

THE BIG IDEAS

Trends in Psychology

It's positive!

Core Virtues

6 shared virtues.

Signature Strengths

What are yours?

The Good Life

Give yourself to the world.

Calling Description

Live yours.

Authentic Happiness

Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment

BY MARTIN SELIGMAN · FREE PRESS © 2002 · 336 PAGES

“The good life consists in deriving happiness by using your signature strengths every day in the main realms of living. The meaningful life adds one more component: using these same strengths to forward knowledge, power, or goodness. A life that does this is pregnant with meaning, and if God comes at the end, such a life is sacred.”

~ Martin Seligman from *Authentic Happiness*

As the former President of the American Psychological Association and Founder of the revolutionary “Positive Psychology” movement, Martin Seligman and his colleagues are literally creating a science of happiness. It’s amazing stuff.

I’m a huge fan of his work and actually studied with “Marty” and 300 other professionals (from academic researchers to therapists, coaches, and philosophers) as part of his “Vanguard Authentic Happiness Coaching” class in 2003. We were the first lucky group like that to get his tutelage in the science of happiness and it was a lot of fun to dive a little deeper into his work.

Before we get going with this Note, I want to *strongly* recommend you go online and bookmark AuthenticHappiness.com the next chance you get. I think you’ll dig playing around with all the amazing self-assessment tests they offer for free. My recommendation: Start with the “signature strengths” test and have fun getting to know yourself better with scientifically valid tests on everything from gratitude and meaning to optimism and “grit.” Fun.

For now, let’s kick this note off with a little background on the trends in psychology and why Dr. Seligman’s work has been and continues to be so important. Then we’re gonna dedicate the rest of our time exploring your signature strengths and playing with ways to help you rock ‘em more consistently in greatest service to the world!

“At last, psychology gets serious about glee, fun, and happiness. Martin Seligman has given us a gift—a practical map for the perennial quest for a flourishing life.” ~ Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* commenting on *Authentic Happiness*

TRENDS IN PSYCHOLOGY

“Happiness and well-being are the desired outcomes of Positive Psychology.”

In the 20th century, psychological research was primarily focused on mental illness.

In fact, for every one hundred articles published on mental illness, there was only one published on mental health. We now have a much better understanding of depression, schizophrenia, and other “negative elements” of human behavior; unfortunately, we made much less progress toward scientifically understanding the elements of health and optimal living.

Although many psychologists have explored positive elements of human behavior, it was Martin Seligman who, as the President of the American Psychological Association in 2000, launched an aggressive initiative to scientifically understand happiness and other positive emotions. He and

“Positive Psychology points the way toward a secular approach to noble purpose and transcendent meaning—and, even more astonishingly, toward a God who is not supernatural.”

~ Martin Seligman

" My most basic concern, however, is measuring happiness's constituents—the positive emotions and strengths—and then telling you what science has discovered about how you can increase them."

~ Martin Seligman

his colleagues labeled this new branch of research "Positive Psychology."

Basically, they figured that although we were pretty good at taking someone from -9 to -3 to 0 through pharmacology and psychotherapy, it was time to focus on understanding how to guide someone from 0 to +3 to +9.

It's pretty exciting to look at the scientific research that is being conducted on subjects such as the value of self-awareness, goal directed behavior, altruism, gratitude and other aspects of optimal living.

CORE VIRTUES

"...there is astonishing convergence across the millennia and across cultures about virtue and strength. Confucius, Aristotle, Aquinas, the Bushido samurai code, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and other venerable traditions disagree on the details, but all of these codes include six core virtues:

- Wisdom and knowledge
- Courage
- Love and humanity
- Justice
- Temperance
- Spirituality and transcendence

... convergence across thousands of years and among unrelated philosophical traditions is remarkable and Positive Psychology takes this cross-cultural agreement as its guide."

Starting with those 6 core virtues, Seligman and his Positive Psychology researchers have categorized a set of 24 character strengths.

We each have aspects of these strengths in our personality. The science is showing that, as we get to know which of these strengths constitute our "signature strengths" and use them regularly in our every day lives, our happiness and well-being go up!

SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

"I do not believe that you should devote overly much effort to correcting your weaknesses. Rather, I believe that the highest success in living and the deepest emotional satisfaction comes from building and using your signature strengths."

That's a major theme of the book: Focus on your strengths.

Another one of my favorite books on the subject of the science of happiness is by a brilliant researcher named Robert Sternberg. In his book, *Successful Intelligence*, he introduced me to this idea that we shouldn't spend too much time on our weaknesses. His research showed that the most successful among us weren't those with the highest IQs or SAT's or GPA's. Rather, the most successful are those who know who they are and what they're good at and they rock those strengths—spending just enough time to make sure their weaknesses didn't kick their butts and the rest of the time developing their strengths.

Powerful stuff.

Seligman and his wealth of research points to the idea that we need to figure out what our strengths are and use them often.

"The well-being that using your signature strengths engenders is anchored in authenticity."
~ Martin Seligman

In this Note, I'm going to focus our energy on helping you get more clear about what they are and how you can integrate them into your life on a more consistent basis!

Before you cruise over to the web site to take the "Signature Strengths" test at AuthenticHappiness.com, let's take a first pass at self-identifying your greatest strengths, shall we?!?

My greatest strengths are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

THE GOOD LIFE

"What is the good life?' In my view, you can find it by following a startlingly simple path. The 'pleasant life' might be had by drinking champagne and driving a Porsche, but not the good life. Rather, the good life is using your signature strengths every day to produce authentic happiness and abundant gratification."

Alright. I think it's time to take the official Signature Strengths test. :)

Find some time where you have 30-40 minutes of quiet, uninterrupted time to go online and take the test (again: AuthenticHappiness.com).

Go ahead. We'll wait for you. :)

...

So, what'd your results say?!?

My *Signature Strengths* are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

For those curious souls (and to set the stage for the rest of this Note), mine are:

1. *Creativity*: I enjoy finding creative solutions to problems.
2. *Hope and Optimism*: I believe I can create incredible things in my life and I also believe that anyone else can do the same.
3. *Courage*: I thrive pushing my edges.
4. *Kindness and Generosity*: I get a lot out of helping people.
5. *Energy & Enthusiasm*: I have a lot of it! (If you haven't noticed. :)
6. *Wisdom*: I love understanding life and people look to me for perspective.

(I've taken the test twice and these are the ones that showed up!)

Now, that we know what our signature strengths are, it's time to make sure we use them often in our every day lives, eh?!?

"You could say that I worked every minute of my life, or you could say with equal justice that I never worked a day. I have always subscribed to the expression 'Thank God it's Friday,' because to me Friday means I can work for the next two days without interruption."

~ John Hope Franklin

CALLING DESCRIPTIONS

"If you can find a way to use your signature strengths at work often, and also see your work as contributing to the greater good, you have a calling."

Seligman talks about the "three kinds of 'work orientation': a job, a career, and a calling."

As he points out, you go to a job strictly for the paycheck. Punch the clock, get paid. Done.

You have a career to enjoy the benefits of advancement and mastery of a given domain.

A calling (or vocation), on the other hand, "is a passionate commitment to work for its own sake."

So, here's what's cool: "any job can become a calling, and any calling can become a job. "A physician who views the work as a Job and is simply interested in making a good income does not have a Calling, while a garbage collector who sees the work as making the world a cleaner, healthier place could have a Calling."

How about you?

How do YOU view your work?

If you're currently rockin' your Calling, AWESOME.

If your work feels more like a Job or a Career than a Calling, no worries.

Let's see what we can do to move in the direction of a Calling!

How?

Well, let's start with your strengths.

Have you done the test yet? If not, get on it!

If so, let's look at your Top 5 signature strengths.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Yes, I realize you just wrote them down, but let's write 'em down again. I think it's super important to get **really** clear on what our strengths are so we can more consciously create a life in which we're using them in greatest service to the world.

In fact, I used to write down my strengths EVERY DAY on the top of my daily planning guide as I explored ways I could use them more often and I attribute that practice as one of the keys to my deepening self-awareness.

Alright. We've got your strengths.

Now what? Now, let's write your *Calling* description.

Let's start with mine as a sample:

As the Chief Philosopher of PhilosophersNotes, I am committed (and giddy!) to use my signature strengths in the greatest service to the world:

1. I use my *Creativity* every day in my writing and as I create my business—having fun coming up with new ways to share wisdom and innovative ways to build my business embodying the ideals of love, fun and conscious capitalism that I believe in.

2. I use my *Hope & Optimism* every day as I set my intention before writing—committing to sharing my enthusiasm for life and ideas about how we can create our greatest lives. And, I use my *Hope & Optimism* as I face the inevitable challenges of life and creativity.
3. I use my *Courage* every day as I take the financial risk to capitalize my business and put myself out there as a writer and teacher. I smile (and sometimes groan :) in the face of challenges and doubts and celebrate the opportunities I have to put these ideas into practice in my own life!
4. I use my *Kindness & Generosity* every day as I pay my team generously and give my best to my work and relationships—seeing the divine harmony as I circulate as much love and kindness and wisdom and abundance as I can!
5. I use my *Energy & Enthusiasm* every day as I put exclamation point and happy face after exclamation point and happy face in my writing and in every conversation I have with subscribers and partners and friends. :)
6. I use my *Wisdom* every day as I distill the essence of these amazing books into fun, easily digested and readily applied nuggets of wisdom. AND as I strive to embody these ideals with more and more integrity moment to moment to moment.

Well, there ya go. A quick look at one way I've framed my work as a Calling.

Your turn!

What are *your* strengths?!?

How are you using them *every day*?

How are you giving them to something bigger than yourself?!?

I'm repeating myself deliberately.

We need to become *conscious* of how this all comes together as we create a truly "Good Life":

"The good life consists in deriving happiness by using your signature strengths every day in the main realms of living. The meaningful life adds one more component: using these same strengths to forward knowledge, power, or goodness."

So, what are your strengths?!?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How are you using them every day?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

And, most importantly, how are you giving them to something bigger than yourself?!?

Let's live these questions and use our greatest strengths in greatest service to the world, my friend.

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

“From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that we are here for the sake of each other - above all for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received.” ~ Albert Einstein

P.S. This was one of the first Notes I wrote and, therefore, I didn't reference many of the other Positive Psychology books I've since studied and written Notes on. I HIGHLY recommend you check out the other Notes I reference on the bottom left there to get your comprehensive Positive Psych on! :)

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[Learned Optimism](#)

[Happier](#)

[The How of Happiness](#)

[The Pursuit of Perfect](#)

[Motivation and Personality](#)

[Man's Search for Meaning](#)

About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.