

The importance of recognising and using strengths: 3 steps

Identifying and talking about our strengths can feel uncomfortable. It is a human characteristic to focus on how we need to improve rather than what we do well. However, knowing what our strengths are can build confidence and resilience and enable us to make the most valuable contributions we can.

Strengths are more than the things we do well. According to Linley (The Strengths Book, 2008), a strength is 'a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking or feeling that is authentic, energizing to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance'.

Our true strengths are energising and different to learned behaviours. Learned behaviours come about through a combination of being good at something and having the positive reinforcement that comes from being good at it – but they are missing the energy component that makes it sustainable. Over time the impact of the rewards runs out – they are simply not sustainable.

Why strengths?

Research has shown that less than a third of people are truly aware of the strengths they possess. Yet, people who use their strengths:

1. Are happier.
2. Are more confident.
3. Have higher levels of self-esteem.
4. Have higher levels of energy and vitality.
5. Experience less stress.
6. Are more resilient.
7. Are more likely to achieve their goals.
8. Perform better at work.
9. Are more engaged at work.
10. Are more effective at growing themselves and growing as individuals.

And as teams, they experience higher performance, engagement and retention.

We may have realised strengths (that we get to use regularly) or unrealised strengths (that we don't have the opportunity to use). Our unrealised strengths are our greatest areas for development.

Step 1: Identifying strengths: self-assessment

Using the star chart, **write down at least three things for each of these areas which you consider to be your 'signature strengths'** (i.e. things you are good at and which give you energy. It may also help to consider what your best friends or family members would say are your top three strengths). These could be:



- Strengths with **people** e.g. humour, generosity, support, empathy
- Personal **qualities** e.g. integrity, sense of justice
- **Analytical** strengths e.g. intellect, learning ability, creativity, critical thinking
- **Drivers** e.g. determination, 'can-do' approach, enthusiasm, diligence

A quick way to discover your strengths is to take the free Values in Action '[Character Strengths Survey](#)'. Once you have your list of strengths, ask yourself the following questions:

- In what areas of my life do I use these strengths?
- How can I use more of my strengths at work?
- How can these strengths inform my life and leadership?

Step 2: Assessment by others



them to formulate actions.

Invite feedback from your colleagues, friends and family and include these in your star chart. Asking other people about what they consider to be your strengths can help reveal any 'blind spots'. You could do this informally or using more structured methods such as 360 feedback tools or appraisal mechanisms. Look for any common traits or patterns and reflect on

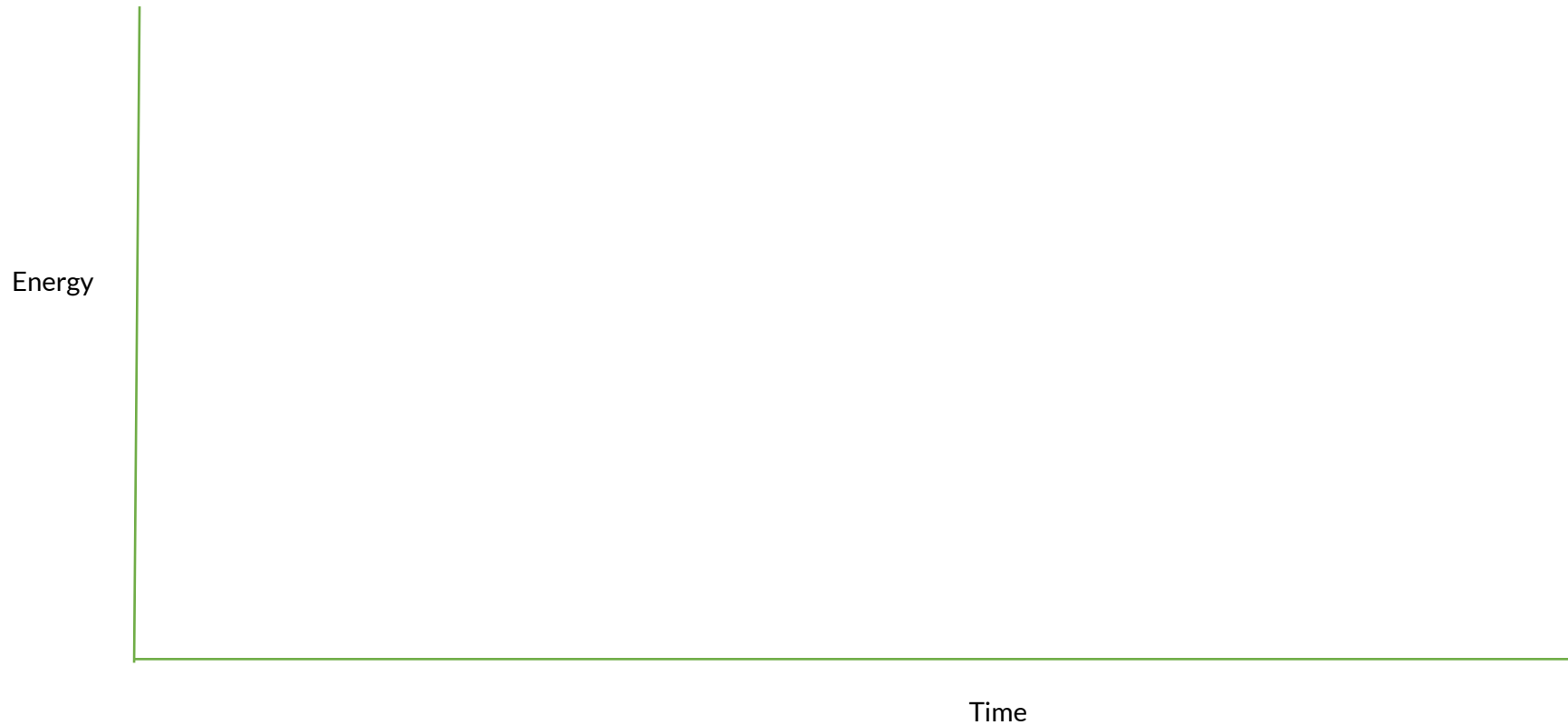
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Tracking my energy

Take time to map your energy over a timeframe of your choice e.g. 1 day.



1. For each 'peak' and 'trough', make a note of what you were doing.
2. Select the activities that make you feel (most) energized.
3. What strength(s) did you use during each activity?
4. Do the same thing for the 5 activities that depleted your energy.
5. Select the activities that make you feel most depleted.
6. For each activity, which strengths you lack during this activity or notice whether the strength you are using is 'learned'?
7. What do you know now? And what difference does that make?



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Strength	Example of when you've used it	What was the impact?	How could you re-purpose the way you use this strength?
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

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