

Signature strengths
my strengths quest
education essay



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Many people, including myself, do not know where to start when determining a career path or course of study to pursue. The StrengthsQuest assessment tool utilizes new theories in positive psychology and strengths based development to try to realize ancient philosophies in modern times. I conducted research hoping to learn more about the theories behind the StrengthsQuest assessment and also about my findings and how they relate to my future planning. I have found that my personal strengths are very much in line with my interests and future career possibilities.

Concepts

Positive Psychology

Traditional views in psychology have described psychological health and well-being as the absence of disease and distress; focusing efforts on developing treatments to care for individuals who are afflicted somehow. Positive psychology, according to Peterson and Park, stresses that “happiness and fulfillment...entail more than the identification and treatment of problems.” They continue to describe it as “the study of optimal experience-people being their best and doing their best (Peterson & Park, 2008). Positive psychology is a relatively new concept in the field of psychology; however it is becoming more popular. Proponents do not argue that diseases and stresses are not a problem for some, but that everyone can benefit from the theories behind positive psychology.

Strengths-Based Development

Positive psychology aims to promote well-being and general life satisfaction. One way this is accomplished is by examining one’s talents and focusing on

strengthening them. For many years, and still to this day, people around the world believed that knowing one's weaknesses, and attempting to improve on them, would help them become more successful than knowing their strengths and working around their weaknesses (Hodges & Clifton). In contrast, many top managers recognize the benefits to discovering the natural strengths of their workers and using that knowledge to better manage workgroups. These ideas also appeal to many in the educational field, including administrators, counselors and students.

“ Everyone has strengths. They need to be recognized, celebrated, strengthened, and used (Park & Peterson, 2008).” Simple and logical, but this way of thinking is often ignored in favor of grooming “ well-rounded” individuals. In studies, student populations that concentrated on using their strengths gained confidence and were later able to work on their weaknesses (Park & Peterson, 2008). Also cited was frustration by those only working on personal weaknesses and not strengths. Aside from confidence, those regularly using their strengths were less depressed, happier, and more fulfilled.

Practical Application

Positive psychology and strengths based development in particular, are greatly valued by school counselors and organizational behavior specialists. Both student and worker populations that actively participated in strength development exercises experienced greater school or workplace engagement. Higher levels of engagement are associated with less absenteeism, much lower failure rates and higher GPAs among students (Hodges & Clifton).

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Personal strength development and greater worker engagement have a positive impact in the workplace. Workers who have the “ opportunity to do what they do best,” are much more engaged and have more job satisfaction. In the workplace, job satisfaction is often tied to job performance and to higher probability of success (Hodges & Clifton).

Personal Relevance

My StrengthsQuest Results

Upon completing the StrengthsQuest assessment, a report was generated revealing my signature top five strengths with definitions and examples of each. First listed was context, context talented people enjoy thinking about the past and understand the present by finding out more about its history. Second was learner, they have great desire to learn and continuously improve; to them, the process of learning is especially exciting. Next, deliberative people are characterized by the care taken when faced with decision-making tasks. They anticipate obstacles. Achiever talented people are hard workers and take great satisfaction from being busy and productive. Last, analytical people search for reasons and causes; they think about all the factors influencing a given situation.

I cannot say any of the signature strengths reported came as a surprise, but having them pointed out to me helped to reinforce my interest in pursuing a degree-and future career-in the field of history. Until recently I had not considered history as a possible career path. My recent interest in it, I fear, may have influenced my StrengthsQuest assessment results. I am anxious to repeat the survey, if I am able, and see if my results line up a second time.

However, this may just be a manifestation of my deliberative and analytical sides.

Past Evidence

Looking back with this new knowledge, it becomes apparent that these talents have been exercised throughout my life. Examples of each come to mind without much trouble. It is also easy to see how many of these talents, if exercised too much, might be counterproductive; there are several examples here as well.

Growing up, and still to this day, I am fascinated by history. I have visited numerous museums, forts, battlefields, and other historical sites. I find seeing the artifacts and the places where historical events actually took place very fascinating. My learner talent ties in nicely with these excursions and further explains my frequent urges to learn about somewhat random topics to satisfy my curiosity. Deliberative and analytical talents-along with context and learner-show themselves when I am faced with tough decisions such as purchasing a used car. My achiever talent, I have read, is the drive that keeps me going, both at work and in school.

Though these talents all appear to be positive, and they are, they can present drawbacks. Several times growing up I found that curiosity born from my learner talent was an enabler of procrastination and a distraction from completing important research or homework on time. My deliberative and analytical talents make it difficult for me to make decisions sometimes, deciding on a major to pursue in college is a prime example. Finally, my achiever talent drives accomplishment, and it is great when I accomplish

things. However, when I am less productive, or when efforts take longer than expected, this talent can cause me to feel down on myself.

Future Goals

As I stated earlier, I intend to pursue a degree and ultimately a career related to history. I received a handout from a representative of Western Michigan University detailing many of the skills developed in pursuit of a history degree. High on the list were research, critical evaluation, gathering and organizing data, usage of past events to explain the present, interpreting events, and examining evidence. It is easy to see how my signature strengths outlined in my StrengthsQuest survey results align with the skills needed to succeed in the field.

Further evidence of the alignment of my talents to the skills required in pursuit of a degree in history can be found in an article by O'Connor and Cordova entitled " Learning: The Experiences of Adults Who Work Full-Time While Attending Graduate School Part-Time. Many of the career paths in the field of history become much more inviting with an advanced degree and my situation closely mimics that of an adult returning to school more than a traditional college student. They found that no matter the external reason these adults returned to school, their primary motivation was that they were intrinsically motivated to learn (O'Connor & Cordova, 2010). Similarly, In an article called " Analysing History" the authors clearly describe analysis' role in teaching history by asking how to find meaning in complex, disturbing, or distant events, or how the different aspects of studying history come together (Counsell et all, 2010). Truthfully, the answer here is in their

analysis and discovery of how these small, complex, disturbing or distant events fit into the big picture.

One last thing I noticed while conducting research, is that all of these signature strengths seem to feed into each other in some way. Part of this is expressed in a quote from O'Connor and Cordova's " Learning" (2010):

" Researchers have explained the role of experience by emphasizing the role of reflection in the learning process. When adults reflect on their experiences, they are making meaning of them. Experiences by themselves are not learning opportunities, unless we think about them and evaluate them." (p. 361)

This illustrates one combination of several of these strengths; context, analyzing, and learning. When examined, my StrengthsQuest results show several other logical ways these talents compliment and promote each other.

Conclusion

While I have not exhaustively studied every possible career path related to the field of history, I do believe the field of study truly interests me. I will use the information I have learned from taking the StrengthsQuest assessment to help focus my plans for higher education and a future career. The theories and evidence behind the StrengthsQuest assessment tools are convincing; why should people make themselves miserable trying to improve on their weaknesses when developing and incorporating their strengths is far more engaging and rewarding?