in, so they will move around a little bit. Thus, we recommend retaking the VIA Survey annually.

GALLUP STRENGTHSFINDER (WWW.GALLUPSTRENGTHSCENTER.COM)

Created by Donald Clifton and his grandson Tom Rath in the mid-1990s while they were working for the Gallup Research, StrengthsFinder assesses people's talents in the workplace. Drawing on Clifton's decades of research of employees across a range of professions, organizations, and roles they identified 34 themes of talent.

The themes fall under four leadership categories, including:

- **Executing:** Achiever, Arranger, Belief, Consistency, Deliberative, Discipline, Focus, Responsibility, and Restorative.
- **Influencing:** Activator, Command, Communication, Competition, Maximizer, Self-assurance, Significance, and Woo.
- **Relationship Building:** Adaptability, Developer, Connectedness, Empathy, Harmony, Includer, Individualization, Positivity, and Relator.
- **Strategic Thinking:** Analytical, Context, Futuristic, Ideation, Input, Intellection, Learner, and Strategic.

Your final results don't attempt to define you completely or label you as one type or another, or "strong here" and "weak there." Rather, the results have been designed to reveal your five dominant themes of talent, known as your "signature themes." Researchers believe the "signature themes" represent your greatest potential for developing your strengths and the best pathways to help you achieve consistent, near-perfect performances that are both excellent and fulfilling (Rath, 2007).

YOUR INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE




1. CHOOSE A DAILY STRENGTHS SURGE

Think back to your results and PERMAH 3 point check when you identified your strengths and stepped on the strengths scale.

Each day this week, please select one task or meeting on your to-do list or in your diary and note which strength you'll try to use more intentionally for this activity to create a Strengths Surge.

2. COMPLETE YOUR SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen action, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  <p>What's your WANT-TO CHOICE?</p> |  <p>How will you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?</p> |  <p>Who will you BUDDY UP WITH?</p> |
|---|---|---|

For example, note your chosen task and strength down as your WANT-TO CHOICE. TRACK YOUR PROGRESS by using an end of day Strength Search by asking yourself: What worked well and which strengths made this possible? What did you struggle with and which strengths might you have underplayed or overplayed? How could you use your strengths tomorrow? And BUDDY UP by asking someone to check in about what you're learning.

YOUR TEAM CHALLENGE

1. COMPLETE A STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT




Have each team member complete a strengths assessment such as the free 10 minutes VIA Survey and ask them to bring their results to your next team meeting so you can start to understand more about how you can each do more of what you do best in the team.

2. SHARE YOUR STRENGTHS

Take some time in your next team meeting to share what your top five strengths are. Share what lit you up recently at work and which of these strengths you were using. And talk about what's coming up that you're looking forward to and which strengths you hope to draw upon. Ask each other for any support you need to help you put your strengths to work more consistently.

3. COMPLETE YOUR TEAM SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen agenda, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below for each of the priorities you've chosen:

| | | |
|--|--|--|
|  <p>What's your WANT-TO CHOICE?</p> |  <p>How will you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?</p> |  <p>Who will you BUDDY UP WITH?</p> |
|--|--|--|

For example, what's a WANT-TO CHOICE you would like to make as a team to help each other develop your strengths as you work together? How can you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS, for example, using strengths feedback or strengths check-ins to see how you're doing. And how can you BUDDY UP to help each other continue learning about your strengths?

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- **Listen to this podcast** with Podcast with Ryan Niemiec from the VIA Institute on how to put your strengths work, and be sure to **grab the cheat sheet**.
- **Grab this free eBook** – for a list of the 24 VIA Strengths and the ways they can be overplayed, underplayed and used well at work.
- **Watch this TED talk** with Professor Mike Csikszentmihalyi TED talk on creating moments of flow.
- **Read this article** on mapping your team's strengths.
- **Check out our strengths toolboxes** if you need more support.