Strengths of Character
“Virtues in Action”

Azusa Pacific University
There is consensus that good character is a good thing.

Good character results in:
- Personal well-being
- Interpersonal well-being
- Social well-being

Good character does not promise the absence of difficulty, but the ability to thrive in the midst of hardship.
A life of good character is a life that is:

- Fulfilling
- Satisfying
- Invigorating
- Worth the effort
- Meaningful
- Positive

morally, psychologically, relationally, and spiritually
Developing Good Character

Good character can be cultivated through a strengths-mindset.

A Deficit Mindset
- Repairing problems
- Healing wounds
- Identifying defects
- Studying what’s wrong with people

A Strengths Mindset
- Building capacity
- Releasing potential
- Nurturing competence
- Studying what’s right with people

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But what is a “strength”? A “strength” is “a capacity for feeling, thinking, and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes” (Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

- The Clifton StrengthsFinder measures situational themes of talent, or strengths of competence.
- The VIA-IS (Virtues in Action-Inventory of Strengths) measures positive psychological traits, or strengths of character.
So what’s the difference?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clifton StrengthsFinder</th>
<th>VIA (Virtues in Action)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Talents</strong></td>
<td><strong>Character Traits</strong></td>
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<td>Discovered within us,</td>
<td>Identified as important,</td>
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The VIA is a classification that offers the positive flipside of the traditional classification of disorders found in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

The VIA list provides a common language for a strengths-based approach to character development (as well as psychological diagnosis and treatment).
The six overarching “virtues” are based on an analysis and compilation of core human excellences found from history’s great philosophers, religions, and traditions.

- They have “emerged consensually across cultures and throughout time” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
- “We speculate that all these virtues must be present at above-threshold values for an individual to be deemed of good character” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The twenty-four VIA “strengths” (organized under the six virtues) are the ingredients that give substance to the virtues.

- These strengths are the means by which the virtues are lived out “We are comfortable saying that someone is of good character if he or she displays but 1 or 2 strengths within a virtue group” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

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VIA The 6 Virtues

Wisdom and Knowledge: cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge

Courage: emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal

Humanity: interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others

Justice: civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

Temperance: strengths that protect against excess

Transcendence: strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
VIA
The 24 Strengths

Wisdom and Knowledge: Creativity, Curiosity, Open-mindedness, Love of learning; Perspective

Courage: Bravery, Persistence, Integrity, Vitality

Humanity: Love, Kindness, Social intelligence

Justice: Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership

Temperance: Forgiveness and Mercy, Humility/Modesty, Prudence, Self-regulation

Transcendence: Appreciation for beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Spirituality
Creativity

- A creative person is someone who comes up with ideas that are (1) original and (2) useful.

- Creativity includes artistic achievement, but is not limited to it.

- People who are creative enjoy thinking of novel and productive ways to describe and do things.

- There is “BIG C” Creativity / “little c” creativity.
  
  - “little c” creativity refers to day-to-day creativity.
  
  - “Big C” creativity is reserved for those who accomplish once-in-lifetime, creative acts.

  - “Big C” creators understand that truly original and useful creativity requires hard work.

  - “Big C” creators are usually (eventually) completers.

- Sparks of ingenuity.
Curiosity

• Curious people have an ongoing, intrinsic interest in their inner experience and the world around them

• They are attracted to new things, people, and experiences

• They are rarely bored.

• Good listeners and conversationalists

• Able to focus their attention

• They ask questions from a new perspective

• Curious people are resilient learners and good problem solvers

• They often want to know, just for the sake of knowing

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Open-Mindedness

- Open-Minded people are inclined to examine things from all sides
- Critical thinkers
- They don’t typically stay stuck in one opinion or jump to conclusions
- Likely to change their mind in light of evidence
- Tend to pursue additional information and to weigh all the evidence fairly
- Can integrate previous knowledge and experience with new knowledge and experience
Love of Learning

• Love of Learning is indicated by the frequent mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge

• Learning on one's own or through a formal process of instruction

• Related to the strength of curiosity, but goes further to describe the tendency to systematically add to what one knows

• In touch with one’s best time, place, and way of learning

• Eager to share what is being learned with others
• A person with perspective is perceived as being wise

• Able to get inside someone else’s point of view

• Insightful beyond the facts

• Able to give sound guidance

• Can explain the reasons *why* in a way that makes sense to oneself and other people
Bravery

- Bravery is the strength of not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
- To speak up for what is right … even in the face of opposition
- Acting on convictions, even if unpopular
- Has a “come-what-may” attitude
- Includes physical bravery but is not limited to it
Persistence

- Persistent people are “finishers”
- They push through obstacles
- They are resilient and hopeful
- To be persistent is to persevere and to be industriousness
Integrity

• The person of integrity presents him/herself in a genuine way

• “What you see is what you get.”

• Honest and ethical

• People with integrity expect honest straight talk from others

• They are aware of their own inauthenticity and where their values don’t match their life
Zest

- Those who have zest approach life with excitement and energy
- A refusal to do things halfway or halfheartedly
- Vigorous
- To have the strength of zest is to live life as an adventure
- Zest is about feeling alive and activated
• Includes the capacity to love

• Also includes the capacity to receive love

• Values close relationships with others

• Especially appreciates when others are reciprocal in sharing and caring

• Comfortable expressing affection in words, deeds, and touch
Kindness

- Intentional in doing favors and good deeds for others
- Likes being helpful
- Appreciates being able to offer tangible care
- Generous
- Acts of compassion for those in need
- A pleasure to be around
- Nurturing

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Social Intelligence

• In touch with their own values, motivations, and limitations

• They are emotionally intelligent
  • They are aware of their own feelings and the feelings of others

• Discerning; Can “read” people accurately; they pick up on motives

• Adaptable in various social settings

• Able to make a connection with others
Citizenship

• Those activating the strengths of citizenship value “doing their part”
• They have a sense of social responsibility
• Faithful members of their team, group, or community
• Loyal
• Acknowledge the need for others: everyone has a contribution to make
• To function with fairness is to have a deep sense of, and commitment to, justice

• A commitment to treat all people equitably

• “Disinterested” >> Fairness is careful to not let personal feelings lead to biased decisions

• Everyone should have the same opportunities
Leadership

• The strength of leadership is seen in those who can
  - Encourage others to get things done
  - Maintain good relationships with those being led
• Inspirational, influential
• Can organize groups and activities
• Achieves results through others

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Forgiveness/Mercy

- Willing to forgive those who have done wrong
- Tolerant of others
- Grants “second chances”
- Gives grace when others come up short
- Not vengeful when wounded by others
- Avoids holding grudges

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• Not braggadocious
• Lets one's accomplishments speak for themselves
• Refuses to “one-up” others in relationship
• Does not regard oneself as more special than one is
• Avoids flaunting or seeking to be the center of attention
• The prudent person is thoughtful about their choices
• They avoid taking undue risks
• Careful to not say or do things that might later be regretted
• The ability to see things circumspectly
• Awareness of possible consequences
Self-Regulation

• When one is self-regulated, one is practicing self-control
• Self-regulation involves both feelings and actions
• Intentional in aligning choices with practices
• Able to discipline one’s natural inclinations for what is proper for the time and place
Appreciation for Beauty and Excellence

- Lives with a sense of awe
- Notices beauty wherever it may be found
- Appreciates excellence across the domains of life including the arts, math, science, etc.
- Has a sense of awareness when in nature
- Pursues wonder in everyday experience
• Willing to accept acts of kindness from others, though not presumptuous

• Conscious of one’s “blessings”

• Aware that others are often the source of good things

• Intentional at saying “Thank You”
Hope

- Optimistic about life’s realities
- Takes personal ownership of the good and sees it as perpetually possible
- Sees the bad as transient and short-term
- Enthusiastic about the future
- Eager to contribute to a better tomorrow
- Willing to make plans and set goals
Humor

• Those with the strengths of humor like to laugh, tease, joke but not in ways harmful to others

• Brings smiles to other people’s faces

• Are able to seeing the lighter side of difficult issues

• Can laugh at themselves; don’t take themselves too seriously

• Playful
Spirituality

- A sense of connection to a presence beyond this world
- Having a coherent set of beliefs that shape conduct and provide comfort
- Perceive their own higher purpose
- In pursuit of the deeper meanings of life
- Conscious of their own role in the larger scheme of things