

Strengths Assessment Follow-Up Notes

Well, we have finished our units on strengths. I would like to take this time to suggest that you reflect on your journey. Remember where you were with strengths two weeks ago? Try to recall what your knowledge base was, what your attitudes were, and what your vocabulary consisted of. Now, fast forward to today and look at how much more you know about defining strengths, labeling them, using them with clients, formal strengths assessments, and so forth. I hope these learning units have been provocative, inspiring, and useful.

Categories of strengths discussion

In general, when I work with an individual from a strengths perspective (just a reminder: this is often invisible to my clients; I often don't even mention the word "strength" I just spot a strength and focus on development strategies) I think of there being distinct categories for discussion:

A) Use-- basically, how are you using X? How would you like to? How intensely or frequently should you be using this in this situation? How have you improved at it over time? What does improvement mean?

B) Identity-- how much do you claim X? What label would you prefer? How core is this? Who are you when you use this strength? How do others see you?

C) Filter-- how does X deliver your values? What qualities do you value in others? What qualities in others are difficult for you to work with?

Some general points regarding assessment:

1. KNOW YOUR ASSESSMENT WELL: know whichever assessment you use very well. Know the definition of each strength and generally understand the strengths categories. Know the assessment's history, structure, and technical details if available. It takes practice to be able to articulate these things clearly. And it's fine to say "I don't know" if you don't know the answer to a technical question.

2. USE YOUR ASSESSMENT WELL: prepare for a debrief by looking at the client results. Note anything that stands out such as seemingly contradictory strengths and weaknesses, or two strengths that seem contradictory (eg. humility and spotlight together). And try to anticipate potential questions. Ask the client for surprises, or satisfactions, or other noteworthy reactions. Take brief notes and plant a little flag in outstanding topics to identify them for later coaching work.

3. You and the client are the most important: The relationship is the most important aspect of coaching. The debrief can be a give-and-take. Tell the client what to expect and what you plan to do. Stop frequently to ask your client about possible questions. Let your client guide the development work. Listen patiently as they occasionally describe why the assessment is evil and wrong, but also feel free to challenge them on this or make small temporary modifications.

4. Creating a culture that supports intervention effectiveness is, itself, an intervention. The attached paper describes this in detail and offers specific examples. I hope this information is helpful to you. I recommend you practice a debrief. This is one area where I generally think it is acceptable to practice with friends, because you won't actually be doing any coaching. It is just about you having the opportunity to explain the assessment and answer real questions.