

Talents come naturally, but strengths are earned.

The strengths development concept rests in these key terms:

A **strength** is the ability to consistently produce a positive outcome through near-perfect performance in a specific task. The ability to consistently recommend the perfect products and services for a customer's needs is a good example of a strength. So is the ability to always meet your family's grocery needs on a tight budget.

A strength is composed of

- **skills**, which are your basic abilities to perform the fundamental steps of a task, such as your basic ability to move through the fundamental steps of operating a computer. Skills do not naturally exist within us; they must be acquired through formal or informal training and practice.
- **knowledge**, which is simply what you know, such as your awareness of historical dates and your grasp of the rules of a game. Knowledge does not naturally exist within us; it must be acquired through formal or informal education.
- **talents**, which are the ways in which you naturally think, feel, and behave, such as the inner drive to compete, sensitivity to the needs of others, and the tendency to be outgoing at social gatherings. Although talents must come into existence naturally and cannot be acquired like skills and knowledge, we each have unique talents within us.

Because your most powerful talents represent the best of your natural self, they are your best opportunities to perform at levels of excellence through strength.

Your **dominant talents** naturally appear frequently and powerfully. Almost no matter where you are or what you are doing, your dominant talents are active.

Your **supporting talents** naturally surface only when their support is needed, and do so with only relative power. Because they aren't as powerful, your supporting talents are unlikely to serve as a foundation for strength.

Your **lesser talents** naturally appear rarely, and they offer little power. Because of that minimal power, lesser talents seldom contribute to strength.

To build strengths, you must first discover your greatest talents.

To do so, consider your top five talent themes, as indicated by your responses to the Clifton StrengthsFinder. Your top five themes and their descriptions can help you begin to understand and, as a result, claim the themes that best represent your talents. Which of them best describe your greatest talents — the ways in which you most consistently and productively think, feel, and behave?

Your top five themes are a useful resource as you seek to understand your talents. They are based upon your spontaneous, top-of-mind reactions to the paired descriptors presented by the Clifton StrengthsFinder, and your spontaneous reactions to situations you encounter are the best indicators of your talents. However, be sure to also consider *yearnings*, *rapid learning*, *satisfaction*, *timelessness*, and *glimpses of excellence*.

Yearnings can reveal the presence of a talent, particularly when they are felt early in life. A yearning can be described as an internal force, an almost magnetic attraction, that leads you to a particular activity or environment time and again.

Rapid learning reveals other traces of talent. In the context of a new challenge or a new environment, something sparks your talents. Immediately your brain seems to light up as if a whole bank of switches were suddenly flicked to “on” — and the speed at which you anticipate the steps of a new activity, acquire a new skill, or gain new knowledge provides a telltale clue to the talent’s presence and power.

Satisfaction is psychological fulfillment that results when you take on and successfully meet challenges that engage your greatest talents. Pay close attention to the situations that seem to bring you these energizing experiences. If you can identify them, you will be well on your way to pinpointing some of your dominant talents.

Timelessness also can serve as a clue to talent. If you have ever become so engrossed in an activity that you lost all track of time, it may have been because the activity engaged you at a deep, natural level — the level of great talent.

Glimpses of excellence are flashes of outstanding performance that have been observed by you or others. In these moments, the task at hand has tapped some of your greatest talents and directly displayed your potential for strength.

Your greatest talents are the foundation of strengths development.

Using your Clifton StrengthsFinder report and all the clues to talent you can gather, identify your most powerful talents. Hone them with skill and knowledge to build strengths, and you will be well on your way to living the strong life.