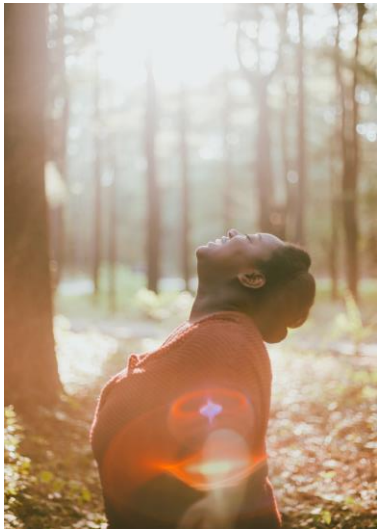
Strengths and Saboteurs

U-M Connecting the Dots Conference
Wednesday, October 28, 2026



Gratitude

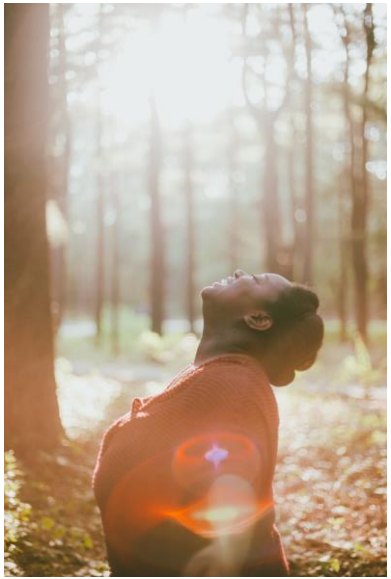
…for the opportunity to spend time with you

…for the Connecting the Dots team who helped organize this session

…for you, for making the choice to learn and grow with your colleagues this morning



What this session is and isn't



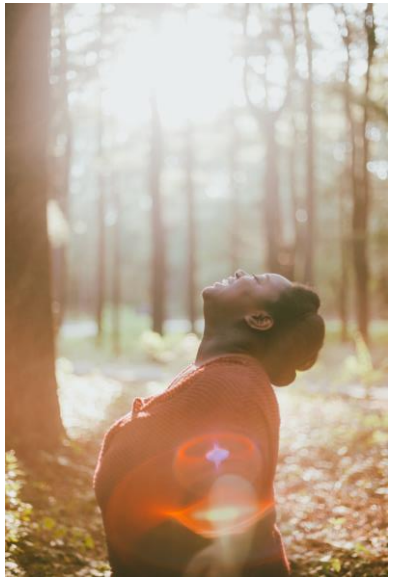
This session is:

- Designed to give you time to pause, reflect, and focus on yourself
- An opportunity to learn about two assessment tools intended to help you:
  - develop greater awareness of your character strengths and the energy they can generate when brought into brighter light and intentional practice
  - identify mind chatter that limits your ability to leverage your strengths and your potential for growth
- Intended to provide some ideas to try as you move along your journey

This session isn't:

- A substitute for mental and emotional health issues that may require your deeper attention
- An exhaustive explanation of the tools, supporting research, and the myriad of potential applications

My hopes for you today…



1. That you will learn about the assessment tools, how you can use them to your benefit, and where you can learn more about them.

2. That you will have a few moments to explore your character strengths and identify a few simple practices to strengthen your use of them.

3. That you will be able to identify and learn practical ways to quiet the chatter that limits your potential to get on with the big things you are meant to do in your life.

My hopes for you today…



Let’s play…who’s in the room?



Life Satisfaction Study

5,000 participants - study linking frequency of certain habits with life satisfaction and happiness

Giving: doing things for others	7.41		**Relating:** connecting with people	7.36
Emotion: taking a positive approach	6.74		**Appreciating:** noticing the world around you	6.57
Meaning: being part of something bigger	6.38		**Resilience:** finding ways to bounce back	6.33
Trying out: keep learning new things	6.26		**Direction:** having goals to look forward to	6.08
Exercising: taking care of your body	5.88		**Acceptance:** being comfortable with who you are	5.56

Final study question: overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

ScienceDaily, March 7, 2014, University of Hertfordshire

Some days are diamonds, some days are stones

"I don't see this ending well."

"I wish I had shown more courage in that conversation."

"Just not firing on all cylinders these days."

"He/she/they just don't see me or get me."

"My life feels authentic and well balanced."

"I feel like I put my best foot forward in that meeting today."

"Things are really clicking in my life right now."

"I can be my true self around that person."

Diamond days and stone days: it's a matter of time (and how we spend it)

SABOTEUR



SAGE

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Potential Impact of Higher % of Time When Mind is Serving You

Physical Health	Well-being	Performance
➢ Enhanced immune system	➢ Better sleep	➢ Better team outcomes
➢ Lower stress hormones	➢ Fewer sick days taken	➢ Higher student achievement
➢ Lower blood pressure	➢ Sustained emotions	➢ Optimized project delivery
➢ Fewer colds, reduced pain	➢ Greater overall vitality	➢ Enhanced collaboration

Tool #1: Values in Action Assessment Tool

- Institute began over two decades ago with a prestigious group of researchers hoping to systematically classify widely valued character strengths.
- Sought to understand whether one could hold the hope that focusing on strengths could help people evolve towards their highest potential.
- Search crossed the realms of philosophy, religion, politics, and education across disciplines and cultures having impact on human civilization.

VIA INSTITUTE ON CHARACTER®

Tool #1: Virtues and Character Strengths

24 character strengths categorized across 6 virtues

- **Virtues:** broad categories that emerged consistently through historical surveys
- **Character strengths:** processes or mechanisms to display one or another virtue; provide a common language to describe what is best in human beings



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Tool #1: Character Strengths - What They Are

- Positive personal traits that are core to our being (identity) and doing (behavior)
- Produce positive outcomes for ourselves and others (health, relationships, emotions, meaning, accomplishment)
- Contribute to the collective good
- Expressed in degrees, in combinations, are influenced by context, and you have all of them within to varying degrees
- Provide a common language to describe what's best in human beings

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Tool #1: Character Strengths - What They Aren't

- Talents (what we do naturally well)
- Skills (what we train ourselves to do)
- Interests (hobbies, passions)
- Resources (our external supports)
- Values (what we internally hold dear)



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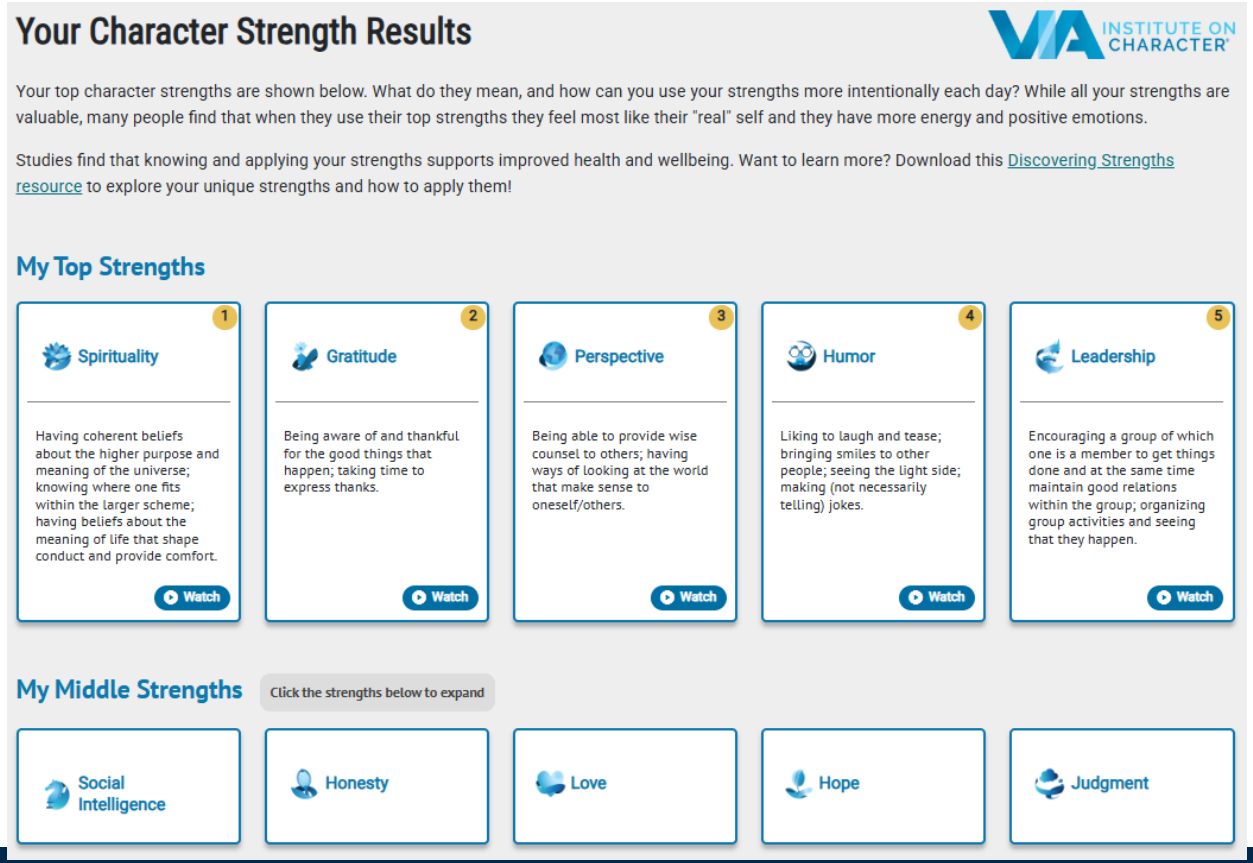
Tool #1: VIA Comparison to Other Strengths Assessments

Assessment	Research Basis	Best Use Cases	Key Benefits
VIA Character Strengths	Positive Psychology Framework: high academic rigor backed by peer-reviewed literature developed by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004).	-Personal growth and well-being -Coaching and therapy -Cultivating life satisfaction, purpose -Youth and educational settings	-Focus on core virtues rather than workplace productivity -Elevates engagement, resilience, and life satisfaction -Free and widely accessible
Gallup Clifton Strengths (StrengthsFinder)	Empirical Organizational Data: built on Donald Clifton's research and global workplace meta-analyses	-Career development/role placement -Performance management -Team building/leadership coaching -Workplace productivity optimization	-Provides actionable insights for leveraging workplace talents -Link to higher engagement, retention, sales, teamwork
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)	Psychoanalytic Personality Theory: based on Carl Jung's theory of psychological types (1921), forced-choice binaries	-Self-awareness and reflection -Team workshops and icebreakers -Career exploration -Understanding personal worldviews	-Offers shared language for discussing cognitive preferences -Enhances appreciation for diverse thinking/decision making -Helps understand energy sources
DISC Assessment	Behavioral Theory: based on William Moulton Marston's 1928 model of behavioral styles, limited peer-review	-Sales/customer service training -Workplace conflict resolution -Team communication adaptation -Management style adjustment	-Easy to learn, remember and apply quickly -Improves communication -Reduces interpersonal friction

WISDOM	COURAGE	HUMANITY	JUSTICE	TEMPERANCE	TRANSCENDENCE
Creativity 	Bravery 	Love 	Teamwork 	Forgiveness 	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence 
Curiosity 	Perseverance 	Kindness 	Fairness 	Humility 	Gratitude 
Judgment 	Honesty 	Social Intelligence 	Leadership 	Prudence 	Hope 
Love of Learning 	Zest 			Self-Regulation 	Humor 
Perspective 					Spirituality 

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Sample VIA Report from MHealthy Portal



Your Character Strength Results

VIA INSTITUTE ON CHARACTER

Your top character strengths are shown below. What do they mean, and how can you use your strengths more intentionally each day? While all your strengths are valuable, many people find that when they use their top strengths they feel most like their "real" self and they have more energy and positive emotions.

Studies find that knowing and applying your strengths supports improved health and wellbeing. Want to learn more? Download this Discovering Strengths resource to explore your unique strengths and how to apply them!

My Top Strengths

1 Spirituality

Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

Watch

2 Gratitude

Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

Watch

3 Perspective

Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself/others.

Watch

4 Humor

Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.

Watch

5 Leadership

Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

Watch

My Middle Strengths

Click the strengths below to expand

Social Intelligence

Honesty

Love

Hope

Judgment

Tool #1: Character Strengths - Levels

- Top strengths
  - Top 4-6, tend to be central to who the person is and how they show up when at their best
  - Captures one's uniqueness or essence
  - Likely to be more energizing to use, more natural to express
- Middle strengths
  - Likely support or readily enhance the expression of signature strengths, sometimes called "supportive strengths"
- Lesser strengths
  - Bottom 4-7 of one's profile, sometimes called lesser or bottom strengths
  - NOT viewed as weaknesses, rather as strengths that are underdeveloped, unrealized, or less used compared to others

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Sample VIA Report from MHealthy Portal

Gratitude

"This is a wonderful day. I have never seen this one before."
(~ Maya Angelou)

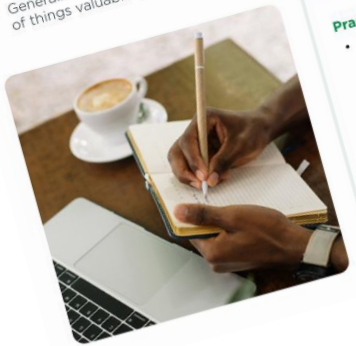
Gratitude involves feeling thankfulness and expressing it toward others. It comprises two components: acknowledgement and recognition. We first acknowledge the goodness in our lives. Then we recognize the source of these gifts outside ourselves. People strong in gratitude are thankful for specific thoughtful acts. They can feel thankfulness in a more generalized way. Gratitude leads to feeling abundance and greater positive emotions, which can inspire virtuous actions.

There are two types of gratitude:

- Benefit-triggered gratitude: the state that follows when you receive something desired from a benefactor
- Generalized gratitude: the state that results from appreciation of things valuable and meaningful to you

Questions for Reflection:

- When and where do you express gratitude easily? At work, home, in relationships?
- What are your favorite ways to express or practice gratitude?
- What are you most grateful for?
- Are there certain people you struggle to express thankfulness toward? How might other strengths help you show your gratitude?



Practicing Gratitude:

- Start a gratitude journal: writing down things you're grateful for each day (large or small) can support a mindset of thankful living.
- Try the "Three Good Things" exercise: each day, name three things you're thankful for and why they happened (e.g., "I'm grateful for my children doing the dishes last night; they are so thoughtful to take notice when I am tired.").
- Share gratitude with a co-worker this week: write an email, send a message or relay in person how much this person means to you.

Leadership

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." (~ John C. Maxwell)

This strength involves supporting a group to achieve goals, help its members remain invested, and build positive cultures. Leaders are catalysts. Those with high leadership strength can set goals, inspire the cooperation of others and solve conflicts. Leaders empower others to achieve greatness, often inspiring through vision. Leadership can manifest as practice qualities (defining goals and establishing direction) and personal qualities (seeking out leadership roles).

There are two types of leaders:

- Transactional leaders: They clarify the tasks and responsibilities needed to be carried out.
- Transformational leaders: They inspire followers to perform at high levels and foster trust and commitment.

Practicing Leadership:

- Practice adapting your leadership skills to situations and people.
- Support others by creating goals; inspire people with the "why" behind those goals.
- Determine something you want to impact this week and take the initiative to lead in some small way.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what ways do you express leadership across various life domains such as work, home, school and community?
- What does it mean to overuse or underuse your leadership strength? What scenarios prompt overuse or underuse?
- What are signs that you need to lean into your leadership strength? When do you need to lean out and follow?



Tool #1: Character Strengths - The Golden Mean

Top Strength	< Underuse	< Optimal Use >	Overuse >
Spirituality	Unaware of core values	Connecting with the sacred	Preachy; fanatical
Gratitude	Entitled; self-absorbed	Connected; appreciating positives	Contrived; repetitive
Perspective	Shallow; superficial	Sees and offers the wider review	Overbearing; arrogant
Humor	Overly serious; flat affect	Laughter/joy with others; playful	Tasteless/offensive; giddy;too silly for situation
Leadership	Follower; compliant; passive	Positively influencing others	Bossy; controlling

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Time to reflect

- In your reflection guide, review the list of character strengths and their definitions on page 2 (or review your report) and identify the five or six that resonate most (top strengths).
- In what specific life situations do you find your top strengths showing up? What situations challenge your ability to practice your top strengths?
- Can you see how you use your top strengths in combination, and if so, how?
- Can you identify times when you might overuse or underuse your strengths?



SABOTEUR



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Tool #2: Saboteur Quiz

- Rooted in work performed by Shirzad Chamine and featured in the book, Positive Intelligence
- Your Positive Intelligence Quotient (PQ) measures the percentage of time your mind is serving you as opposed to sabotaging you
- Options: weaken saboteurs and/or strengthen sage powers through daily brain fitness techniques
- Saboteur quiz: **https://www.positiveintelligence.com/saboteurs/**

Tool #2: Saboteur Quiz

- Saboteurs are the voices in your head that generate stress and negative emotions in the way you handle work and life's challenges. They sabotage your potential for both happiness and performance.
- Exist in the brainstem, limbic system, and parts of the left brain.
- Produce much of your stress, anxiety, self-doubt, anger, shame, guilt, frustration, and mind chatter.
- Helpful for a second as they alert you to dangers or issues ("hot stove" rule).
- Staying in these emotions hurts your ability to see clearly and choose the most impactful response.

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Master saboteur: The Judge

- Finding fault with self
- Finding fault with others
- Finding fault with circumstances
- Source of much of our unhappiness
- Triggers accomplice saboteurs

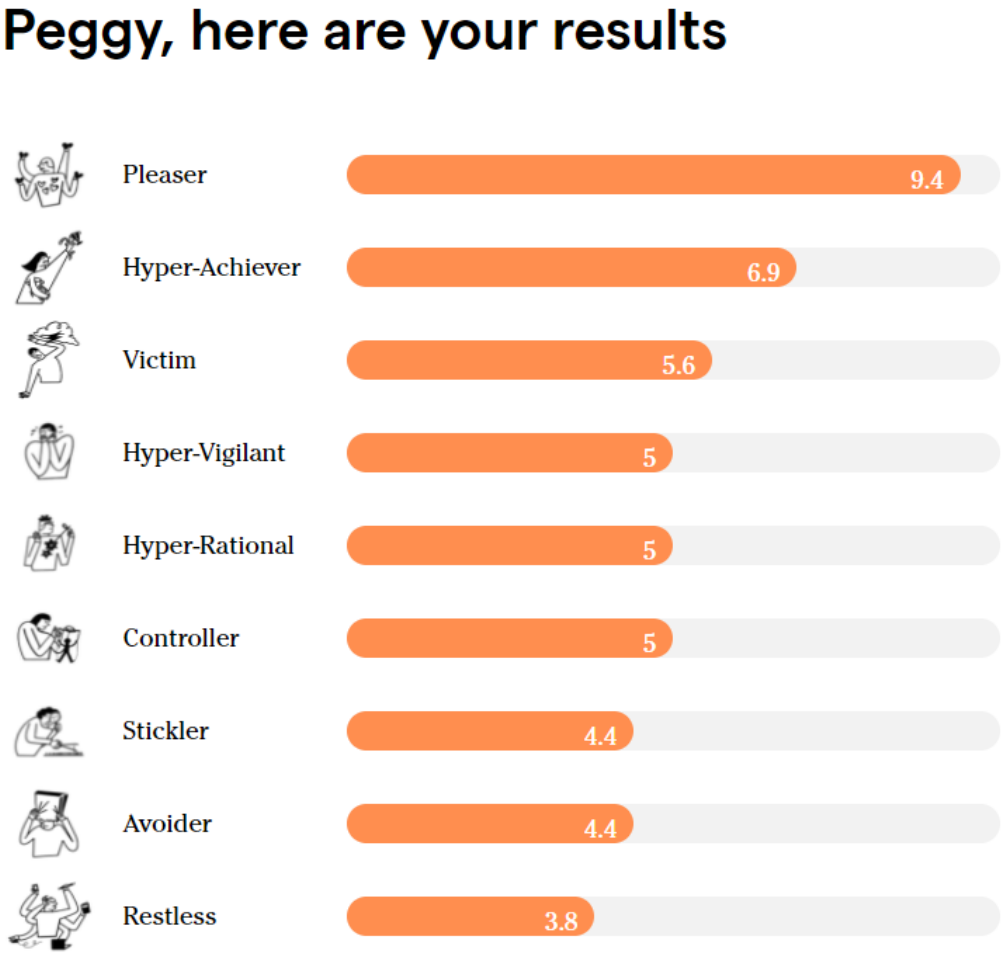


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AVOIDER	CONTROLLER	HYPER-ACHIEVER
• Focusing on positive and pleasant in an extreme way • Avoiding difficult and unpleasant tasks and conflicts	• Anxiety-based need to take control of situations and people's actions to one's own will • High anxiety and impatience when that is not possible	• Dependent on constant performance and achievement for self-respect and self-validation.
HYPER-RATIONAL	**HYPER-VIGILANT**	**PLEASER**
• Rational processing of everything, including relationships • Can be perceived as cold, distant and intellectually arrogant	• Continuous anxiety about all dangers and what could go wrong • Vigilance that can never rest	• Pleasing, flattering, rescuing others, to gain acceptance • Loses sight of own needs and becomes resentful as a result
RESTLESS	**STICKLER**	**VICTIM**
• Never at rest or content with what is, needing perpetual busyness • Rarely at peace or content with the current activity	• Need for perfection, order and organization taken too far	• Emotional and temperamental to gain attention and affection • An extreme focus on internal feelings, particularly painful ones.

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Sample Report



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Audience Poll:

If you completed the Saboteur Quiz, what was your top Saboteur?

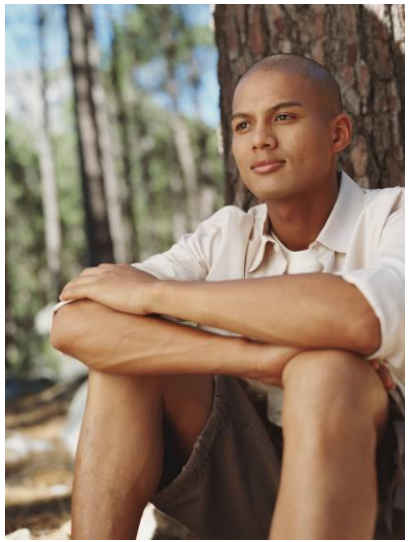


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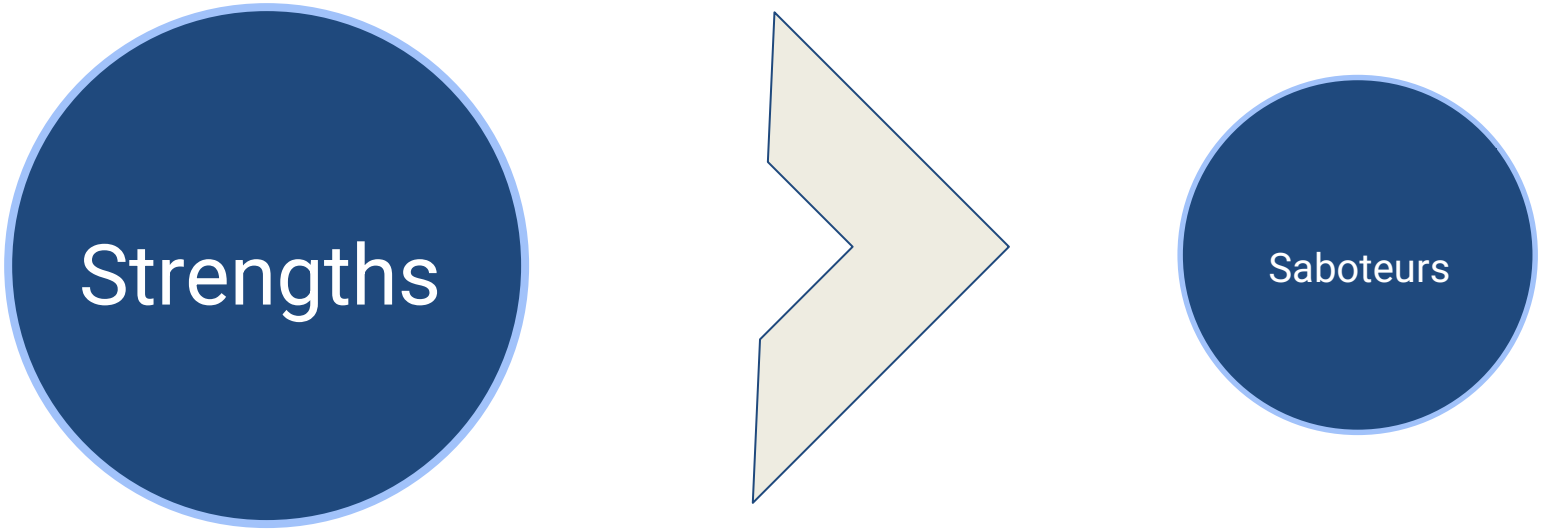
Time to reflect

- Upon review of the list of saboteurs and their definitions on page 3 of your reflection guide (or your report), which of them particularly resonate with you?

- In what ways do these saboteurs impact your ability to exercise your strengths?



Putting It All Together



Taming Saboteurs and Exercising Strengths

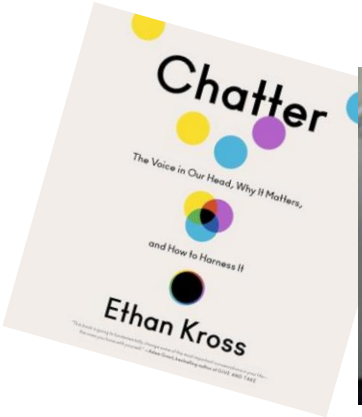
- Purely positive thinking isn't the answer
- Speed up your saboteur recognition time
- Establish scripts to buy time
- Be proactive and prepare yourself for high risk events where sabotage is likely
- Study and apply your character strengths intently, combinations, levels of intensity



Taming Saboteurs and Exercising Strengths

4 Ways to Harness Your Inner "Chatter"

- **Distanced self talk**
  - Refer to yourself by name, or in the second-person
- **Seek out awe-inspiring experiences**
  - "Shrinking of the self" phenomenon
- **Create order**
  - Regaining control by tidying up the house, writing a list or organizing that junk drawer!
- **Build your Chatter Board**
  - Identify a person or group of people you can talk to about your inner chatter

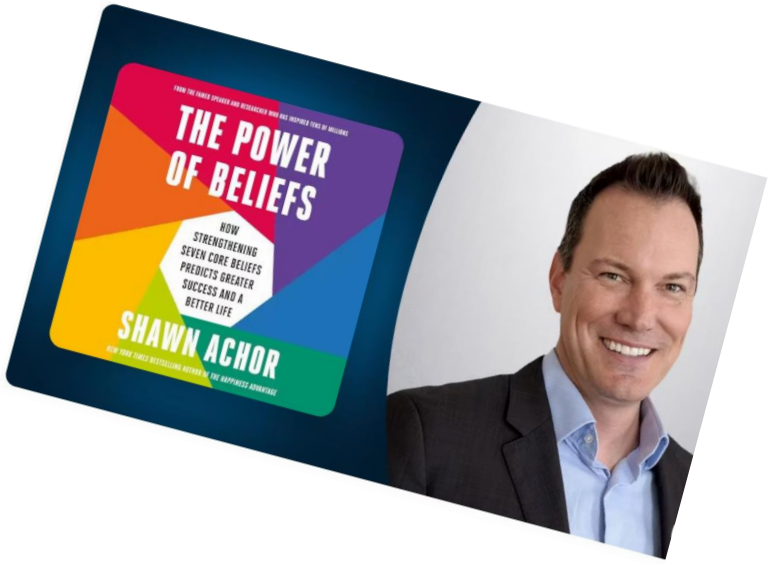




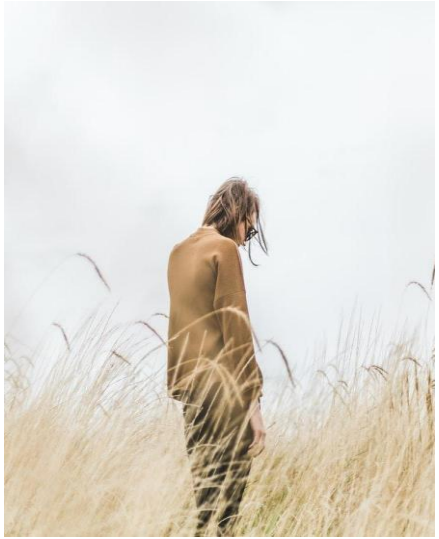
Taming Saboteurs and Exercising Strengths

Strengthening Seven Core Beliefs

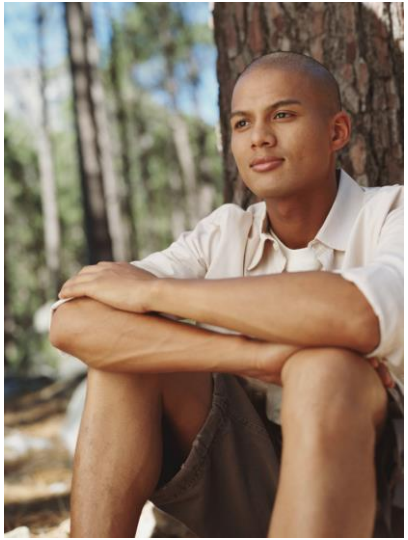
- My behavior matters
- I am grateful
- I matter
- I have something to give
- I am not alone
- This work is meaningful
- There is something greater than me



Make a Commitment to Yourself



From our time today, identify two practices you will try in the next week to manage your saboteurs and/or enable your strengths to shine more brightly.



“Home is a place we all must find, child. It's not just a place where you eat or sleep. Home is knowing. Knowing your mind, knowing your heart, knowing your courage. If we know ourselves, we're always home, anywhere."

"You always had the power, my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself."

"You are capable of more than you know."

Questions?



Thank You!

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