

# **Volunteer Leader Training Guide**

## **Discovering Your Signature Strengths**

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### **Objective**

One of the keys to our success and happiness is knowing and using our strengths. This unit is intended to help participants identify their greatest or signature strengths.

### **Target Audience**

- EHC leaders and members
- Family and friends of EHC members
- Those who have an interest in developing their strengths

### **Advanced Preparation**

- Make copies of **Handout 1, “Your Signature Strengths,”** for each person you expect to attend.
- Study the lesson, including completing “Your Signature Strengths,” yourself so you are familiar with the process.
- If you have access to the Internet, you might go to [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) and complete the entire VIA Signature Strengths Survey. This will probably take you at least an hour. If you are not familiar with the Internet, you should get someone to help you with this.

### **Opening**

If someone were to sit you down and tell you all the things that are wrong with you, would that motivate you to grow and improve? Or would it make you tired and discouraged?

*[Most of us would probably get discouraged.]*

When any one of us spends a lot of time thinking about our faults, what happens to us?

*[We tend to get discouraged or depressed.]*

When someone can accurately describe one of your greatest strengths to you, how do you feel?

*[Most of us probably feel hopeful, encouraged and energized.]*

When we clearly know our own strengths, how do we feel?

*[Confident.]*

In spite of the fact that it helps us live better when we know our strengths, many of us dwell on our weaknesses. We may think about them and worry about them a lot. Does anyone here do that?

*[Probably most of us do.]*

There is another problem many of us face. Sometimes we know our strengths, but we minimize them. We act as if our particular strengths aren't very important. Or maybe we believe that everyone has those strengths. Does anyone face that problem?

*[Probably most of us do. You might share a story to illustrate.]*

Many of us are very good at underappreciating our strengths. Psychologists say that most of us will never overcome all our weaknesses. But our happiness and productivity depend more on knowing and using our strengths than on overcoming our weaknesses. Does this make sense to you?

*[Discuss this idea.]*

Some sensible psychologists encourage people to use their strengths and manage their weaknesses. It is easier to do this when we know what our strengths are.

## **Knowing Our Strengths**

Knowing, valuing and using our strengths can make our lives happier and more productive. Today we will review a list of 24 strengths that some psychologists believe have been valued from the beginning of recorded history by all societies. I'd like to provide each of you a copy of "Your Signature Strengths."

*[Provide a copy of "Your Signature Strengths" to each person.]*

Each of the 24 strengths is listed along with a statement in quotes. If the statement is not at all like you, put a mark in the first column after the statement. If the statement is a tiny bit like you, put a mark in the second column. If the statement is a little bit like you, put a mark in the third column. If the statement is quite a bit like you, put a mark in the fourth column. If the statement describes you exactly, put a mark in the fifth or last column.

When you have finished putting one mark in each row for all 24 strengths, notice which strengths are most like you. These are your signature strengths. If you finish before others, maybe you can notice your greatest strengths and try to think of ways you have used those strengths in your life.

*[Give participants time to complete “Your Signature Strengths.” You may want to walk among the group and help any who do not understand the instructions. When all the participants have completed “Your Signature Strengths,” you might ask a few of them to share their greatest strengths with the group. If you have the time, you might invite a few people to share stories from their lives that illustrate how they have used their signature strengths.]*

Some of you may have had a hard time focusing on your strengths. You may have wanted to study your weaknesses. I want to remind you that the greatest happiness and success come from knowing and using your strengths.

I hope each of us will try to remember what our strengths are and to use them regularly in our lives. We can also use these ideas about strengths to help other people in our lives. We may want to notice and comment on the strengths we see in our children and grandchildren or neighbors and friends. In fact, you may want to have some of the people you care about complete “Your Signature Strengths” for themselves. Or, in the case of children, if they are too young to complete the form, you and others who love them might complete the form for them. How do you think it affects relationships when you look for strengths in other people?

*[It makes them glad to be with us and more likely to be happy and productive!]*

## **Conclusion**

I hope we’ll all work to know our strengths – and the strengths of those around us.

## **Helpful Resources**

For more information about signature strengths, see Martin Seligman’s *Authentic Happiness* (2002, Free Press).