**Character Strengths Exercise**

**FIRST SESSION**

**Strengths**

Despite life’s struggles, all persons possess strengths that can be identified and used to improve self-regulation and enhance wellbeing. In addition, client motivation is increased by a consistent emphasis on strengths.

Explain to your client what strengths are:

“Strengths are the things you are naturally good at. When people use their strengths, they feel energized and engaged. Strengths allow us to feel and perform at our best. Strengths can also help us to deal with difficult times.”

Examples of strengths are “persistence,” “creativity,” and “gratitude”.

**Character Strengths**

Strengths are the psychological characteristics through which we honor and express what we value in our life. It’s how we integrate who we are with what we value.

The character strength is how we express what we value and need emotionally in our life: “values in action” (VIA)

Your values are the things that you believe are important in the way you live and work.

***When our strengths AND what we value are in harmony, we are our true selves.***

Knowing that what you do in life matters, or at least has some purpose if only in a small way, will give fulfillment and richness in your life.

Martin Seligman, a Positive Psychologist, believes we can only really flourish when we are using our signature character strengths.

According to Seligman, you are using a character strength when:

* It feels authentic and gives you a sense of your real self.
* You feel excited.
* There is and has been a rapid learning curve involved.
* It offers new ways to use existing skills.
* You yearn to do/be this.
* There is an inevitability about doing this, and you feel unable to stop yourself from doing it.
* You feel invigorated rather than depleted doing this.
* You find yourself engaging in activities and projects that require you to be this way.
* You feel joy and enthusiasm.

Research has shown that people who use their character strengths to achieve their goals feel more fulfilled and happy.

**There are 24 VIA (Values in Action) Character Strengths**

1. **Creativity (originality, ingenuity):** Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things.
2. **Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience):** Taking an interest in ongoing experiences for their own sake; exploring and discovering.
3. **Open-mindedness (judgment, critical thinking):** Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; weighing all evidence fairly.
4. **Love of learning:** Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally.
5. **Perspective (wisdom):** Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.
6. **Bravery (valor**): Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain; acting on convictions even if unpopular.
7. **Persistence (perseverance, industriousness):** Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles.
8. **Integrity (authenticity, honesty):** Presenting oneself in a genuine way; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions.
9. **Vitality (zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy):** Approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and activated.
10. **Love:** Valuing close relations with others, particularly those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated.
11. **Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”):** Doing favors and good deeds for others.
12. **Social intelligence (emotional intelligence, personal intelligence):** Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself.
13. **Citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork):** Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group.
14. **Fairness:** Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others.
15. **Leadership:** Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same maintain time good relations within the group.
16. **Forgiveness and mercy:** Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.
17. **Humility / Modesty:** Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.
18. **Prudence:** Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.
19. **Self-regulation (self-control):** Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions.
20. **Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation):** Appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life.
21. **Gratitude:** Being aware of and thankful of the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.
22. **Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation):** Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it.
23. **Humor (playfulness):** Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side.
24. **Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose):** Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose, the meaning of life, and the meaning of the universe.

**Homework**

1. Ask your client to take a look at the list of 24 VIA strengths and select 5 strengths that he/she thinks characterize him/her best.

2. Ask your client to ask three other persons, preferably a friend and a family member, to assess his strengths. Your client should use the two homework forms with strength-related questions and ask others to select 5 (not more or less) strengths that they believe are characterizing him/her. Ask him/her to bring this list to the next session. Important: If possible, the client should ask why others believe he/ she possesses certain strengths.

3. Ask your client to pay attention to feelings of energy, enthusiasm, and passion. You can ask him/her to write down what he/she is doing, who is with him/her, and/or if any strengths are at play.

4. Ask your client to complete the VIA questionnaire online:

<https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey>

**SECOND SESSION**

The goals of the second session are to:

* Further, clarify the strengths of the client
* Start by making concrete plans for behavioral change

**Evaluation**

Evaluate the experiences of the client between this session and the first session.

**Ask the client:**

* Did you pay attention to feelings of energy, enthusiasm, and passion during the last week?

Discuss what your client noticed and how these experiences may be related to strength use or valued behavior.

Evaluate the experiences of the client between this session and the first session.

**Spotting Your Client’s Strengths**

At this point, it’s time to dig into the strengths and strengths homework from the first session. But before you do, you as the coach will note the strengths you notice in your client to add to what the client has already brought in from the strengths homework exercise. The best way to do this is to use the At Your Best Strengths Exercise.

**At Your Best Strengths Exercise**

Invite your client to identify two occasions when they have been at their best (when they felt at their best or performed at their best). The occasions can be of any duration from a few minutes to a year.

(It is important that being ‘at your best’ is meaningful to your client, not an attempt to impress or conform to what others think).

1. Get him or her to talk about the experience, re-living it as vividly as possible as they go.

2. Note down every example of a possible strength they display as they talk.

3. After they have talked about the events, invite them to consider the list you have noted down.

**Scoring Strengths**

Put the 5 top strengths of the VIA questionnaire, the peer-assessed strengths, and your own assessed strengths in the table on the next page.

▪ Column 1 (Self): Record the five positive character attributes the client identified.

▪ Column 2 (Coach): Record the five positive character attributes the coach identified. Place a checkmark inside the box that corresponds to the attribute the coach thought most characterized the client.

▪ Column 3 (VIA): Record the top 5 strengths as evidenced by the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire online.

▪ Column 4, 5 & 6 (Family): Record the attributes that others identified and thought best described your client.

▪ Column 7 (Composite): Add the number of times that each attribute was checked in the previous columns.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | STRENGTH | Self | Coach | VIA | Other 1 | Other 2 | Other 3 | TOTAL |
| wisdom & knowledge | 1 | Creativity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | Curiosity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | Open-mindedness |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 | Love of learning |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 | Perspective |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| courage | 6 | Bravery |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | Persistence |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 8 | Integrity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9 | Vitality |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| humanity | 10 | Love |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | Kindness |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 | Social intelligence |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| justice | 13 | Citizenship |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 14 | Fairness |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 15 | Leadership |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| temperance | 16 | Forgiveness and mercy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 17 | Humility / Modesty |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 18 | Prudence |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 19 | Self-regulation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| transcendence | 20 | Appreciation of beauty |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 21 | Gratitude |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 22 | Hope |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 23 | Humor |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 24 | Spirituality |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Evaluate Scoring Form**

Ask the client:

* What do you notice when looking at the scoring form?
* To which extent do you recognize yourself in the most frequently identified strengths?

Note your client's 5 most important signature strengths

**Linking Strengths and Goals**

In the last session, your client generated several goals. Discuss with the client:

* Are there strengths that are currently being underused (used not often enough)?
* Would you like to use these strengths more? If so, what could you do to use these strengths more?
* Are there strengths that are currently being overused (used too often)?
* Would you like to use these strengths less? If so, what could you do to use these strengths less frequently?
* Are there strengths that can be used to move closer to the personal goals? How can they be used for this purpose?
* Are there strengths that can be used to overcome potential obstacles? How can they be used?