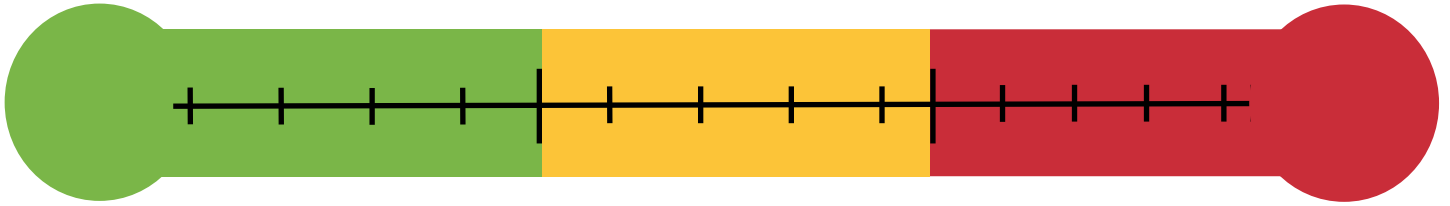


Weekly Check-In



Think back to the **Well-Being Thermometer**. Are you in the **Green zone**, **Yellow zone**, or **Red zone**? What can you do to stay in the green zone or move towards the green zone?

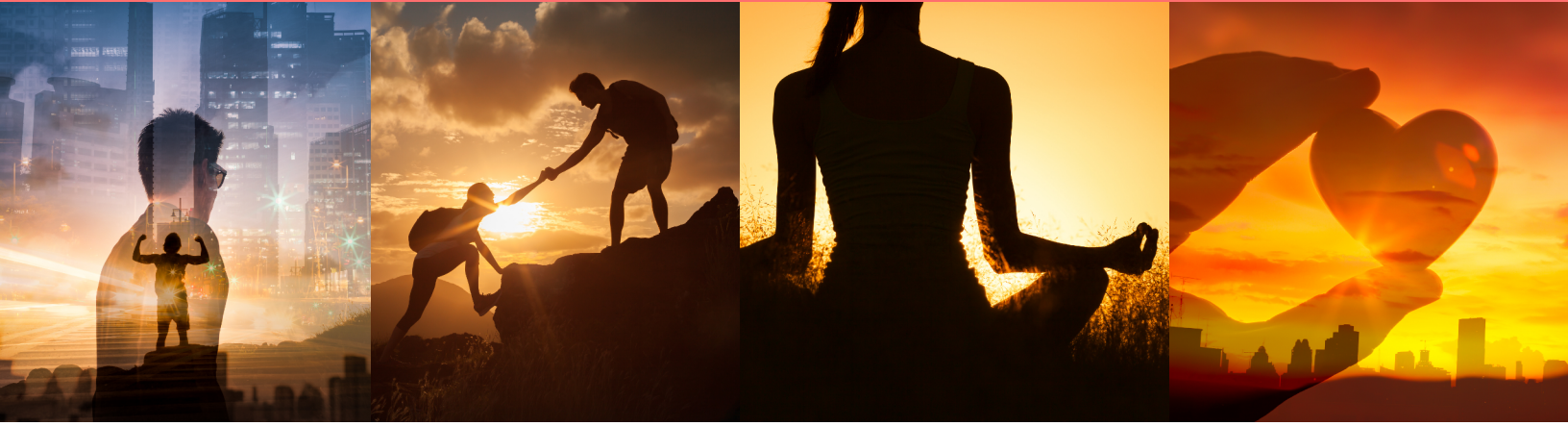
Think back to last week's homework activity:

What went well?

What was challenging? What have you learned *about yourself* that will help you to manage these challenges in the future?

Session 11

Harnessing The Power Of Personal Strengths



What are Personal Strengths?

Personal strengths are a natural part of who we are. They reflect the acts, desires, and feelings that lead to personal flourishing and excellence. We can use our natural strengths to overcome the inevitable challenges of life.

Why is it important to use your strengths during COVID-19?

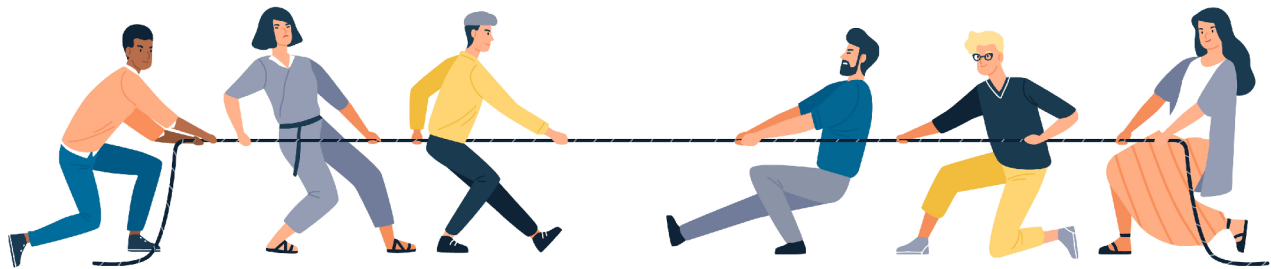
In times of stress, it can be easy to get down on ourselves and think about the things that we can improve on or do better. Identifying our strengths can help us recognize what we personally bring to the table, which can help us to cope with stress and overcome the challenges that life throws our way, as well as boost confidence and hope for the future.

Using Strengths To Manage Stress

Whether you are required to leave your home for work during this pandemic or are facing new challenges associated with having to stay at home, it is normal to be experiencing more stress than usual right now.

Stress is a normal reaction to life's challenges, but it is possible to build resiliency and methods to cope with stress that can mitigate some of its negative consequences.

One of the benefits of identifying and using your personal strengths is that they can help us navigate challenging life situations. As a result, the negative effects of stress from those situations are reduced.



Strengths can help us cope with stress by:

- Helping us analyze the situation
- Better managing our response to stress
- Taking an active role in facing a stressful event
- Better dealing with interpersonal conflict

Universal Strengths

Some Universal Strengths

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Judgment
- Love of Learning
- Perspective
- Bravery
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Zest
- Love
- Kindness
- Social Intelligence
- Teamwork
- Fairness
- Leadership
- Forgiveness
- Humility
- Prudence
- Self-regulation
- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humor
- Spirituality

Take the VIA character strength survey online to help you understand your personal strength profile. After you take the survey, reflect on the results it provides you (i.e., do the results reflect how you feel, day to day?).

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>

The next few pages are a description of these strengths. Take some time to read the strengths that you have identified as your top 5 strengths.

Curiosity

If Curiosity is your top strength, you are interested in learning more about anything and everything. You are always asking questions, and you find all subjects and topics interesting. You like exploration and discovery.

There are two key components to curious individuals:

- They are interested in exploring new ideas, activities, and experiences.
- They have a strong desire to increase their personal knowledge.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Interest in exploring a new idea, activity, or experience*
- *Increase knowledge about COVID-19 (e.g., best practices to flatten the curve)*
- *Curiosity about how social isolation is affecting you and those around you.*

Spirituality

If Spirituality is your top strength you have strong and coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe. You know where you fit in the larger scheme. Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you.

Spirituality is believed to describe both the private, intimate relationship between humans and the divine, and the range of virtues that result from the relationships. Spirituality is universal. Although the specific content of spiritual beliefs varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred force.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Spirituality is another coping strategy many people use in times of adversity*
- *Perhaps the stress associated with the current pandemic has brought you closer to your spiritual practice*
- *Perhaps the current pandemic has given you more perspective for what matters in life.*

Judgment

If Judgment is your top strength, thinking things through and examining them from all sides are important aspects of who you are. You do not jump to conclusions and you rely only on solid evidence to make your decisions. You are able to change your mind if there is a good reason to. The strength of judgment counteracts faulty thinking, such as favoring your current views or automatically accepting ideas that are considered the dominant view. This allows you to give more attention to the less-dominant view and consider it in your decisions. It is the willingness to search for evidence against your favored beliefs, plans, or goals and to weigh all of the evidence fairly when it is available.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Doing your research on the COVID-19 pandemic so that you know how to respond appropriately*
- *Examining the rationale for physical isolation to gain a more full appreciation for government recommendations*

Love of Learning

If Love of Learning is your top strength, you love learning new things, whether in a class or on your own. You have always loved school, reading, and museums - anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn. Love of learning describes the way in which a person engages new information and skills. Love of learning is a strength that teachers would like to see in their students, parents want to encourage in their children, therapists support in their clients, and employers try to foster in their employees. It can improve motivation because it helps people persist through challenges, setbacks, and negative feedback.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Learning a new activity or skill*
- *Taking time to learn about the COVID-19 virus*
- *Doing online classes or courses*

Perspective

If Perspective is your top strength, you have a way of looking at the world that makes sense to others and to yourself. Although you may not think of yourself as wise, your friends hold this view of you. They value your opinion on matters and turn to you for advice. Perspective is distinct from intelligence but represents a high level of knowledge and the capacity to give advice. It also allows you to recognize and weigh multiple sides before making decisions. Individuals with more perspective can address important questions about the conduct and meaning of life.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Understanding that the COVID outbreak will not last forever*
- *Ability to take things one day at a time*
- *Focusing on things within your control*

Bravery

If Bravery is your top strength, you are a courageous person who does not back-down from threats, challenges, difficulty, or pain. You speak up for what is right even if there is opposition and act on your principles.

There are three types of bravery (a person may possess one of these or a combination):

- **Physical bravery** (e.g., firefighters, police officers, soldiers)
- **Psychological bravery** (e.g., facing painful aspects of oneself)
- **Moral bravery** (e.g., speaking up for what's right, even if it's an unfavorable opinion to a group)

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Going to work*
- *Practicing social isolation*
- *Advocating for safe practices*

Perseverance

If Perseverance is your top strength, you work hard to finish what you start. No matter the project, you "get it out the door" in a timely fashion. You do not get distracted when you work and you take satisfaction in completing tasks. Perseverance involves continued work despite challenges, difficulties, and discouragement that you may come across. There are two parts to perseverance: effort towards a task and the stamina to stick with it.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Dealing with life's stressors while in the midst of a global pandemic*
- *Accomplishing even 1-2 things each day (e.g., taking a shower, emptying the dishwasher, making dinner, finishing a report) all deserves praise right now.*

Honesty

If Honesty is your top strength, you are a straightforward person, not only by speaking the truth but by living your life in a genuine and authentic way. You are down to earth and sincere; you are a "real" person.

This strength involves accurately representing your internal states, intentions, and commitments, both publicly and privately. The strength of honesty is often linked to self-concordance - the extent to which your goals are in line with your true interests and values. Honesty allows people to take responsibility for their feelings and behaviors, owning them, and reaping benefits by doing so.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Being honest with yourself about what is realistic to accomplish throughout the day and when you need a break*
- *Being assertive with physical boundaries (e.g., isolation)*
- *Being honest with yourself/others about the amount of support you want from others, and where you can realistically get that support from (family, friends, other services)*

Zest

If Zest is your top strength, you approach all experiences with excitement and energy. You never do anything halfway or halfheartedly. For you, life is an adventure.

Zest is directly related to physical and psychological wellness. This strength has the strongest ties to overall life satisfaction and a life of engagement.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Finding ways to make the most of the current situation*
- *Finding the joy in the mundane*
- *Finding the positive aspects of the current situation and maximizing or savouring them*

Love

If Love is your top strength you value close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated. The people to whom you feel most close to are the same people who feel closest to you.

There are four types of love, each with a biological and evolutionary base:

- Attachment love: parent for child; child for parent
- Compassionate/altruistic love: unconditional love for another
- Compassionate love: friendship
- Romantic love: spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Finding new ways to connect to loved ones*
- *Showing your appreciation for health care workers (e.g., putting up white hearts on windows)*
- *Showing appreciation for all that you are doing during this difficult time*

Social Intelligence

If Social Intelligence is your top strength, you are aware of the motives and feelings of other people. You know what to do to fit in to different social situations, and you know what to do to put others at ease. You are able to establish, develop, and maintain meaningful relationships with others.

Social intelligence involves two general components:

- **Social awareness:** what we sense about others
- **Social facility:** what we do with our awareness

COVID-Related Examples

- *Awareness of others' needs*
- *Knowing what you can do to meet the needs of others*

Fairness

If Fairness is your top strength, treating people fairly is one of your top priorities. You do not let your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people. You give everyone a chance.

Fairness involves both reasoning and making judgments. It involves two types of reasoning:

- **Justice reasoning:** emphasizes logic and weighing principles to determine moral rights and responsibilities.
- **Care reasoning:** includes empathy and compassion; the ability to put yourself in somebody else's shoes.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Gaining an appreciation for how the COVID outbreak has impacted individuals with different circumstances (e.g., vulnerable individuals), and weighing this into how you decide to act*
- *Acknowledging that not everyone will have the same information you do and, therefore, appreciating that everyone is doing the best that they can with the available information*

Teamwork

If Teamwork is your top strength, you excel as a member of a group. You are a loyal and dedicated teammate, you always do your share, and you work hard for the success of your group. Teamwork is closely related to three other concepts:

- Citizenship: responsibility toward one's community
- Loyalty: unwavering trust for a group
- Patriotism: loyalty toward one's homeland/nation without hostility toward other nations

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Working with (a) colleague(s) to navigate changes in the way you operate*
- *Working with individuals in your household to figure out how you can meet each other's needs.*
- *Working with your community to practice physical distancing*
- *Trusting your community (i.e., that everyone is doing the best they can)*

Kindness

If Kindness is your top strength, you are generous and nice to others, and you are never too busy to do a favor. You enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if you do not know them well.

Kind individuals believe that others are worthy of attention for their own sake as human beings, not out of a sense of duty or principle. There are three traits of altruistic personalities:

- Empathy/sympathy
- Moral reasoning
- Social responsibility

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Staying at home for the safety of others*
- *Donating your time to COVID-related causes*
- *Keeping a safe physical distance from others while in public*

Leadership

If Leadership is your top strength, you excel at encouraging a group to get things done and making everyone feel included. You are good at organizing activities and seeing them through.

Leadership is a social phenomenon that can be distinguished into two areas:

- **Practice:** defining, establishing, identifying, or implementing action.
- **Personal quality:** the motivation and capacity to seek out, attain and carry out leader roles.

There are two types of leaders:

- **Transactional leaders:** this type of leader clarifies responsibilities, expectations, and the tasks to be completed.
- **Transformational leaders:** this leader motivates their followers to perform at an extremely high level, building trust and commitment to the organization and its goals.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Organizing remote events with friends (e.g., planning a celebrations)*
- *Helping colleagues work harmoniously under new levels of stress*
- *Organizing family chores, dinners, homeschooling, play activities*

Forgiveness

If Forgiveness is your top strength, you are good at forgiving those who have done you wrong. You always give people a second chance. You believe in mercy, and not revenge.

It is important to distinguish forgiveness from:

- Condoning (removing the offense)
- Forgetting (removing the awareness)
- Reconciliation (restoring the relationship)

Instead forgiveness is a strength that we use to protect ourselves from the feeling of hatred. It is a specialized form of mercy; a general concept of feeling kindness and compassion towards others.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *More willing to forgive people when things have not gone your way*
- *Meeting frustrations (e.g., trips/events canceled, new working environment, delayed shipping, lines at grocery store, unable to purchase favourite food items) with a sense of understanding, kindness, and compassion.*

Humility

If Humility is your top strength, you do not seek the spotlight. You recognize your limitations, forgive yourself, and keep accomplishments in perspective. You prefer to let your accomplishments speak for themselves. Others value your modesty.

Humility is NOT having low self-esteem, a sense of unworthiness, and/or a lack of self-focus. Humble people do not distort information for their image, and do not present themselves as being better than others.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Accomplishing what realistic goals you have set out for yourself during this pandemic, and letting those accomplishments speak for themselves*
- *Gaining a sense of accomplishment from your goals (both in terms of self-care and in meeting others' expectations of you) that comes from within rather than from others.*

Prudence

If Prudence is your top strength, you are a careful person, and your choices reflect this. You do not say or do things that you might later regret.

Prudence involves far-sighted planning as well as short-term, goal-directed planning. It is often referred to as cautious wisdom, practical wisdom, and practical reason.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Taking extra caution when it comes to protecting yourself and others*
- *Knowing what actions you can do day-to-day that will keep yourself and others healthy.*
- *Avoid unnecessary risks*
- *Far-sighted planning: thinking about what work, home, and social life will look like months from now.*

Self-Regulation

If Self-Regulation is your top strength, you consciously control what you feel and what you do. You are a disciplined person. You are in control of your desires and your emotions, not vice versa.

Self-regulation can be viewed as a resource that can be depleted or used-up. A useful metaphor can be that self-regulation acts like a muscle, which can be exhausted through over-use or strengthened through regular practice.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Unique opportunity to exercise self-regulation when it comes to government regulations (e.g., physical distancing/isolation, sanitation)*
- *Ability to shift your world to accommodate new goals/visions for the near future, whether it be getting physical activity on a regular basis, regulating the amount of time consuming new/media*
- *Being able to manage and regulate your emotions around others who you have found yourself to be in close proximity with during quarantine.*

Appreciation Of Beauty And Excellence

If Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence is your top strength you notice and appreciate beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life and everyday experiences.

There are three types of goodness individuals high in Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence are responsive to:

- **Physical beauty:** this comes in the form of what we see, hear, and touch, producing awe and wonder in the individual experiencing it.
- **Skill or talent (excellence):** this is often energizing, motivating individuals to pursue their own goals, and producing admiration.
- **Virtue or moral goodness (moral beauty):** virtual goodness makes the individual want to be better, more loving, and produces feelings of elevation such as hope and optimism.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *You are able to look beyond the unfortunate consequences of the pandemic and see the silver lining (e.g., spending more time in nature, tending more to house, taking up old hobbies, trying new hobbies, spending more time with family, etc.)*
- *You may feel morally moved by everyone coming together to flatten the curve; appreciation of essential service workers.*
- *You may feel moved by society's appreciation for health care workers (e.g., seeing the white hearts and kind messages posted on houses and yards).*
- *You may feel a new sense of appreciation for the things that you can no longer do (e.g., socializing with others, seeing coworkers)*
- *You may feel a new sense of appreciation for the things that you once took for granted before the pandemic (e.g., saying "hi" to strangers on the street)*

Gratitude

If Gratitude is your top strength you are aware of the good things that happen to you, and you never take them for granted. Your friends and family members know that you are a grateful person because you always take the time to express your thanks.

There are two types of gratitude:

- **Benefit-triggered gratitude:** the state that follows when a desired benefit is received from a benefactor.
- **Generalized gratitude:** the state that follows from awareness and appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to yourself.

There are two stages of gratitude:

- Acknowledging the goodness in your life.
- Recognizing the source of this goodness is outside yourself.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Noticing and appreciating the good parts/aspects of the day*
- *You may be especially grateful to healthcare workers and all other essential services (e.g., grocery store workers)*
- *You may be grateful to the services that were offered before the pandemic that are no longer operating, and look forward to thanking them when you are able to visit them again*
- *You may have a good idea of what you value and are taking the time to appreciate the things that manifest these values (e.g., if humour is your value, you may appreciate how you are still able to joke with others virtually)*

Humor

If Humor is your top strength you like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. You try to see the light side of all situations.

Humor involves the ability to make other people smile or laugh. It also means having a composed and cheerful view on adversity that allows an individual to see its light side and thereby sustain a good mood.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *Humour may be one way that you have learned to cope with this unpredictable situation - and people may appreciate you for it!*
- *You may be taking the current situation and seeing the humour in certain aspects of it.*
 - *E.g., writing/looking up covers to songs with COVID-lyrics; making fun of the way political leaders are handling the situation; reflecting on abnormal things yourself and others have started doing in isolation (e.g., toilet paper hoarding).*

Creativity

If Creativity is your top strength, thinking of new or unique ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are rarely happy with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible.

There are two essential components to Creativity: originality and adaptiveness. A creative individual generates ideas or behaviors that are new or unusual and these make a positive contribution to the individual's life or the lives of others.

COVID-Related Examples

- *Creating new projects for self-care*
- *Being creative with the ways in which you communicate with others.*

Hope

If Hope is your top strength you expect the best in the future and you work to achieve it. You believe that the future is something that you can control.

Optimism is closely linked with having a particular explanatory style (how we explain the causes of bad events). People using an optimistic explanatory style interpret bad events as external, unstable, and specific to the event. Those using a pessimistic explanatory style interpret events as internal, stable, and global.

COVID-Related Examples:

- *You may be optimistic that you will come out stronger than before (i.e., new coping skills, realized strengths)*
- *You may be optimistic that we, as a society, will come out stronger*
- *You might interpret the COVID-19 pandemic as external (i.e., a virus that I cannot control), unstable (i.e., it won't stick around forever), and specific (i.e., the consequences for me are specific to this virus)*
- *You might interpret events related to COVID-19 as external. For example, if you are not being as productive as you would like to be, you could interpret your behaviour as external (i.e., related to being in a different work environment), unstable (i.e., productivity will improve when things return to normal), and specific (i.e., knowing that you are normally very productive, and that your difficulty is specific to the current circumstances)*

What Are Your Personal Strengths?



We all use some personal strengths more often than others. But we all have signature strengths that are core to who we are and that we use most frequently.

Most people have between three and seven signature strengths.

What are your top five personal strengths?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Are there any strengths you see in yourself that are not on the list?

6. _____
7. _____

Take a moment to reflect on how your strengths may have helped you cope with the current challenges you are facing.

Applying Your Personal Strengths

Applying your top personal strengths can lead to several positive outcomes:

- Less stress
- Progress towards reaching important goals
- Improvements in work experience
- Improvements in psychological well-being

Consider ways that you use your top five personal strengths

How have you typically applied these strengths? What are some activities and roles you have engaged in that display these strengths? How did applying your strengths effect those around you? For each of your top five strengths, describe an event or occurrence in the past when you used that strength successfully.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Applying Your Personal Strengths

Reflecting on Your Use of Your Strengths

How did it feel to be able to display your strengths to others?

Do you notice any link between your personal strengths and your values/roles?

We can think of strengths like a muscle – if we use them, they grow and become stronger. The ways in which we use our strengths might look a bit differently now than they did before COVID-19.

In the roles that you play, the activities that you're currently engaging in, and the new challenges that you are facing, how are you currently using your personal strengths? In what ways have you been challenged to use your strengths in innovative ways?

Putting It Into Practice



Use Your Top Strengths In A New Way This Week

Take a moment to consider your current environment. What has changed since the pandemic? Are there any aspects that have stayed the same?

Given these changes to your environment, can we think of opportunities to flex your personal strengths in a new way?

How can we use our strengths to manage feelings of grief and/or experiences of loss as a result of the pandemic? Can we use or foster new strengths to help us manage feelings of grief?

Putting It Into Practice

Think of how you can apply your strengths in new ways over the upcoming weeks. What are some situations you might be in or that you could actively seek out, which could allow you to use one of your top personal strengths. Make a SMALL goal to help achieve this task!

What will I do: _____

Where will I do it: _____

When will I do it: _____

How will I do it: _____

Who will help me with it: _____

*Born
to be
strong*

SMALL Goal Checklist

Is your goal....

- Self-selected
- Measurable
- Action-oriented
- Linked to your lifestyle
- Time Limited

Putting It Into Practice

1. If I am in a situation in which _____,
I can apply my strength of _____
by _____.
2. If I am in a situation in which _____,
I can apply my strength of _____
by _____.
3. If I am in a situation in which _____,
I can apply my strength of _____
by _____.
4. If I am in a situation in which _____,
I can apply my strength of _____
by _____.
5. If I am in a situation in which _____,
I can apply my strength of _____
by _____.

Don't limit yourself to using only your strengths in the ways that you have planned here. Use them as often as you can!