



LAWYER TO LAWYER MENTORING PROGRAM

WORKSHEET QQ

STRENGTHS-BASED LAWYERING

Worksheet QQ is intended to facilitate a discussion of the how aligning one's practice with one's strengths can increase professional performance and personal satisfaction.

WHAT WENT WELL?

Start by sharing with each other a brief story of something that went well in your practice this week:

Share your reflection by on one of these questions: What caused the good event? What does it mean? How did you contribute? Others? How can you have more such events in the future?

ACTIVITIES FOR TODAY

- Prior to the session, read the attached material: "Strengths Based Lawyering" and, if you have not already done so, take the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths at one of the sites identified in that paper.
- Discuss the role Signature Strengths have played in your career and life to this point. Looking back, have you made changes that enabled you to live and practice more from your strengths? Are there changes you now see might have been possible, but that you did not see or did not attempt at the time?
- Are there some strengths that cannot readily be given expression in your area of practice? Why?
- Who are some lawyers in your community that stand out because of how they live out one or more of the strengths?
- As a mentor, how do you see that your strengths have helped you meet Law's Five Challenges to Thriving (Worksheet D)? As a beginning lawyer, what role can you see for your strengths to help you meet those challenges?
- Discuss how your Signature Strengths might play a greater role in your career or life. Are there strengths you use at home but not in the practice of law? What might be gained from bringing those Signature Strengths more fully into your practice. What



about the opposite direction? Are there Signature Strengths you use in practice, but do not take home. For example, are you open-minded in handling matters for your clients, but not so much in dealing with a teen-ager at home?

- Describe ways in which the Shadow Side of one or more of your Signature Strengths has affected your lawyering. Your personal life? What lessons did you learn from that experience? Have you improved your approach to that strength as a result?
- Do activities in bar associations or other areas of the profession (see Worksheet C) enable you to utilize some strengths not given full expression in your practice?

ACTION STEPS

End the session by discussing what action steps you can take to either improve or set yourself up for future success based on today's discussion. Discuss how one or more of your Signature Strengths can help you achieve success in these steps.

RESOURCES

Smart Strengths: A Parent-Teacher-Coach Guide to Building Character, Resilience and Relationships in Youth, (Chapters 7 and 8). Yeager, J., Fisher, S., Shearon, D. (2011). Putnam Valley, NY: Kravis Publishing.

Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification. Peterson, C. and Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Strengths Based Leadership. Rath, T. and Conchie, C. (2008). New York: Gallup Press.

Strengthsfinder 2.0. Rath, T. (2007). New York: Gallup Press.

Video on the Development and Theory of the VIA: <http://j.mp/ahiCiH>



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Strengths Based Lawyering

Empirical research evidence is piling up for the proposition that individuals are more productive and more satisfied when engaged in activities that pull from their strengths, rather than their weaknesses. Stated so plainly, this proposition appears to be common sense that does not require empirical research evidence. However, as you follow the consequences of this proposition to their logical conclusions, you may find a focus on strengths-based lawyering – or even strengths-based living – more radical than you initially thought.

1. Maximize your focus on Strengths.
2. Minimize your focus on weaknesses.
3. Align activities with Strengths.
4. Approach challenges from Strengths.
5. As a leader, do the same for others.

Maximize your focus on Strengths. Follow the IOU method: Identify, Own, Use/Develop

Identify Your Strengths.

Most of us are pretty good at identifying our weaknesses, but pretty poor at identifying our strengths. As a result, researchers have developed a variety of approaches to help individuals identify their strengths, many focused on self-report questionnaires. Here, you will focus on one of those questionnaires, the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA). The VIA was developed a decade ago by a team led by Chris Peterson of the University of Michigan. Researchers now have well over a million results from the VIA and substantial research exists into the impact of these strengths on the lives of individuals.

Complete the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA) at either www.viame.org or www.authentichappiness.org. (The former has more tools and resources. The latter has additional tests. Both are run by non-profits.) Print out the list of your rank ordering of all 24 strengths of character.

Own Your Signature Strengths.

Out of the top eight or nine on your list of VIA strengths, four or five will likely stand out to you as your Signature Strengths. Signature Strengths generally meet the following criteria:

- **Feels like me** – an immediate sense of recognition and ownership.
- **Energizes me** – you tend to use energy more productively and rejuvenate more quickly.
- **Always on** – you do not need to be reminded to use the strength.



- **Attracts others** – used in the right situation (see “Shadow Side” below) others like and admire you when they see you living from your strengths – you at your best.

Challenges to owning your Signature Strengths: you may experience some ambivalence about owning your Signature Strengths. Here are some possible reasons for that ambivalence.

- **Nothing special.** On first look, you may think some of your strengths are "nothing special." This is, of course, incorrect. Each of the strengths met rigorous criteria established by the researchers who created the VIA, including that each of these strengths have been valued by virtually every society around the world throughout recorded history. These are the best of what it means to be human. Read the definition for rejecting the strength.
- **Too easy.** You may think that, since using the strength is so easy, it cannot be of much value. The key here is to note that it is easy *for you*. Others do not find it so easy and therefore value your contributions when you are operating from your Signature Strengths. Likewise, you may be impressed by the contributions of others when operating from their Signature Strengths, while they are puzzled at why anyone would even notice. Too easy.
- **Shadow side.** Each of the strengths can be overused, used in the wrong situation, or used for an inappropriate purpose. We told this the “shadow side” of a strength, and your memories of times the shadow side of your Signature Strengths came out may be influencing your willingness to acknowledge those strengths.

Special for Lawyers: Strengths Recovery

Over the last two decades, researchers have amassed substantial evidence that:

1. Students entering law school look much like those entering other post-graduate work.
2. Law school changes many law students rapidly, significantly, and detrimentally.

(See Worksheet D for more.) In the area of VIA Strengths, we know that American lawyers endorse 21 of the 24 VIA Strengths *less* than the American average, and that the rank ordering of strengths is different. However, going into law school, preliminary data suggests – in accordance with other research – that beginning law students look much like others both in how strongly they endorse the strengths and in how they order them. The three strengths lawyers endorse more than average are Love of Learning, Judgment (critical thinking/open-mindedness), and Curiosity.

Thus, it is possible as you look down through the strengths you will see one or two in the 6-12 range that do not currently meet the criteria of a signature strength for you, but which you think you lived more fully in the past, perhaps prior to law school. Make note of those and



think of including them in your activities, especially for development.

Use/Develop Your Strengths.

The final step is to begin to put your strengths and your new knowledge and strengths to work. Remember that VIA stands for Values in Action. Thus the question is always, how can you embody, live out, manifest, or do something out of your strengths. Here are seven suggestions to get you started.

1. Use a Signature Strength in any way. Select one of your Signature Strengths, plan a new way to use it in the coming week, then implement your plan. For example:
 - Love of Learning – plan to read a book or watch a video on a subject just because it interests you.
 - Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence – go to some display of beauty (museum, flower show, landscaping exhibition) or excellence (a performance of some kind, perhaps) and try to fully and deeply appreciate the event. (To give you an idea, watch this video featuring the son of a lawyer who pursued juggling as a way to NOT become a lawyer, and now spends part of his time promoting the Bill of Rights: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8f8drk5Urw>.)
 - Curiosity – Set a goal of learning three new things about someone you already think you know well such as your spouse, a child, or a law partner.
2. Recraft a task to use a Signature Strength. Pick a task you dislike and see if you can shift your experience of the task by engaging one or more of your Signature Strengths. For example, if you hate shopping and have Gratitude as a Signature Strength, you might see try focusing on your gratitude to all those who made your choices at the supermarket possible.
3. VIA swap. Ask someone who knows you very well to take the VIA about you – answering the questions as they see you, not about themselves. Offer to do the same for them. Discuss the results.
4. Strength spotting. Pick a strength that interests you, or perhaps one you want to develop, and try to spot it in others for a week. Keep notes of the exact behavior that allowed you to see the strength in action.
5. Strength exploration. Pick a strength that interests you, or perhaps one you want to develop and find ways to practice that strength. Reflect on how you experience those efforts, what happens to your sense of well-being afterwards, and whether the efforts become easier as you continue them.



6. Relationship bonus. Do any of the first five with someone you care about and notice the effect on the relationship.
7. Binocular view. Purchase either *Strengths Based Leadership* by Rath and Conchie, or *Strengthsfinder 2.0* by Rath (both from the Gallup organization) and use the code you will receive with the book to take Gallup's Strengthsfinder instrument. This assessment identifies 34 strength themes that the Gallup organization has found exceptionally important in the world work. You will see similarities and differences to the VIA results. Reflect on what the Strengthsfinder result adds to your understanding of your VIA strengths, and the reverse. How could you apply both to leadership? Lawyering?