Becoming Strengths-Based in Career & Counseling Services

University of Houston-Clear Lake
Dr. Cindy Cook, Associate Director, Counseling Services
Chuck Crocker, Associate Director, Career Services
Initial Idea

- The current Career Exploration Workshop did not explore one’s strengths/talents
- Many students found it difficult to identify and communicate strengths to employers.
- Many students seemed to lack positive self-esteem
Strengths Principles

Major findings from studying the Best of the Best - 2 Million people, from all walks of life

“What would happen if we studied what is right with people?” Dr. Don Clifton

- They are all alike in one respect: They build their lives around their strengths.
- They focus on developing and applying their strengths and managing their weaknesses.
- High achievers don’t necessarily have more strengths, but they do more fully develop and apply the strengths that they have.
Strengths Principles (CONTINUED)

- Strengths develop best when one can reflect on past success patterns and receive feedback from a trusted friend, supervisor, mentor.

- Most people are not aware of their strengths and talents because they are so “natural” to them.

- Strengths can have “blind spots” As a result, strengths and talents may be seen as weaknesses.
Positive relationships are formed when strengths are discussed.

Developing strengths has a motivating effect on a person and seems to generate hope and optimism about the future.
StrengthsFinder Test

- 177 Items
- Gives responder 20 seconds for each item
- Measures 34 Strengths
- Results are the top 5 strengths, with explanations of the strengths
How We Applied Strengths in Our Services

- Career Exploration Workshops
- Training of Practicum students and interns
- Personal Counseling
- Interview Coaching
  - In classroom demonstrations/presentations
  - With individual students
- Leadership Development
  - Service Learning program
  - Leaders in Action Program
- Team Building
  - CCS Staff, UHCL departments
Outcomes

CEW Evaluations

The result of the assessment learning objective “I have identified my strengths and abilities” (1-5 scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011 Feb</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes - Interview Coaching Classroom Sessions

I was skeptical at first as well about the Strengths finder but I found my results to fit me perfectly. I will definitely use them when applying to jobs and interviewing in the future. It gave me other ways to explain my strengths instead of just saying "I'm organized" or something more cliche.

I did not want to pay the fee for the Strengths Finder test because I thought I already knew my strengths and it would be a waste of money, but after we received the results of the test, I realized that there were strengths I had that I did not know about or how to define. Now I can more clearly explain how I can fit into certain positions I might be interested in for employment. The fee turned out to be worth it!

I really enjoyed the strength finder, and I think it helped me rediscover strengths that I used to use and recognize. However, I lost confidence in some of these strengths and my ability, so it was very helpful to visually list my strengths for me to reconnect with. It also pointed out a couple of strengths that I would have never seen. It made me reflect back upon different experiences in my past where I might have used these unknown strengths. Overall I think it was a great confidence booster as well as very motivational by showing us these core strengths and encouraging us to put them into action. Loved it!

I thoroughly enjoyed the strengths finder workshop with Chuck because it helped me break down my basic and cliche strength of being a "people person" into several specific skills to present to others that help me explain that. I have used my WOO (winning others over) strength as a conversation starter in several academic settings including the Presidential Cabinet dinner. The workshop and Chuck's feedback also gave me the confidence to reach out and network using my strengths. Thanks to Chuck, I am now one of the "faces of UHCL" representing our university (and I'm on the web site)! Thanks so much!
provided a systematic way of describing myself to potential employers in concept words.
I really like it. From those "strengths" you can create your top 5 in your own words to use in interviews.
The StrengthQuest was effective in allowing me to identify strengths that I had never considered.
The Strengthsfinder was beneficial to me updating my resume so that I could include key descriptive words that will help me stand out against other applicants.
The survey helped me realize what my strengths are and how to build on them. It revealed things I didn't know about myself.
The Strengthsfinder helped me put my strengths into words.
This helps you understand how you can use your strengths when interviewing and how to improve on them.
A great tool that helped me discover my strengths - also using my strengths to build my career as well as working on my weaknesses.
The Strengthsfinder was beneficial to me because I was able to hear strengths (new strengths) and define them. Once defining them I was able to know my weaknesses.
It helped me revamp my resume and give me a better understanding of where to direct my career search. It was a great learning opportunity - essential.
Outcomes

Service Learning Program

- How to help my strengths and helpful suggestions to make them better.
- The way to apply individual strengths. I will apply this to help me choose the right career and to help me follow the correct career path for me.
- I learned how to combine my leadership strengths and focus on them to become a better person both at work and at school. I really was able to see the inter-relatedness of my strengths and how to use them to my advantage as well as gained insight about how to interact with others that have different strengths than me.
- Appreciation of each other’s strengths and how to incorporate them in their everyday.
- I learned to appreciate people for their strengths though they may be different from mine as a leader it will help me to be me and use my strengths to achieve goals.
- To prepare myself and knowledge on how to manage situations.
- I’m a strong, confident person and should not doubt my abilities!
- My major strengths – I’m really the only person that truly knows who I am and my best strengths. My strengths should make me feel strong and good.
Service Learning Program

- Look at different perspectives of each person’s strengths
- It has made me realize that different people have different strengths, in their personalities as well as in their leadership styles.
- It made me feel good about my individual strengths and how to accept my lesser talents.
- By encouraging me to use my strengths and appreciate what I have to offer.
- To prepare for challenges or changes.
- You have to know your peer’s/coworker’s strengths and honor it.
- I can overlook my weaknesses and focus on my strengths.
- Helps me when working with others – communicating what I would like, but also what others would like.
- I believe I will be able to communicate better with my peers at work as well as with coworkers by assessing their strengths and taking them into account.
- Always putting a positive spin on things and to enjoy my true self
- If I am in an interview I will know how to verbally communicate my strengths effectively.
- To reflect on other’s comments on what needs to be improved.
- I learned that I can achieve my goals but I have to focus on the goal and stay strong with that goal.
Service Learning Program

- To find out how best to recognize my strengths.
- Develop my strengths more!
- It has motivated me to assess other people’s strengths to better interact with them; it has motivated me to work on and focus on my strengths so as to excel at them and also to identify my weaknesses and work to manage them.
- To set my goals, stay focused and keep up my positivism in my approach to life.
- By continuing to set goals and go for it, using all my strengths in order to feel fulfilling about my career and life.
- Plan, strategize and prepare for objectives that may or may not go according to plan. Adapt to change. Once objectives are completed, prepare for new goals.
- Don’t doubt myself!
- By focusing on my strengths, I can learn to deal with my weaknesses and use them to my advantage.
Lessons Learned – What worked best

- Using a group format seems to create more learning
- Use of interactive exercises enables students to identify and appreciate their strengths
- The challenge is how to intentionally build or develop one’s strengths over time.
Additional possible applications

- First Year Experience
- Senior capstone courses
- Expanded use in individual counseling
- Couples counseling