

Finding your fire

Whether you're looking to turbo-charge your career or find a better work-life balance, our coach and columnist Kinsy McWilliam can help. This month, she shares her tips for identifying and harnessing your individual inner superpower...



Interested in learning more? Contact Kinsy about how strengths coaching could help you harness your potential, or view a full list of all 40 human strengths, which can be found at coachingdirect.co.uk/what-is-strengths-coaching

Do you know what you do best? Before I set up Coaching Direct in 2008, I worked as an accountant. I don't actually remember when I decided to become an accountant, but it had always been what I was going to do when I left school, the subject of a very clear career path that I did not step from at any point. I also don't remember any conversation around whether I would actually be any good at this chosen path - I simply performed well in all my exams and I was job done.

As grateful as I am now for my accountancy background, had I looked at not only what I was good at, but at what sparked my energy and motivation, it would well have been a very different story. Because what we are good at does not always equate to what makes us happy. And while we could be going through a performance review each year, when we know they don't see us as our best, it is easy to become exhausted by the daily grind.

Our strengths are so much more than what we are good at. They are linked to our performance, our energy and how often we use them, and while we all have natural strengths, which we know and use often, we also have untapped strengths, of which we are unaware. Think of your potential when that is

activated - harness that and you really will feel like you have superpowers!

A good way to spot strengths, in yourself or in others, is to notice when you are at your most focused, motivated, passionate and relaxed. When are you quick to learn? When you are in your flow, time passes really. When you return your mind to do-its, which items you do best without any hesitation? These are the things that energise you - your top strengths. Spotting untapped strengths can be harder, but a good way to do so is to ask some things. How do they feel? Does a new activity make you learn?

On the opposite side of this, when are you drained, restless and agitated? Which part of your to-do list keeps getting you off to bed? These can be our weaknesses but all have their own natural strengths, and while we may not be able to eliminate these parts of our lives completely, we can look at how often we use them. Using these drains our energy - so wonder we're tired - so ensuring we balance them with use of our strengths can be very beneficial.

I work with lots of different people but the one common thread I see is they struggle to recognise their strengths. Would you believe there are over 40 strengths ranging from pride in achievement? I was not surprised to find the difference between my 'learned strengths', so even though I have taught

myself to be good at it (think back to my middle days in accountancy), I do feel more like ticking a routine and look to delegate them. Being so busy can actually drain the life out of me. An easy way to identify a learned strength? Practise it...

Given we can learn those that don't come naturally, you might ask why we even bother with strengths? Over the past 20 years, various research projects, mainly by Steve Lohdy, have shown that individuals who harness their strengths have higher levels of happiness, confidence, self-regard and energy. Further studies have demonstrated a positive impact on overall well-being, as well as engagement in both life and work. In further good news, our strengths can change over time, if we recognise them and increase their use. Think of all that untapped potential in you...

So, how to harness it. If you make to-do lists, can you create one where what you do best, then link that task to a strength and figure out how to use that more. On the other side, work out what you are putting off and either do it, dump it or delegate it to someone who has that strength.

Kinsy is the founder and CEO of Coaching Direct, an Edinburgh based centre for emotional intelligence, coaching and mentoring.