

Develop Your Strengths

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Developing your strengths: Dr. Marty Seligman and Dr. Chris Peterson developed a list of universal virtues or personal strengths. These seem to be valued in every society, and research now suggests if you develop your strong areas, you will be more productive and happy.

This will work best if you keep a journal. Write each night about what you did to work on your strengths. Pick the top two or three strengths in yourself and do something each day that “plays to” that strength. People who write down their experiences are more likely to benefit.

The more energy you put into this, the more dramatic the effect will be on your life.

Thanks to Jon Haidt, Ph.D. of the University of Virginia for an earlier version of this list.

1. Curiosity and Interest in the World

- a. Ask question of people
- b. Discover new places
- c. Explore the stacks in a library; browse widely, or pick an interesting looking book each day, and spend 20 minutes skimming it.
- d. Eat something new that you never otherwise would have tried
- e. Go to a meeting or hear a speaker

2. Love of Learning

- a. Discover one new place in town every day
- b. Read a newspaper other than your usual.
- c. Ask a question of someone you admire
- d. Go to an online search engine like Ask.com -ask a question and explore sites you never otherwise would have discovered
- e. Read a book about something you’ve always found intriguing but never found the time to learn more about

3. Judgment, Critical Thinking and Open-Mindedness

- a. Go to a multi-cultural group or event.
- b. Play devil’s advocate and discuss an issue from the side opposite to your personal views
- c. Take a colleague out to lunch who is different from you in some way.
- d. Go to a different church or religious event or political gathering
- e. Every day, pick something you believe strongly, and think about how you might be wrong. Ask yourself how you would know if you *were* wrong.

4. Creativity, ingenuity and originality

- a. Keep a journal, work on a picture or poem
- b. Submit a piece to a literary magazine or newspaper
- c. Decorate a room or your workspace
- d. Pick one object in your room and devise another use for it rather than its intended use
- e. Find a new word everyday (perhaps at dictionary.com) and use it creatively every day.

5. **Social Intelligence**

- a. Meet one new person each day by approaching them
- b. Go into a social situation in which you would normally feel uncomfortable and try to fit in
- c. Whenever you talk with someone, try to figure out what his or her motives and concerns are.
- d. Encounter someone by themselves and by being friendly, include them in your group

6. **Perspective (Wisdom)**

- a. Get a quote a day online
- b. Give advice to an upset friend
- c. Think of the wisest person you know. Try to live each day as that person would live.
- d. Look up prominent people in history and learn their views on important issues of their day and/or find a significant quotation that they said.

7. **Valor**

- a. Speak up in groups or volunteer to speak publically (if you don't normally)
- b. Go against peer pressure or social norms
- c. Stand up for someone even if you disagree with him/her.
- d. Ask someone to spend time with you.
- e. Introduce yourself to a stranger
- f. Speak up for an unpopular idea (if you believe in it)

8. **Industry diligence and Perseverance**

- a. Finish work ahead of time
- b. Notice your thoughts about stopping a task, and ignore them. Focus on the task at hand.
- c. At work, resist daydreaming and distractions.
- d. Plan ahead- use a calendar for assignments and meetings
- e. Set a high goal (e.g., for exercise, or studying) and stick to it.
- f. When you wake up in the morning, make a list of things that you want to get done that day that could be put off until the next day. Make sure to get them done that day.

9. **Honesty, Authenticity and Genuineness**

- a. Refrain from telling small, white lies, to friends (including insincere compliments). If you do tell one, admit it and apologize right away.
- b. Monitor yourself and make a list of every time you tell a lie, even if it is a small one. Try to make your daily list shorter every day.
- c. At the end of each day, identify something you did that was attempting to impress people, or put on a show. Resolve not to do it again.

10. **Zest, Enthusiasm, and Energy**

- a. Go out of your way to become more involved in an organization you are already a part of
- b. Take up a greater interest in others' work, i.e. volunteer to help them in a project
- c. While eating or drinking something, concentrate on the taste and sensations. Try to appreciate every aspect of that food or drink.
- d. Get a good night's sleep and eat a good breakfast, to give yourself more energy during the day.
- e. Do something physically vigorous in the morning (e.g., jog, push-ups). Note carefully how you feel ten minutes later, an hour later.

11. Kindness and generosity

- a. Leave a huge tip for a small check.
- b. Do a random act of kindness every day (a simple, small favor). Make it anonymous if possible.
- c. Be a listening ear to a friend. Ask them how their day was and actually listen to the answer before telling them about your own day.
- d. Send an e-card to a different friend each day.
- e. Pay the whole tab when you are out with friends.

12. Capacity to Love and be Loved

- a. Tell spouse/ boyfriend/girlfriend/sibling/parent that you love them
- b. Send a loved one a card or e-card to say that you were thinking about him/her.
- c. Give loved ones a big hug and a kiss
- d. Show great enthusiasm when a friend achieves something. Or, write a nice note where someone you love will find it sometime during the day. Do this in a new place, or for a new person, every day.

13. Citizenship and Teamwork

- a. Volunteer at a school
- b. Take on added responsibility within an organization you are already a part of
- c. Pick up litter that you see on the ground
- d. Pick up litter in your neighborhood.
- e. Organize a neighborhood dinner
- f. Organize a volunteer group in your neighborhood

14. Fairness Equity and Justice

- a. Allow someone to speak their peace while keeping an open mind by not passing judgment
- b. Stay impartial in an argument between friends despite your beliefs (be the mediator)
- c. Notice when you treat someone based on a stereotype or pre-conception; resolve not to do it again.

15. Leadership

- a. Organize something special for your friends or suitemates one evening.
- b. Organize a study group, book club, or a volunteer group in your neighborhood

16. Modesty

- a. Don't talk about yourself at all for a full day.
- b. Dress and act modestly, so as not to attract attention to yourself.
- c. Find a way in which someone you know is better than you. Compliment him or her for it.

17. Self-Control and Self-Regulation

- a. Set aside 2 hours (or other designated amount of time) and work on a work project in a quiet, private place.
- b. Work out four days a week (if you don't already)
- c. Clean or organize your home. Every day, make sure that you pick up whatever mess you made during the day.
- d. Leave something unfinished on your plate that you usually regret eating afterwards.
- e. When something upsets you, attempt to block it out of your mind and instead focus on the good

things in your life.

- f. Make a resolution to not gossip. When you feel the urge to talk about someone behind his or her back, remember your resolution and stop yourself before you talk.
- g. In the evenings, make an agenda for the following day. Stick to that agenda.
- h. When you get overly emotional about something, calm down and calmly consider all of the issues again.

18. Caution, Prudence and Discretion

- a. During a conversation, think twice before saying anything. Weigh the probable effect of your words on others.
- b. Think about the motto “Better safe than sorry” at least three times a day. Try to incorporate its meaning into your life.
- c. Before you decide to do something important, reflect on it for a moment and consider if you want to live with its consequences 1 hour, 1 day, or 1 year later.

19. Forgiveness and Mercy

- a. Think of someone that you found it very hard to forgive. Try to see the situation from their perspective. Then consider, if you had been the one to do the offensive act, would you have expected to be forgiven?
- b. Keep a journal, and every night, describe someone who made you mad, or against whom you have a grudge. After writing about the grudge, describe why you are resistant to forgiving them. Then look at the situation from that person’s point of view, and forgive the person.
- c. Make contact with someone who has made you mad in the past. Let them know that you forgive them, or just be kind to them in your conversation.
- d. When someone does something that you do not understand, try to fathom his or her intentions in the actions.

20. Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

- a. Go to a museum and pick out a piece of artwork or a display that has aesthetic value and touches you because of its beauty.
- b. Write down your thoughts about a piece of art, or something beautiful you see
- c. Take a walk with a friend and comment on something pretty that you see
- d. Attend a concert and enjoy the sound for its musical value. Or pick out the most moving music you know of, and listen to it appreciatively on headphones every night. Or ask a friend to recommend the most beautiful music he or she knows.
- e. Keep a journal, and every night, record something you saw during the day that struck you as extremely beautiful, or skillful.
- f. Find something that makes you happy, in aesthetics or value, a physical activity or an object, and let it inspire you throughout the day.

21. Gratitude

- a. Keep a journal, and each night, make a list of three things that you are thankful for in life
- b. Every day, thank someone for something that you might otherwise take for granted (e.g., thanking the janitor who cleans your office).
- c. Keep a record of the number of times you use the words “thank you” in a day. Over the course of the first week, try to double the number of times that you say the words.

- d. Call a parent/sibling/friend each day and thank him/her (e.g., for helping you to become who you are, or for always being there for you.)
- e. Send someone a “thank you” e-greeting.
- f. Leave a note on your roommate/apartment mate suitemate/hall mate that thanks them for something about them that you appreciate.

22. Hope, Optimism, and Future-Mindedness

- a. Keep a journal, and every night, record a decision you made that day that will impact your life in the long run
- b. When you are in a bad situation, turn it around to see the optimistic side of it. You can almost always find some good in a situation, regardless of how awful it seems at the time.
- c. Make a list of bad decisions you have made. Forgive yourself and move on in life realizing that you cannot go backwards, only focus on the present and future.
- d. Notice your negative thoughts. Counter them with positive thoughts.
- e. Reaffirm yourself that you can and will succeed at whatever you put your mind to.

23. Spirituality and Sense of Purpose, and Faith

- a. For five minutes a day, relax and think about the purpose of life, and where you fit in..
- b. For five minutes a day, think about the things you can do to improve the world or your community.
- c. Read a religious or spiritual book, or go to a religious service every day
- d. Explore different religions. You can do this by going to a library, looking on the Internet, or asking your friends about their religions.
- e. Spend a few minutes a day in meditation or prayer.
- f. Invest in a book of affirmations or optimistic quotes. Read a few every day.

24. Humor and Playfulness

- a. Every day, make someone smile or laugh.
- b. Learn a joke and tell it to your friends.
- c. Watch a funny movie or TV show.
- d. Read the comics
- e. Learn a magic trick and perform it for your friends