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**strengthsmatch** ™

# Strengths assessment

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## Introduction

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.”

**Steve Jobs**

This booklet is a self-discovery guide. The guide will give you an insight into yourself, and particularly your strengths.

It's very important that we let our strengths shine, and don't keep them hidden. Doing great work is partly about playing to our strengths, doing what engages us and thriving on what we do. In fact, research has shown that people who combine their technical competencies with their strengths are generally:

- Higher performers
- More confident
- More energetic
- Less stressed
- More likely to achieve their goals
- Happier
- More effective at growing and developing themselves

This guide will help you discover:

- What you're really good at, and enjoy doing
- How to bring more of 'who you are' to work
- How to increase your impact, and consistently deliver excellent performance through using your strengths

## So, what are strengths?

We define strengths as the things that people are naturally good at, love doing and find energising. Your strengths reflect your values and motivators, and are enhanced over time by accumulated knowledge, skills and experience.

**It's very important to distinguish between a competence – something you can do – and a strength – something you are naturally good at, love doing and are energised by.**

Intelligence, technical know-how and experience will always be essential for certain professional or complex roles. However, it's the synergy of 'can do' and 'love to do' that makes the difference.

An interesting thing about our strengths is that they are so natural to us that we often give them little thought and we take them for granted. We may even assume that everyone else is just as good at the things we are good at. In truth of course, everyone is an individual and we all bring unique gifts to our lives and work.

While strengths are innate and cannot be learned, they are not unchanging. Enhancing and maximising your strengths brings a powerful purpose to your development and leads to excellent performance.

Strengths-based development is about building on your strengths and managing your weaknesses as well as possible. **It's important to understand that you will only excel by capitalising on your strengths, never by fixing your weaknesses.** This focus on strengths challenges traditional approaches to workplace development which commonly aim to identify and fix weaknesses.

The strengths approach prioritises two things:

- increasing the impact of the strengths we already have the opportunity to use, and
- finding ways to uncover and polish hidden strengths.

The good news is that you don't need to have strengths in every aspect of your role to succeed. Excellent performers are seldom completely well-rounded. They use their strengths to the full, and learn to be good enough in important areas where they are not naturally talented.

The most important role we can play in our lives is to be ourselves. **This guide is intended to help you be yourself, more, with skill.**

Let's get started.

**“Be yourself...more...with skill.”**

**Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones**

### Definitions

Strengths	The things that people are naturally good at, love doing and find energising
Values	The things that are very important to people
Motivators	The driving force behind somebody's actions

## Structure of the guide

The guide has three sections which build upon each other.



### How to use the guide

This guide will take you on a journey of self-discovery. It has been designed to be simple and easy to use, but it also invites you to do some deep thinking.

Because the guide poses fundamental questions, you might find it helpful to take a break for reflection between sections. You could use this time to:

- Seek feedback from others on your strengthsmatch™ self-assessment
- Share your insights from the reflection activity with a trusted colleague
- Prepare for a conversation with your boss about your action plan

### How long will it take to complete the guide?

It's entirely your choice how you approach completing the guide, and this will determine how long it takes.

If you work straight through the guide on your own, it will take about 90 minutes depending on how much time you take to reflect. If you take breaks and/or discuss it with others then it will take longer.

When we use the guide with a group as part of a development workshop it takes a day.

The beauty of this guide is that you can pick it up and put it down whenever you like. You can work in short bursts and keep coming back to it. Use it in whatever way works for you.

# Section one:

## Assessing your strengths

The purpose of this section of the guide is to help you discover your strengths. The assessment is in two stages.



**Stage one:****strengthsmatch™ strengths assessment**

Take a look at the strengths listed below and on the following page.

Look at the two statements for each strength and ask yourself 'in the round, how well does this strength describe something I am good at, love doing and energises me?' Then, place a tick in the box which best describes how much the strength is like you.

Strength	Very much like me	A bit like me	Not very much like me
<b>I love to be in charge:</b> I am naturally drawn to take the lead in any situation			
<b>It's important to me to make a difference:</b> I thrive on influencing things for the better			
<b>I am a very competitive person:</b> It's very important for me to be the best			
<b>I have a lot of drive:</b> I am never satisfied until I have achieved what I set out to do			
<b>I keep going when things are tough:</b> I am energised by overcoming obstacles and setbacks			
<b>I bring energy and pace to everything I do:</b> I get a lot done, fast			
<b>It's very important to me to do the right thing:</b> I am the type of person who speaks up, or takes risks, if something is not right			
<b>I am honest and straightforward:</b> People know where they stand with me			
<b>I am naturally optimistic:</b> I usually assume that things will turn out well			
<b>I believe in myself:</b> I am usually confident that I can make a positive contribution			
<b>I get a buzz out of learning:</b> I continuously look for opportunities to develop and grow			
<b>I love developing others:</b> I get great satisfaction from watching others progress and realise their potential			
<b>I instinctively tune in to other people's needs:</b> I readily and easily realise if something is wrong with someone and I am good at understanding situations from other peoples' perspectives			
<b>I care about people:</b> Others' wellbeing is really important to me			
<b>I love to think about the big picture:</b> I am good at understanding how things connect			
<b>I have a restless desire to improve things:</b> I am always searching for ways to do things better, or more efficiently			
<b>I am good at explaining things:</b> I communicate information in ways that others find easy to understand			
<b>I love connecting people:</b> I am great at connecting people for their shared benefit			

Strength	Very much like me	A bit like me	Not very much like me
<b>I love making decisions:</b> I thrive on weighing the options and selecting the best way forward			
<b>I intuitively know what's really important:</b> I find it easy to figure out, and focus my attention, on the things that count			
<b>I am good at analysing data and situations:</b> I enjoy the challenge of making sense of complex and sometimes incomplete information			
<b>I am always coming up with new ways of doing things:</b> Creative thinking comes naturally to me			
<b>I thrive on solving problems:</b> I enjoy finding solutions to issues and challenges			
<b>I have very high standards:</b> I strive to achieve excellence			
<b>I love to be on top of things:</b> It's important for me to know that everything is happening as it should			
<b>I am good at adapting to changing situations:</b> I quickly and easily juggle priorities and resources to meet unexpected demands			
<b>I am energised by working with other people:</b> I love collaborating and being part of a team			
<b>I love to bring a smile to others' faces:</b> I am good at using humour to create a relaxed atmosphere			
<b>I thrive on personal responsibility:</b> I take pride in always doing what I say I'll do			
<b>I am disciplined:</b> I love to organise things so I achieve my deadlines			
<b>I see and value the differences in others:</b> I am good at relating to people as individuals			
<b>I have a keen eye for detail:</b> I am good at spotting mistakes and instinctively know when 'things don't add up'			
<b>I love to be in the spotlight:</b> I really enjoy being the centre of attention			
<b>I am a very open person:</b> I enjoy sharing information about myself, and finding out about others			
<b>I am good at writing:</b> I enjoy writing to clarify my own thoughts and to present ideas to others			
<b>I love providing service to others:</b> I get a buzz from helping people above and beyond their expectations			
<b>I am naturally persuasive:</b> I enjoy debate and negotiation			
<b>I am a very positive person:</b> I am good at energising myself and others			
<b>I love to have a sense of purpose:</b> It's very important to me that my efforts deliver a meaningful outcome			
<b>I have a natural ability to listen to others:</b> I am good at giving attention and really understanding what others are saying			



**You will notice that the strengthsmatch™ strengths describe those underlying strengths that underpin outstanding performance, rather than being a traditional list of competencies. This is because we are inviting you to think deeply about the things that drive your current performance and results, and are the root source of your unrealised potential.**

Here are some examples of strengths in action in the workplace. They show how the combination of strengths, together with technical competence and know-how, result in effective behaviour and high performance.

*Chris is a primary school teacher. He's energised by 'making a difference' and his commitment to 'developing others' means he aims to help every child achieve their potential. He's 'a very open person' and has the gift of 'tuning into others' needs'. This enables him to quickly build trusting relationships with his students and their parents.*

*Mary's strengths include 'being on top of things' and 'developing others'. She's a great fit for her team leader role. She regularly checks in with the team so she knows what's going on, and can decide when and how to intervene to get things right. She loves coaching team members. She provides clear directions and constructive feedback. She's quick to recognise people's progress, and is often asked to mentor colleagues from other teams.*

*Nigel is a senior underwriter in an insurance company. He's 'good at analysing complex data', and his natural ability to 'see the bigger picture' while maintaining 'an eye for detail' enable him to assess and price risks accurately. Helping clients to feel safe and secure gives him personal satisfaction and 'a strong sense of purpose'.*

*Sean 'has very high standards', 'knows what's really important', and 'has a restless desire to improve things'. He's a great fit for a role where he needs to consistently deliver high customer service while improving efficiencies. His team has clear goals and performance measures, while he is constantly looking for improvements that will enable him to achieve more with less.*

*Julie is the team receptionist in a social services department. She 'loves to provide service to others' and naturally 'takes personal responsibility'. This ensures her colleagues follow-up with the clients that contact her. She is patient and 'good at explaining things' to the public. She often has to deal with stressful situations, so her 'positive attitude' and 'ability to bring a smile to others' faces' are vital attributes.*

*Anthony is an account executive at a professional services business. He 'has a lot of drive' and is energised by trying to 'achieve his performance goals and targets'. He 'thrives in a competitive environment and his 'optimism' helps him deal with setbacks. 'Naturally persuasive', he aims to win new business by leveraging his reputation for delivering to 'very high standards'.*

Now it's time for you to do some prioritising. Looking at the strengths you ticked as **'Very much like me'** on pages 7 and 8, identify the six that you think most accurately describe you at your best.

Record these in the first column of Box 1 on the next page. Once you've done this, make notes in the second column about how each strength manifests itself in your particular work environment.

**As with the examples above, you might notice that some of your innate strengths combine to help you deliver outstanding results for your business and your people.**

If you have difficulty thinking of ways in which you're able to apply a particular strength in your work, this suggests some unrealised potential. We'll explore how to take advantage of this situation in the action planning section of the guide.

Box 1

Strength	How the strength manifests itself in my work

**Stage two:****Reflection on past experience and achievements**

The strengthsmatch™ strengths are drawn from our research into the strengths and motivators of high performers. However, it is not intended to be an exhaustive list; you may be able to identify other strengths that you bring to your life and work.

The next exercise will help you to validate the strengths you've highlighted through strengthsmatch™, and potentially reveal other hidden strengths.

At this point we ask you to put your strengthsmatch™ assessment to one side. It's time to look at your strengths from a different perspective.

We want you to reflect on your career to date. Use the triggers below to identify peak experiences in your career where you believe your strengths were coming to the fore. Remember, strengths are the things that people are naturally good at, love doing and find energising.

**Think about a time when you've experienced...**

- Being really 'alive' at work
- A really satisfying day
- A memorable 'high' at work

**A time when...**

- The 'real you' has come through in your work
- The activity has given you a real 'buzz'
- You've been so engrossed in your work that time has just flown by
- You've loved what you've done so much that you'd do it for nothing
- You were so pleased about something you'd done that you had to tell someone else about it

**Now use the space provided on the following pages to answer these three questions for up to four of the instances that came to mind:**

- What were you doing?
- What was it like?
- What innate strength(s) do you think you were using?

You can work alone or with someone else who can play the role of coach. If you decide to work with someone else see page 17 for guidance.

**Instance 1**

What were you doing?

What was it like?

What innate strength(s) do you think you were using?

**Instance 2**

What were you doing?

What was it like?

What innate strength(s) do you think you were using?

**Instance 3**

What were you doing?

What was it like?

What innate strength(s) do you think you were using?

**Instance 4**

What were you doing?

What was it like?

What innate strength(s) do you think you were using?

Now review what you've just written in order to:

- Validate strengths you identified as being **'Very much like me'** in Stage One of this discovery process
- Look for evidence of any strengths that you previously assessed as being **'A bit like me'**, but which featured in one or more of your peak experiences. These could be natural strengths which you either tend to suppress or just don't use often and represent hidden potential
- Look for any connecting themes across the instances you describe; these might indicate a new strength(s) not captured in the strengthsmatch™ strengths profile. Remember you are looking for innate, underpinning strengths not learned skills

Now use the box below (Box 2) to confirm your true strengths. Remember, the objective here is quality not quantity. If you find it helpful, use the notes column to write a few words about how the strength is important to you.

**Box 2**

Strength	Notes



An alternative approach to Stage two is to arrange a co-coaching session with a colleague or friend. Here's how this process works.

Each of you takes a turn to reflect on your current and past experiences. The role of the coach is to:

- Use the triggers to prompt their partner to speak about their peak experiences and what they love doing at work
- Listen to and observe what is said and how
- Make brief notes of things they say that sound important. These might show by them speaking more loudly, quickly or in a more animated way
- Invite the partner to reflect on what they've said and to identify any strengths they believe they described
- Offer their own view of their partner's strengths, based on what they heard and saw

To help with the final task, here are some examples of the things you might notice when people are talking about their strengths:

- Eyes shining
- Faster speech
- High energy in voice
- Inflection in voice
- Possibly talking more and for longer
- Smiling
- More erect body posture/sitting forward
- 'Showing' what they are talking about by using hands
- Easily finding examples to explain a situation

Be aware that some people will show their strengths more through their body language, while others express their strengths more by their choice of words and the tone of their voice.

**Back at work, helping colleagues to identify and find ways to play to their strengths is the mark of a great team member. It's also a valuable skill you can use outside work with friends and family.**

**Strengths spotting at work is made easier because people cannot stop themselves behaving in accordance with their strengths.**

**For example, someone with a strength in competitiveness will check their progress against their targets several times a day, while someone who has a strength in connection will always ask people questions about themselves.**

Now you have discovered your own strengths let's look at how you can make the most of them, and also think about how best to manage your weaknesses.

# Section two: Action planning

In this section we'll help you think about your current work and build an action plan that really helps you to play to your strengths.



“The effective executive makes strengths productive.  
He knows that one cannot build on weakness.”

**Peter Drucker**

There is no prescription for the number of strengths needed to be a top performer. The key to success lies in achieving the best possible fit between your natural strengths and the situation you are working in. We do know that the more you use your strengths, the more motivated and effective you will be.

In this section we'll help you think about your current work and build an action plan that really helps you to play to your strengths.

We'll do this in four steps, by asking you questions about:

- **Your Clear strengths;** those things you identified as being **'Very much like me'** through the strengthsmatch™ self-assessment
- **Your Hidden strengths;** which may have emerged through the reflection activity, and where, given the right situation and encouragement, you could shine
- **Your Weaknesses;** most likely the things you identified as being **'Not very much like me'**
- **Over-done strengths;** situations where over-use can cause a strength to become a weakness

In helping you prepare your action plan, we strongly encourage you to give most emphasis to the first two steps. **Development plans commonly focus exclusively on fixing weaknesses. This is a mistake because the way to achieve excellence is to leverage our strengths.**

## Clear strengths

It's important to use your clear strengths to achieve your goals and objectives. This is the path to outstanding performance and job satisfaction.

Consider these questions, and jot down your thoughts in Box 3 below:

- Which of the strengths you summarised in Box 2 are your strongest ones?
- How can you use your strengths to be even more effective in your current job?

For example, if 'always coming up with new ways of doing things' is a strength, then developing complementary skill in communicating clearly and concisely will help you to have more influence and impact.

Similarly, you may 'love to be in charge' but are not sure how to run a productive meeting with your team – learning how to manage a meeting to an agenda and give everyone the opportunity to contribute will enhance your 'love to be in charge' strength.

- In your work, what opportunities exist for you to leverage your strengths for the benefit of others?

For example, if 'tuning into others needs' and 'developing others' are strengths, you could volunteer to be a mentor to more junior colleagues.

### Box 3

Clear strengths	Notes

## Hidden strengths

Your hidden strengths are an exciting source of untapped potential. Maybe you've never had the occasion to use them at work, or something in the work context stops you showing what you can do. Perhaps you listed a strength in Box 1, but then struggled to think of ways you were currently applying it in your work.

Consider these questions, and jot down your thoughts in Box 4 below:

- What do you love doing, but is not required in your current work?
- What do you love, but for some reason feel prevented from doing?
- What do you now realise is a strength, which you hadn't fully appreciated before?
- How can you bring those strengths into your current role?
- How might the wider organisation benefit from you exercising these strengths?
- What support do you need to do so?

For example, in your personal life you might be something of a story teller perhaps as a tourist guide, or someone who gives talks about a special interest, You could use your natural strength of 'being good at explaining things' to help a colleague, or your boss, to present important business information in a compelling and memorable way.

Practicing newly uncovered strengths builds your confidence to use them, and over time will help you apply them even more skilfully.

### Box 4

Hidden strengths	Notes

## Weaknesses

Weaknesses are things you're not good at and drain you of energy.

Realistically, everyone is weak at certain aspects of their job. Some of these weaknesses might not be that important, while others might require your attention and improvement.

Although you cannot transform weakness into great performance, with effort and application you can become 'good enough'. There are a number of ways to manage your weaknesses:

- Use the strengths you do have to help you address, or mitigate, your weaknesses

For example, perhaps you struggle with 'creative thinking', and find it hard 'to come up with new ways of doing things'. This could be a problem in a fast-paced environment where it's important to continually improve your working methods. If you are a team leader and have the strengths of 'loving to be in charge' and 'being honest and straightforward', you can tell your team that your role is to foster a climate of innovation, rather than come up with new ideas yourself. Your leadership contribution is to ensure new thinking is encouraged, and that original ideas are fully explored and recognised.

- Find a colleague with a compensating strength and ask them for help, or delegate responsibility to them

For example, perhaps you enjoy 'being in the spotlight' and this strength together with your love of 'explaining things' and 'ability to persuade' others means you often take the lead in client meetings. However, a lack of interest in the nitty gritty may mean you fail to spot mistakes in your presentation materials. In this case, asking a colleague 'with an eye for detail' to proof read your slide decks could avoid embarrassment for you and your organisation.

- Develop some of the key behaviours associated with the strength you lack

For example, if 'I care about people' is not one of your strengths, try practising these behaviours (which are associated with a strength in caring about people) when interacting with others: ask people how they are, listen to what's important to them, smile and make eye contact, let them finish, paraphrase or summarise what you've heard.

Consider these questions, and jot down your thoughts in the box below:

- What other ways might there be to get things done well that are not your natural strengths?
- Where you need to become 'good enough', what can you learn from people who excel in this strength?
- How can you use your clear strengths to help you mitigate your weaknesses?

### Box 5

Weaknesses	Notes

## Over-done strengths

Over-using a strength can turn it into a weakness. For example, the desire 'to be in charge' could lead to over-control, and a climate in which other people feel dominated or stifled

Consider these questions, and jot down your thoughts in the box below:

- Which, if any, of your strengths do you sometimes over-play so that they become weaknesses and/or can cause problems?

For example, maybe your motivation to 'care for others' is so strong that you spend too much time dealing directly with customers when you should be getting on with your back office work.

- What do you love so much that you sometimes do it to the detriment of other things?

For example, maybe your 'drive' and desire to 'keep going when things get tough' can blind you to what's really happening in a relationship with a client or team member. A colleague might help you to see that simply doing the same thing with more energy or persistence will not get you the result you need. They could help you to take a step back, and think through alternative approaches.

- How can you prevent yourself over-playing your strengths in this way?
- What support do you need from others to do this?

### Box 6

Over-done strengths	Notes

## Creating your action plan

It's now time to gather your insights into a consolidated action plan.

Use the action planning template below to write down your key objectives and actions against the four areas you've explored in this section:

- Clear strengths
- Hidden strengths
- Weaknesses
- Over-done strengths

Your objective describes the outcome you want to achieve, and the actions are the things you will do to make this happen.

There are no right or wrong responses; your plan will be as unique as you are.

Notice that we've given more space to objectives and actions that will maximise your clear and hidden strengths. This is where we want you to focus most of your attention. **Remember, you will only excel by capitalising on your strengths, never by fixing your weaknesses.**

	Strengths	Actions
Clear strengths		
Hidden strengths		
Weaknesses		
Over-done strengths		



Here are some tips for helping you achieve your action plan and stay motivated:

- Focus your energy and attention first on three high priority objectives: those that will make the biggest difference quickly
- Don't try to tackle too many things at once; when you've successfully achieved success in an action area, turn your attention to a new one
- Stick with commitments you make for 60 days; it takes at least this long to form new habits

- Remember that change involves giving up old ways of doing things, as well as starting new ones
- Each day, note down examples of how you are making progress with your action plan; ask others whether they are noticing a positive difference as well

Keeping notes can help you to learn more about yourself and your strengths and, over time, enable you to use them much more consciously and effectively.

### How to use what you've learnt about yourself

You will find that the discoveries you've made by completing this guide will be valuable to you in a number of different situations:

- **Writing your CV** – highlighting your strengths in a short opening paragraph will give the reader a clear sense of you as a person. It will bring the CV to life in a way that listing achievements and competencies usually don't.
- **Identifying future opportunities that you will thrive in** – now you have a clear idea of what you love doing and are energised by you will be able to better judge which roles are likely to be right for you and which aren't
- **Building a case for a job move or promotion** – remember that playing to your strengths leads to great performance. Now you know your strengths you'll be able to make the connection with excellent performance in a new role.
- **Preparing for performance and development conversations** – knowing your clear strengths, hidden strengths and weaknesses means that you can focus such conversations into areas that will make the most difference. You will also be able to articulate clearly to your manager what your strengths are.
- **Agreeing roles and work tasks with your team members and peers** – when you know your areas of strength it makes it much easier to decide whether you are best placed to do a particular piece of work or whether someone else would be better at it and love it more than you do!

Our final piece of advice is to revisit this guide periodically and share your plan with others. You are far more likely to be successful and find your work rewarding if you keep in mind your strengths. And if your friends and colleagues know what you are aiming to achieve they can encourage you should you lose momentum and celebrate with you when you succeed!

*“We are all meant to shine, as children do... and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”*

**Marianne Williamson**

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At Engaging Minds our work is our mission because we see the massive difference strengths-based recruitment and development makes to individuals and their employers.

If you would like to find out more about how our work helps people and the results that organisations have achieved by working with us visit our website [www.engagingminds.co.uk](http://www.engagingminds.co.uk) and download the free White Paper summary of the findings of a study into the impact of SBR on five top companies. You can download free articles too.

#### Sources

The strengthsmatch™ profile was developed from three sources:

- An analysis of leadership strengths from profiles developed by Engaging Minds.
- Analysis of the foundational strengths that underpin outstanding performance and; deliver great business results. (Reference point: in-depth study of leadership excellence at a FTSE 25 financial services organisation).
- The collective insight of our Engaging Minds consultants who have worked to improve job performance and employee satisfaction at all organisational levels across a wide range of industry sectors.

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