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**Chapter 9**

**YOUR SIGNATURE STRENGTHS**

THIS chapter will allow you to identify your signature strengths. The chapters that follow are about building them and choosing to use them in the main realms of your life.

**TALENTS AND STRENGTHS**

Strengths, such as integrity, valor, originality, and kindness, are not the same thing as talents, such as perfect pitch, facial beauty, or lightning-fast sprinting speed. They are both topics of Positive Psychology and while they have many similarities, one clear difference is that strengths are moral traits, while talents are nonmoral. In addition, although the line is fuzzy, talents generally are not as buildable as strengths. True, you can improve your time in the hundred-meter dash by raising your rump higher in the starting position, you can wear makeup that makes you look prettier, or you can listen to a great deal of classical music and learn to guess the pitch correctly more often. I believe that these are only small improvements, though, augmenting a talent that already exists.

Valor, originality, fairness, and kindness, in contrast, can be built on even frail foundations, and I believe that with enough practice, persistence, good teaching, and dedication, they can take root and flourish. Talents are more innate. For the most part, you either have a talent or you don’t; if you are not born with perfect pitch or the lungs of a long-distance runner, there are, sadly, severe limits on how much of them you can acquire. What you acquire is a mere simulacrum of the talent. This is not true of love of learning or prudence or humility or optimism. When you acquire these strengths, it seems that you have the real thing.

Talents, in contrast to strengths, are relatively automatic (you just know that it is C sharp), whereas strengths are usually more voluntarily (telling the cashier that he undercharged you by fifty dollars takes an act of will). A talent involves some choices, but only those of whether to burnish it and where to deploy it; there is no choice about possessing it in the first place. For example, “Jill was such a smart person, but she wasted her intelligence” makes sense because Jill displayed a failure of will. She had no choice about having a high IQ, but she squandered it by making bad choices about whether to develop her mind and when and where to deploy her smarts. “Jill was such a kind person, but she wasted her kindness,” however, does not make much sense. You cannot squander a strength. A strength involves choices about when to use it and whether to keep building it, but also whether to acquire it in the first place. With enough time, effort, and determination, the strengths I discuss below can be acquired by almost any ordinary person. The talents, however, cannot be acquired merely by dint of will.

In fact, the same thing that happened to character also happened to will. Scientific psychology gave up both concepts around the same time and for very similar reasons. Yet the concepts of will and of personal responsibility are just as central to Positive Psychology as the concept of good character is.

Why do we feel so good about ourselves when we call the cashier’s attention to a fifty-dollar undercharge? We are not suddenly admiring some inborn trait of honesty, but instead we are proud that we did the right thing— that we chose a more difficult course of action than just silently pocketing the money. Had it been effortless, we would not have felt as good. In fact, if we have gone through an inner struggle (“ It’s just a huge supermarket chain . . . hmm, but he might get docked the fifty dollars at the end of the day”), we feel even better about ourselves. There is a difference between the emotion we feel when we watch Michael Jordan effortlessly slam dunk over an outclassed opponent versus when we watch him score thirty-eight points in spite of his having the flu and a 103-degree fever. Witnessing effortless virtuosity elicits thrill, adoration, admiration, and awe. But since there is no possibility of emulation, it does not elicit inspiration and elevation in the way that soaring over a formidable obstacle does.

In short, we feel elevated and inspired when the exercise of will culminates in virtuous action. Notice also that when it comes to virtue, no matter how much graduate work in social science we have had, we do not undercut the credit due by invoking the environmentalist argument of the nineteenth-century theologians. We do not say to ourselves, “I really don’t deserve credit for my honesty, because I was raised in a good home by good parents, fifty dollars does not mean the difference between my going hungry or not, and I have a secure job.” Deep down, we believe that it stems from good character plus the exercise of choice. Even if we are inclined to excuse the criminal because of the circumstances of his upbringing, we are not at all inclined to take away credit from Jordan because he had the best of mentors, is blessed with talent, or is wealthy and famous. Because of the paramount role of will in the display of virtue, we feel that praise and credit is deserved. Virtue, the modern mind believes, depends crucially on will and choice, whereas the underside of life stems more from external circumstances.

Interventions in Positive Psychology differ from those in psychology as usual for just this reason. Psychology as usual is about repairing damage and about moving from minus six up to minus two. Interventions that effectively make troubled people less so are usually heavy-handed, and the balance between the exercise of will and the push of external forces tilts toward the external. The actions of medications do not depend at all on will; “no discipline required” is one of the main justifications of drugs. The psychotherapies that work on disorders are often accurately described as “shaping” or “manipulations.” When the therapist is active and the patient is patient and passive, procedures such as putting a claustrophobic in a closet for three hours, reinforcing an autistic child for hugging by turning off shocks, and marshaling evidence against catastrophic thoughts for a depressive work moderately well. In contrast, therapies like psychoanalysis, in which the therapist is passive (speaking only rarely, and never acting) and the patient is active do not have a great track record of relieving mental disorders.

When we want to move from plus three to plus eight in our lives, though, the exercise of will is more important than rearranging external props. Building strengths and virtues and using them in daily life are very much a matter of making choices. Building strength and virtue is not about learning, training, or conditioning, but about discovery, creation, and ownership. My favorite positive “intervention” is merely to ask you to take the survey below, then think about which of these strengths are the ones you own and how you might use them every day. Quite astonishingly, your own ingenuity and your desire to lead the good life often take over from there, even if I step aside.

**THE TWENTY-FOUR STRENGTHS**

**In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I had met with in my reading, I found the catalog more or less numerous, as different writers included more or fewer ideas under the same name.**

**—Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography**

To be a virtuous person is to display, by acts of will, all or at least most of the six ubiquitous virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. There are several distinct routes to each of these six. For example, one can display the virtue of justice by acts of good citizenship, fairness, loyalty and teamwork, or humane leadership. I call these routes strengths, and unlike the abstract virtues, each of these strengths is measurable and acquirable. In what follows I discuss, briefly enough for you to recognize each, the strengths that are ubiquitous across cultures. From this discussion and the survey below, you can decide which of these twenty-four are most characteristic of you.

Here are some of the criteria by which we know that a characteristic is a strength: First, a strength is a trait, a psychological characteristic that can be seen across different situations and over time. A one-time display of kindness in one setting only does not display the underlying virtue of humanity.

Second, a strength is valued in its own right. Strengths often produce good consequences. Leadership well exercised, for example, usually produces prestige, promotions, and raises. Although strengths and virtues do produce such desirable outcomes, we value a strength for its own sake, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes. Remember that the gratifications are undertaken for their own sake, not because they may produce a squirt of felt positive emotion in addition. Indeed, Aristotle argued that actions undertaken for external reasons are not virtuous, precisely because they are coaxed or coerced.

Strengths also can be seen in what parents wish for their newborn (“ I want my child to be loving, to be brave, to be prudent”). Most parents would not say that they want their children to avoid psychopathology, just as they would not say that they want their child to have a job in middle management. A parent might wish that her child will marry a millionaire, but she would probably go on to explain why in terms of what marrying rich might enable. The strengths are states we desire that require no further justification.

The display of a strength by one person does not diminish other people in the vicinity. Indeed, onlookers are often elevated and inspired by observing virtuous action. Envy, but not jealousy, may fill the onlooker’s breast. Engaging in a strength usually produces authentic positive emotion in the doer: pride, satisfaction, joy, fulfillment, or harmony. For this reason, strengths and virtues are often enacted in win-win situations. We can all be winners when acting in accordance with strengths and virtues.

The culture supports strengths by providing institutions, rituals, role models, parables, maxims, and children’s stories. The institutions and rituals are trial runs that allow children and adolescents to practice and develop a valued characteristic in a safe (“ as if ”) context with explicit guidance. High school student councils are intended to foster citizenship and leadership; Little League teams strive to develop teamwork, duty, and loyalty; and catechism classes attempt to lay the foundation for faith. To be sure, institutions may backfire (think of win-at-all-cost youth hockey coaches, or beauty contests for six-year-olds), but these failures are readily apparent and widely decried.

Role models and paragons in the culture compellingly illustrate a strength or virtue. Models may be real (Mahatma Ghandi and humane leadership), apocryphal (George Washington and honesty), or explicitly mythic (Luke Skywalker and flow). Cal Ripken, and Lou Gehrig before him, is a paragon of perseverance. Helen Keller is a paragon of love of learning, Thomas Edison of creativity, Florence Nightingale of kindness, Mother Theresa of the capacity to love, Willie Stargell of leadership, Jackie Robinson of self-control, and Aung San of integrity.

Some of the strengths have prodigies, youngsters who display them early on and amazingly well. When I taught my most recent seminar on Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, I began by asking all of the students to introduce themselves— not with the trite “I’m a junior with a double major in finance and psychology,” but by telling us a story about themselves that showed a strength. (These introductions provide a warm and refreshing contrast to my abnormal psychology seminar, in which the students usually introduce themselves by regaling us with stories of their childhood traumas.) Sarah, a perky senior, told us that when she was about ten years old, she had noticed that her father was working very hard, and that a chilliness had descended between her parents. She was worried that they might divorce. Without telling her parents, she went to the local library and read books on marital therapy, which is remarkable enough, but what really made us marvel was the rest of her story. She turned dinner conversations with the family into deliberate interventions, encouraging her parents to solve problems jointly, to argue fairly, to express their likes and dislikes about one another in behavioral terms, and so on. She was, at the age of ten, a prodigy with respect to the character strength of social intelligence. (And yes, her parents are still married to one another.)

Conversely, there exist idiots (from the Greek, for not socialized) with respect to a strength, and the archives of the Darwin Awards (www.darwinawards.com) are a hall of fame of these individuals. In contrast to Rachel Carson (whose book Silent Spring immortalizes her as a paragon of prudence), this fellow is an idiot of prudence:

A Houston man earned a succinct lesson in gun safety when he played Russian roulette with a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol. Rashaad, nineteen, was visiting friends when he announced his intention to play the deadly game. He apparently did not realize that a semiautomatic pistol, unlike a revolver, automatically inserts a cartridge into the firing chamber when the gun is cocked. His chance of winning a round of Russian roulette was zero, as he quickly discovered.

Even though children grow up surrounded by a bevy of positive role models, a question of critical importance is when and why bad lessons are learned as opposed to good ones. What leads some kids to fix on Eminem, Donald Trump, or professional wrestlers as their role models?

Our final criterion for the strengths below is that they are ubiquitous, valued in almost every culture in the world. It is true that very rare exceptions can be found; the Ik, for example, do not appear to value kindness. Hence we call the strengths ubiquitous rather than universal, and it is important that examples of the anthropological veto (“ Well, the Ik don’t have it”) are rare and they are glaring. This means that quite a few of the strengths endorsed by contemporary Americans are not on our list: good looks, wealth, competitiveness, self-esteem, celebrity, uniqueness, and the like. These strengths are certainly worthy of study, but they are not my immediate priority. My motive for this criterion is that I want my formulation of the good life to apply just as well to Japanese and to Iranians as to Americans.

**What Are Your Highest Personal Strengths?**

Before I describe each of the twenty-four strengths, those of you with Internet access can go to my website (www.authentichappiness.org) and take the VIA Strengths Survey. This twenty-five minute exercise rank orders your strengths from top to bottom and compares your answers to thousands of other people. Immediately after taking it, you will get detailed feedback about your strengths. For those of you who do not use the Web, there is an alternate, but less definitive way to assess your strengths right in the pages of this chapter. My descriptions will be simple and brief, just enough to have you recognize the strength; if you want to read more, the endnotes refer you to the scientific literature. At the end of each description of the twenty-four strengths, there is a self-rating scale for you to fill out. It consists of two of the most discriminating questions from the complete survey on the website. Your answers will rank order your strengths approximately the same way as the website.

**Wisdom and Knowledge**

The first virtue cluster is wisdom. I have arranged the six routes to displaying wisdom and its necessary antecedent, knowledge, from the most developmentally basic (curiosity) up to the most mature (perspective).

**1. CURIOSITY/ INTEREST IN THE WORLD**

Curiosity about the world entails openness to experience and flexibility about matters that do not fit one’s preconceptions. Curious people do not simply tolerate ambiguity; they like it and are intrigued by it. Curiosity can either be specific (for example, only about roses) or global, a wide-eyed approach to everything. Curiosity is actively engaging novelty, and the passive absorption of information (as in the case of couch potatoes clicking their remotes) does not display this strength. The opposite end of the dimension of curiosity is being easily bored.

If you are not going to use the website to take the strengths survey, please answer the following two questions:

a) The statement “I am always curious about the world” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I am easily bored” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your curiosity score.

**2. LOVE OF LEARNING**

You love learning new things, whether you are in a class or on your own. You always loved school, reading, museums— anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn. Are there domains of knowledge in which you are the expert? Is your expertise valued by people in your social circle or by the larger world? Do you love learning about these domains, even in the absence of any external incentives to do so? For example, postal workers all have zip-code expertise, but this knowledge only reflects a strength if it has been acquired for its own sake.

a) The statement “I am thrilled when I learn something new” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I never go out of my way to visit museums or other educational sites” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your love of learning score.

**3. JUDGMENT/ CRITICAL THINKING/ OPEN-MINDEDNESS**

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.

By judgment, I mean the exercise of sifting information objectively and rationally, in the service of the good for self and others. Judgment in this sense is synonymous with critical thinking. It embodies reality orientation, and is the opposite of the logical errors that plague so many depressives, such as overpersonalization (“ It’s always my fault”) and black-or-white thinking. The opposite of this strength is thinking in ways that favor and confirm what you already believe. This is a significant part of the healthy trait of not confusing your own wants and needs with the facts of the world.

a) The statement “When the topic calls for it, I can be a highly rational thinker” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I tend to make snap judgments” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your judgment score.

**4. INGENUITY/ ORIGINALITY/ PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE/ STREET SMARTS**

When you are faced with something you want, are you outstanding at finding novel yet appropriate behavior to reach that goal? You are rarely content with doing something the conventional way. This strength category includes what people mean by creativity, but I do not limit it to traditional endeavors within the fine arts. This strength is also called practical intelligence, common sense, or street smarts.

a) “I like to think of new ways to do things” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “Most of my friends are more imaginative than I am” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here.\_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your ingenuity score.

**5. SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE/ PERSONAL INTELLIGENCE/ EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Social and personal intelligence are knowledge of self and others. You are aware of the motives and feelings of others, and you can respond well to them. Social intelligence is the ability to notice differences among others, especially with respect to their moods, temperament, motivations, and intentions— and then to act upon these distinctions. This strength is not to be confused with merely being introspective, psychologically minded, or ruminative; it shows up in socially skilled action.

Personal intelligence consists in finely tuned access to your own feelings and the ability to use that knowledge to understand and guide your behavior. Taken together, Daniel Goleman has labeled these strengths “emotional intelligence.” This set of strengths is likely fundamental to other strengths, such as kindness and leadership. Another aspect of this strength is niche finding: putting oneself in settings that maximize one’s skills and interests. Have you chosen your work, your intimate relations, and your leisure to put your best abilities into play every day, if possible? Do you get paid for doing what you are truly best at? The Gallup Organization found that the most satisfied workers readily affirmed the statement “Does your job allow you every day to do what you do best?” Consider Michael Jordan, the mediocre baseball player who “found himself” in basketball.

a) “No matter what the social situation, I am able to fit in” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I am not very good at sensing what other people are feeling” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your social intelligence score.

**6. PERSPECTIVE**

I use this label to describe the most mature strength in this category, the one closest to wisdom itself. Others seek you out to draw on your experience to help them solve problems and gain perspective for themselves. You have a way of looking at the world that makes sense to others and yourself. Wise people are the experts in what is most important, and knottiest, in life.

a) “I am always able to look at things and see the big picture” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “Others rarely come to me for advice” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your perspective score.

**Courage**

The strengths that make up courage reflect the open-eyed exercise of will toward the worthy ends that are not certain of attainment. To qualify as courage, such acts must be done in the face of strong adversity. This virtue is universally admired, and every culture has heroes who exemplify this virtue. I include valor, perseverance, and integrity as three ubiquitous routes to this virtue.

**7. VALOR AND BRAVERY**

You do not shrink from threat, challenge, pain, or difficulty. Valor is more than bravery under fire, when one’s physical well-being is threatened. It refers as well to intellectual or emotional stances that are unpopular, difficult, or dangerous. Over the years, investigators have distinguished between moral valor and physical valor or bravery; another way to slice the valor pie is based on the presence or absence of fear.

The brave person is able to uncouple the emotional and behavioral components of fear, resisting the behavioral response of flight and facing the fearful situation, despite the discomfort produced by subjective and physical reactions. Fearlessness, boldness, and rashness are not valor; facing danger, despite fear, is.

The notion of valor has broadened over history from battlefield courage, or physical courage. It now includes moral courage and psychological courage. Moral courage is taking stands that you know are unpopular and likely to bring you ill fortune. Rosa Parks taking a front seat on an Alabama bus in the 1950s is an American exemplar. Corporate or governmental whistle-blowing is another. Psychological courage includes the stoic and even cheerful stance needed to face serious ordeals and persistent illness without the loss of dignity.

a) “I have taken frequent stands in the face of strong opposition” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “Pain and disappointment often get the better of me” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your valor score.

**8. PERSEVERANCE/ INDUSTRY/ DILIGENCE**

You finish what you start. The industrious person takes on difficult projects and finishes them, “getting it out the door” with good cheer and minimal complaints. You do what you say will do and sometimes more, never less. At the same time, perseverance does not mean obsessive pursuit of unattainable goals. The truly industrious person is flexible, realistic, and not perfectionistic. Ambition has both positive and negative meanings, but its desirable aspects belong in this strength category.

a) “I always finish what I start” is

Very much like me 5
Like me 4
Neutral 3
Unlike me 2
Very much unlike me 1

b) “I get sidetracked when I work” is

Very much like me 1
Like me 2
Neutral 3
Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your perseverance score.

**9. INTEGRITY/ GENUINENESS/ HONESTY**

You are an honest person, not only by speaking the truth but by living your life in a genuine and authentic way. You are down to earth and without pretense; you are a “real” person. By integrity and genuineness, I mean more than just telling the truth to others. I mean representing yourself— your intentions and commitments— to others and to yourself in sincere fashion, whether by word or deed: “To thine own self, be true, and thou canst not then be false to any man.”

a) “I always keep my promises” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “My friends never tell me I’m down to earth” is

Very much like me 1
Like me 2
Neutral 3
Unlike me 4
Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your integrity score.

**Humanity and Love**

The strengths here are displayed in positive social interaction with other people: friends, acquaintances, family members, and also strangers.

**10. KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY**

You are kind and generous 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. How frequently do you take the interests of another human being at least as seriously as your own? All the traits in this category have at their core this acknowledgment of the worth of another person. The kindness category encompasses various ways of relating to another person that are guided by that other person’s best interests, and these may override your own immediate wishes and needs. Are there other people— family members, friends, fellow workers, or even strangers— for whom you assume responsibility? Empathy and sympathy are useful components of this strength. Shelly Taylor, in describing men’s usual response to adversity as fight and flight, defines the more usual feminine response as “tending and befriending.”

a) “I have voluntarily helped a neighbor in the last month” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3
Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I am rarely as excited about the good fortune of others as I am about my own” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your kindness score.

**11. LOVING AND ALLOWING ONESELF TO BE LOVED**

You value close and intimate relations with others. Do the people that you have deep and sustained feelings about feel the same way about you? If so, this strength is in evidence. This strength is more than the Western notion of romance (it is fascinating, in fact, that arranged marriages in traditional cultures do better than the romantic marriages of the West). And I also disavow a “more is better” approach to intimacy. None is a bad thing, but after one, a point of rapidly diminishing returns sets in.

It is more common, particularly among men, to be able to love than to let oneself be loved— at least in our culture. George Vaillant, the custodian of the six-decade study of the lives of men in the Harvard classes of 1939 to 1944, found a poignant illustration of this in his latest round of interviews. A retired physician ushered George into his study to show him a collection of grateful testimonial letters that his patients had sent him on the occasion of his retirement five years before. “You know, George,” he said with tears streaming down his cheeks, “I have not read them.” This man displayed a lifetime of loving others, but no capacity at all for receiving love.

a) “There are people in my life who care as much about my feelings and well-being as they do about their own” is

Very much like me 5
Like me 4
Neutral 3
Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I have trouble accepting love from others” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your loving and being loved score.

**Justice**

These strengths show up in civic activities. They go beyond your one-on-one relationships to how you relate to larger groups, such as your family, your community, the nation, and the world.

**12. CITIZENSHIP/ DUTY/ TEAMWORK/ LOYALTY**

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 the group. This cluster of strengths reflects how well these statements apply to you in group situations. Do you pull your own weight? Do you value the group goals and purposes, even when they differ from your own? Do you respect those who are rightfully in positions of authority, like teachers or coaches? Do you meld your identity with that of the group? This strength is not mindless and automatic obedience, but at the same time, I do want to include respect for authority, an unfashionable strength that many parents wish to see their children develop.

a) “I work at my best when I am in a group” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I hesitate to sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of groups I am in” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your citizenship score.

**13. FAIRNESS AND EQUITY**

You do not let your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people. You give everyone a chance. Are you guided in your day-to-day actions by larger principles of morality? Do you take the welfare of others, even those you do not know personally, as seriously as your own? Do you believe that similar cases should be treated similarly? Can you easily set aside personal prejudices?

a) “I treat all people equally regardless of who they might be” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “If I do not like someone, it is difficult for me to treat him or her fairly” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your fairness score.

**14. LEADERSHIP**

You do a good job organizing activities and seeing to it that they happen. The humane leader must first of all be an effective leader, attending to getting the group’s work done while maintaining good relations among group members. The effective leader is additionally humane when he or she handles intergroup relations “with malice toward none; charity toward all; with firmness in the right.” For example, a humane national leader forgives enemies and includes them in the same broad moral circle as his or her own followers. (Think of Nelson Mandela on the one hand, versus Slobodan Milosevic on the other.) He or she is free from the weight of history, acknowledges responsibility for mistakes, and is peaceable. All of the characteristics of humane leadership at the global level have ready counterparts among leaders of other sorts: military commanders, CEOs, union presidents, police chiefs, principals, den mothers, and even student council presidents.

a) “I can always get people to do things together without nagging them” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I am not very good at planning group activities” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your leadership score.

**Temperance**

As a core virtue, temperance refers to the appropriate and moderate expression of your appetites and wants. The temperate person does not suppress motives, but waits for opportunities to satisfy them so that harm is not done to self or others.

**15. SELF-CONTROL**

You can easily hold your desires, needs, and impulses in check when it is appropriate. It is not enough to know what is correct; you must also be able to put this knowledge into action. When something bad happens, can you regulate your emotions yourself? Can you repair and neutralize your negative feelings on your own? Can you make yourself feel cheerful even in a trying situation?

a) “I control my emotions” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I can rarely stay on a diet” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your self-control score.

**16. PRUDENCE/ DISCRETION/ CAUTION**

You are a careful person. You do not say or do things you might later regret. Prudence is waiting until all the votes are in before embarking on a course of action. Prudent individuals are far-sighted and deliberative. They are good at resisting impulses about short-term goals for the sake of longer-term success. Especially in a dangerous world, caution is a strength that parents wish their children to display (“ Just don’t get hurt”— on the playground, in an automobile, at a party, in a romance, or by a career choice).

a) “I avoid activities that are physically dangerous” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I sometimes make poor choices in friendships and relationships” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your prudence score.

**17. HUMILITY AND MODESTY**

You do not seek the spotlight, preferring to let your accomplishments speak for themselves. You do not regard yourself as special, and others recognize and value your modesty. You are unpretentious. Humble people see their personal aspirations, victories, and defeats as pretty unimportant. In the larger scheme of things, what you have accomplished or suffered does not amount to much. The modesty that follows from these beliefs is not just a display, but rather a window into your being.

a) “I change the subject when people pay me compliments” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I often talk about my accomplishments” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your humility score.

**Transcendence**

I use “transcendence” for the final cluster of strengths. This term is not popular throughout history—“ spirituality” is the label of choice— but I wanted to avoid confusion between one of the specific strengths, spirituality, with the nonreligious strengths in this cluster, like enthusiasm and gratitude. By transcendence, I mean emotional strengths that reach outside and beyond you to connect you to something larger and more permanent: to other people, to the future, to evolution, to the divine, or to the universe.

**18. APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCE**

You stop and smell the roses. You appreciate beauty, excellence, and skill in all domains: in nature and art, mathematics and science, and everyday things. When intense, it is accompanied by awe and wonder. Witnessing virtuosity in sports or acts of human moral beauty or virtue provokes the kindred emotion of elevation.

a) “In the last month, I have been thrilled by excellence in music, art, drama, film, sport, science, or mathematics” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I have not created anything of beauty in the last year” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your appreciation of beauty score.

**19. GRATITUDE**

You are aware of the good things that happen to you, and you never take them for granted. You always take the time to express your thanks. Gratitude is an appreciation of someone else’s excellence in moral character. As an emotion, it is a sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life itself. We are grateful when people do well by us, but we can also be more generally grateful for good acts and good people (“ How wonderful life is while you’re in the world”). Gratitude can also be directed toward impersonal and nonhuman sources— God, nature, animals— but it cannot be directed toward the self. When in doubt, remember that the word comes from the Latin, gratia, which means grace.

a) “I always say thank you, even for little things” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I rarely stop and count my blessings” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your gratitude score.

**20. HOPE/ OPTIMISM/ FUTURE-MINDEDNESS**

You expect the best in the future, and you plan and work in order to achieve it. Hope, optimism, and future-mindedness are a family of strengths that represent a positive stance toward the future. Expecting that good events will occur, feeling that these will ensue if you try hard, and planning for the future sustain good cheer in the here and now, and galvanize a goal-directed life.

a) “I always look on the bright side” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I rarely have a well-thought-out plan for what I want to do” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your optimism score.

**21. SPIRITUALITY/ SENSE OF PURPOSE/ FAITH/ RELIGIOUSNESS**

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. Do you have an articulate philosophy of life, religious or secular, that locates your being in the larger universe? Does life have meaning for you by virtue of attachment to something larger than you are?

a) “My life has a strong purpose” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I do not have a calling in life” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your spirituality score.

**22. FORGIVENESS AND MERCY**

You forgive those who have done you wrong. You always give people a second chance. Your guiding principle is mercy, not revenge. Forgiveness represents a set of beneficial changes that occur within an individual who has been offended or hurt by someone else. When people forgive, their basic motivations or action tendencies regarding the transgressor become more positive (benevolent, kind, or generous) and less negative (vengeful or avoidant).

a) “I always let bygones be bygones” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I always try to get even” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your forgiveness score.

**23. PLAYFULNESS AND HUMOR**

You like to laugh and bring smiles to other people. You can easily see the light side of life. Up to this point, our list of strengths has sounded seriously righteous: kindness, spirituality, valor, ingenuity, and so on. The last two strengths, however, are the most fun. Are you playful? Are you funny?

a) “I always mix work and play as much as possible” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I rarely say funny things” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your humor score.

**24. ZEST/ PASSION/ ENTHUSIASM**

You are a spirited person. Do you throw yourself, body and soul, into the activities you undertake? Do you wake up in the morning looking forward to the day? Is the passion that you bring to activities infectious? Do you feel inspired?

a) “I throw myself into everything I do” is

Very much like me 5

Like me 4

Neutral 3

Unlike me 2

Very much unlike me 1

b) “I mope a lot” is

Very much like me 1

Like me 2

Neutral 3

Unlike me 4

Very much unlike me 5

Total your score for these two items and write it here. \_\_\_\_\_\_

This is your zest score.

**SUMMARY**

At this point you will have gotten your scores (as well as their meaning and comparisons to others) from the website, or you will have scored each of your twenty-four strengths in the book yourself. If you are not using the website, write your score for each of the strengths below, then rank them from highest to lowest.

**WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE**

1. Curiosity \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. Love of learning \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Judgment \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. Ingenuity \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. Social intelligence \_\_\_\_\_\_

6. Perspective \_\_\_\_\_\_

**COURAGE**

7. Valor \_\_\_\_\_\_

8. Perseverance \_\_\_\_\_\_

9. Integrity \_\_\_\_\_\_

**HUMANITY AND LOVE**

10. Kindness \_\_\_\_\_\_

11. Loving \_\_\_\_\_\_

**JUSTICE**

12. Citizenship \_\_\_\_\_\_

13. Fairness \_\_\_\_\_\_

14. Leadership \_\_\_\_\_\_

**TEMPERANCE**

15. Self-control \_\_\_\_\_\_

16. Prudence \_\_\_\_\_\_

17. Humility \_\_\_\_\_\_

**TRANSCENDENCE**

18. Appreciation of beauty \_\_\_\_\_\_

19. Gratitude \_\_\_\_\_\_

20. Hope \_\_\_\_\_\_

21. Spirituality \_\_\_\_\_\_

22. Forgiveness \_\_\_\_\_\_

23. Humor \_\_\_\_\_\_

24. Zest \_\_\_\_\_\_

Typically you will have five or fewer scores of 9 or 10, and these are your highest strengths, at least as you reported them. Circle them. You will also have several low scores in the 4 (or lower) to 6 range, and these are your weaknesses. In the final part of the book, as I discuss work, love, and parenting, I suggest that using your strengths every day in these settings is the crucial element of living the “good life.” The Nikki story tells you that I believe in building the good life around polishing and deploying your strengths, then using them to buffer against your weaknesses and the trials that weaknesses bring.

**SIGNATURE STRENGTHS**

Look at the list of your top five strengths. Most of these will feel authentic to you, but one or two of them may not be the real you. My strengths on this test were love of learning, perseverance, leadership, originality, and spirituality. Four of these feel like the real me, but leadership is not one. I can lead quite adequately if I am forced to, but it isn’t a strength that I own. When I use it, I feel drained, I count the hours until it is done, and I am delighted when the task is over and I’m back with my family.

I believe that each person possesses several signature strengths. These are strengths of character that a person self-consciously owns, celebrates, and (if he or she can arrange life successfully) exercises every day in work, love, play, and parenting. Take your list of top strengths, and for each one ask if any of these criteria apply:

• A sense of ownership and authenticity (“ This is the real me”)

• A feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first

• A rapid learning curve as the strength is first practiced

• Continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength

• A sense of yearning to find ways to use it

• A feeling of inevitability in using the strength (“ Try and stop me”)

• Invigoration rather than exhaustion while using the strength

• The creation and pursuit of personal projects that revolve around it

• Joy, zest, enthusiasm, even ecstasy while using it

If one or more of these apply to your top strengths, they are signature strengths. Use them as frequently as you can and in as many settings. If none of the signature criteria apply to one or two of your strengths, they may not be the aptitudes you want to deploy in work, love, play, and parenting. Herein is my formulation of the good life: Using your signature strengths every day in the main realms of your life to bring abundant gratification and authentic happiness. How to use these strengths in work, love, parenting, and in having a meaningful life is the subject of the final part of the book.