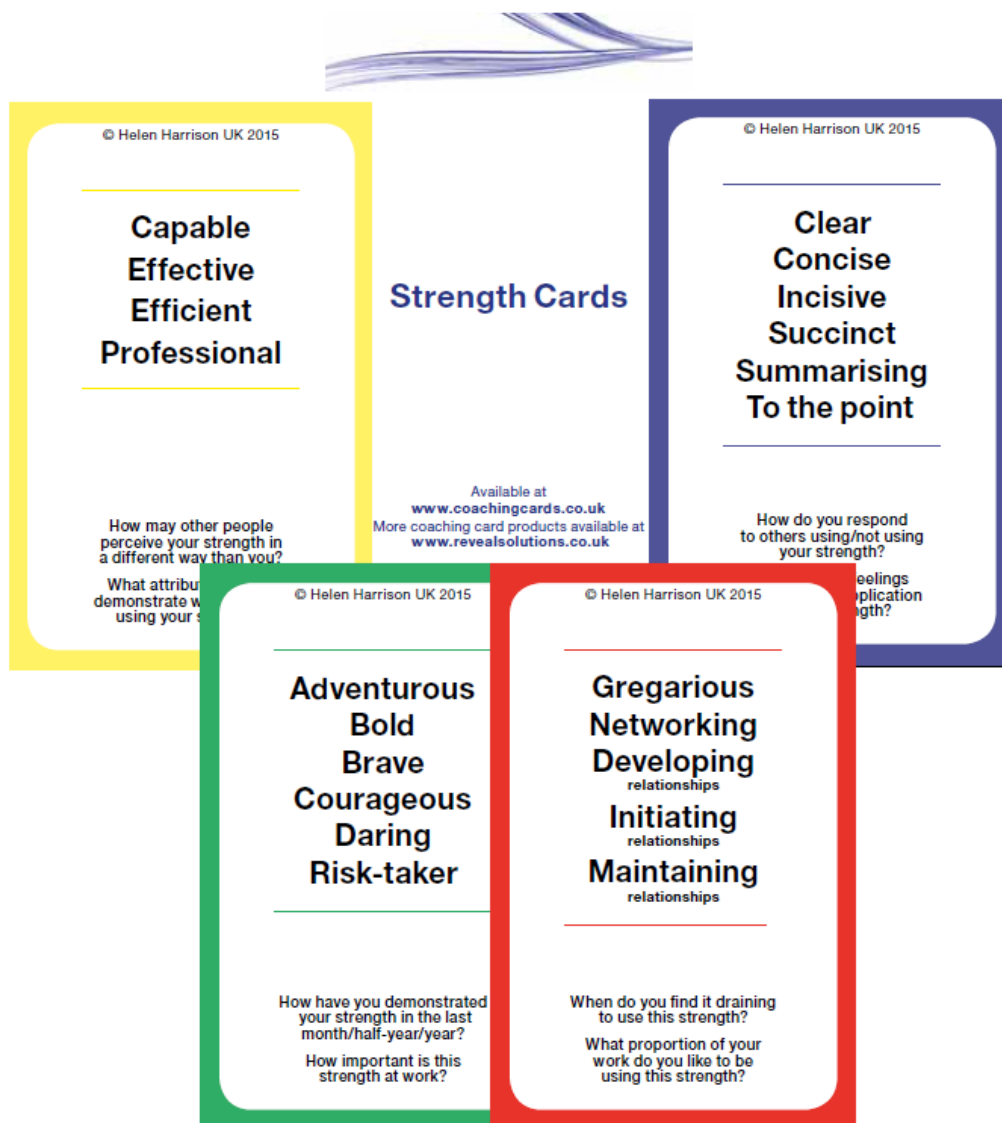


Strength Cards Handbook



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Purpose of the cards

Welcome to the strength cards! The purpose of the cards is to help people think about their strengths. Quite often when a person is asked what their strengths are, they find it difficult to come up with many – if any at all! Part of this may be because we take for granted what we can do and not realise it is a strength. Another aspect may be that in some western cultures, there is a tendency to see people who say they are good at something as boasting! In addition, at work we are encouraged to view any successes as the success of the team, in which we work. All such thoughts impact our ability to see what strengths we have with ease.

What is a strength?

Generally speaking, when talking about the strengths a person has, I am taking it to mean “a good or beneficial quality or attribute of a person or thing”, which is one of several definitions oxforddictionaries.com give to the word.

Marcus Buckingham of leanIn.org says “a strength is an activity that strengthens you”. To help you recognise this type of strength he suggests you notice the following aspects (SIGN):

- **Success** — When you do the activity, you feel effective and in control (what psychologists call “self-efficacy”).
- **Instinct** — Before you do the activity, you look forward to doing it. You can't wait to do it.
- **Growth** — While you are doing the activity, you feel inquisitive and focused. You may lose track of time and two hours feel like only five minutes have passed.
- **Needs** — After you've done the activity, even if you're tired, you feel fulfilled.

I have sympathy with this idea, because I know I'm good at some things, but I wouldn't want to be doing them, or at the most only for a short period! However, your thinking about a particular strength can change over time, so do keep this in mind too. How you feel about a strength is only based on your thinking, which can shift very quickly.

Strengths and their value to individuals, teams and organisations

Research within positive psychology has led to a variety of things we already consider to be true being validated as true. And I like the fact that there is research to back up commonly held views.

Here are some of the points now backed by research:

- ✓ Top achievers are good at recognising their talents and develop them into strengths
- ✓ Top achievers find roles that suit them best, including being able to apply their strengths
- ✓ Top achievers find ways to make the most of their strengths in everyday tasks
- ✓ Certain strengths help shield you against particular types of mental disorders/ dysfunctions
- ✓ Using your strengths helps build your resilience
- ✓ Using your prime strengths in the main aspects of your life generates positive emotions

In addition, research has brought out certain benefits when you make use of your strengths by following them:

- ✓ Insight and perspective in your life is encouraged
- ✓ Optimism is generated
- ✓ They provide a sense of direction
- ✓ They help develop your feeling of confidence
- ✓ A sense of life-giving energy is generated

In addition, research has been undertaken to validate particular strength-related exercises. Some of what follows are interpretations of those exercises.

I want to thank Lucy Ryan of MindSpring for introducing me so enticingly to positive psychology and making me aware of positive psychology and its application.

The Value of Knowing your Strengths

There are a variety of reasons why it is valuable to know and acknowledge your strengths: this includes

- ✓ you increase your self awareness, in particular appreciate how many strengths you have and understand more about your strengths e.g. which seem to give you job satisfaction;
- ✓ you can be more effective in how you apply and develop your strengths;
- ✓ you have grounded self-assurance;
- ✓ it opens the way to productive thinking and conversations about your strengths;
- ✓ you get better at identifying and appreciating strengths in other people; and
- ✓ it helps you make decisions e.g. about your career path.

Robert Kaplan has a very useful example regarding the application of a strength:

Take one brilliant and well-respected media executive that my colleagues and I interviewed. Though his peers and his staff acknowledged his intellect in a variety of ways, he remained steadfast in his belief that he wasn't exceptional. "I don't think of myself as unusually smart," he told us. "I do have a good-enough understanding about things most of the time, but that's not brilliance." The problem that arose from this misjudgment was that he could be abrasively impatient. When a staff member asked him to repeat a point in a complex presentation, for example, he chided her for not keeping up, noting that if he got it right away, she should. This destructive behavior intimidated his staff and deprived him of their full contributions.

Underrating oneself, as this executive did, gives rise to two common distortions in managerial behavior: overdoing and underdoing. In this case, the media executive overdid it by aggressively asserting his intelligence. (Harvard Business Review, March 2002)

When using the strength cards ...

When you look at a card you may:

- agree with only one word
- not see any connections between the words on the card
- like two or more words on one card, possibly considering them as completely separate
- think of a completely different word that better fits the description of your strength

All these responses are fine! Feel free to use the cards to best effect for you.

How to use the strength cards

You can use the cards in a variety of ways, depending on what you want to achieve. What follows are some ideas that you may wish to follow or develop to suit your own approach. You may wish to use one idea, a combination of the ideas or none at all. I'm sure you will find what fits you and what you want to accomplish.

You can use the questions on each card as and when it suits you too. They are there to develop your depth of knowledge about your strengths.

Exercise 1: What are your strengths?

If you are unsure what your strengths are in a particular area of your life, you may find it helpful to keep track of the abilities you use, how well you use them and what satisfaction you gain from using them, for a set period of time (e.g. one week). **However, do have a go at this exercise first - you may surprise yourself!**

Step 1: You may want to consider what your strengths are in general or pick a particular aspect of your life, such as:

- Career / work
- Finances (this can include material wealth, physical environment and possessions)
- 'Significant other' relationship
- Family and friends
- Leisure / travel / fun
- Personal development
- Health

You may even want to consider a particular situation, e.g. different communication situations, a specific work task.

Step 2: For whatever area(s) you wish to cover, there are a variety of ways to sort through the cards. What follows are some suggestions:

- **Prime strength** - I'm strong in this and enjoy it

- **Secondary strength** – I'm good at this, but would only want to use it for short periods of time
- **Strength to develop** - I'm occasionally or quite strong in this and would like to develop it further
- **Sufficiently strong** - I'm occasionally strong in this and know I can call on it when needed
- **Not strength and not interesting** - I'm not strong in this and have no interest in developing it at present

You may use whichever categories you wish – or make up your own. When I did this exercise myself I used:

- Prime strength (I'm strong in this and enjoy it)
- Secondary strength (I'm good at this, but would only want to use it for short periods of time)
- Not a strength and/or absolutely no interest in it

If you are considering more than one area of your life, you will need to write down the strengths for each area. You may notice some strengths are found in all areas. These are likely to be your core strengths.

Step 3: Assuming you have a reasonable number of 'prime strengths', which is quite normal, you may wish to categorise them in some way: for instance,

- **Which strengths support other strengths** e.g. one client of mine found that his strength in 'challenging' was supported by being articulate, independence, quick thinking, tactful and wisdom. He found that his 35 prime strengths divided under five core strengths. He recognised that those five strengths were important to him.
- **In what situations do you tend to use each of the strengths** e.g. you may find you use some strengths more when you're working alone and others when doing team work.
- **Types of strengths** e.g. you may notice that the cards are different colours. The strengths have been divided into four types:
 - relationships (red)
 - thinking (blue)
 - operational (yellow)
 - character – what's innate (green)

You can find different ways to differentiate them.

Exercise 2: Toning your strengths

Once you know your key strengths, here are some ideas how you might follow on. You may use one, two or a combination of these suggestions:

- **Use the core strengths more often during the next week.** Notice:
 - What difference(s) has it made?

- What remained the same?
 - What can you learn from this?
 - Taking this learning into consideration, what commitment(s) do you want to make, if any?
- **Use one of the core strengths in a new and different way every day for one week,** either in all aspects of your life or specific aspects of your life. Notice:
 - What difference(s) has it made?
 - What remained the same?
 - What can you learn from this?
 - Taking this learning into consideration, what commitment(s) do you want to make, if any?
- **Go through each core strength and find out more about them:**
 - How do you describe this strength?
 - How and when do you use this strength?
 - When don't you use this strength? And for what reasons?
 - When would this strength possibly not be a strength?
 - When might you over-use this strength – or use it in an extreme way? For instance, when being persevering turns into being stubborn!

Exercise 3: Finding out more about the strengths you want to develop

You are sometimes strong in a particular way and would like to be able to rely on that strength more. You may find it helpful to find out more about these strengths by answering the following questions:

- How do you describe this strength?
- When do you use this strength? And for what reasons?
- How do you use this strength?
- When would you find it useful to use this strength but currently don't?
- How could you use this strength in different ways?
- How do other people use this strength in different ways than you?

You could develop these strengths by using the suggestions in Exercise 2.

Exercise 4: Support Strengths Can Give You

When you are facing a difficult situation or person ask yourself:

- Which of my strengths will support me in handling this situation/person?
- How can these strengths support me?
- What strengths can I borrow to use?
- What strengths can I gain from other people?

