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**strengthsfinder** 2.0

Strengths Discovery and Action-Planning Guide



**What makes *you* stand out?**

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## MIKE JOHANSSON

### Your Top 5 Themes

**Ideation**

**Learner**

**Context**

**Achiever**

**Includer**

### What's in This Guide?

- For each of your top five themes, you will find:
  - A brief Shared Theme Description
  - Your Personalized Strengths Insights, which describe what makes you stand out from others with the same theme in their top five
  - Some examples of what the theme "sounds like" — real quotes from people who also have the theme in their top five
  - 10 Ideas for Action
- A Strengths Discovery Activity to get you thinking about how your talents and your investment work together to build strengths that you can apply to your work and personal life
- A Strengths-Based Action Plan for review with a friend, manager, or colleague

## IDEATION

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

It's very likely that you often experience satisfaction with your life when someone asks you to scrutinize, assess, examine, or evaluate things such as people, processes, plans, or mechanisms. By nature, you usually find novel and fresh ways to do things. People turn to you when they find themselves struggling to generate ideas. Because of your strengths, you naturally separate into parts the programs, mechanisms, or techniques you use. Then you map the steps needed to complete the task. You can also pinpoint how each part fits or fails to fit perfectly with the one preceding it and the one following it. Having completed your investigation, you probably expect everyone to faithfully abide by the established guidelines, rules, policies, or procedures. You refrain from making exceptions for individuals. Driven by your talents, you automatically think of new and different ways to do things. Your mind is brimming with ideas. You probably are eager to share them with whoever will listen. Instinctively, you regard yourself as logical and reasonable. You spontaneously reduce mechanisms, processes, proposals, ideas, or formulas to their basic parts. You figure out how the pieces interrelate. Your discoveries tell you why something does or does not function the way it should.

### Ideation sounds like this:

Mark B., writer: "My mind works by finding connections between things. When I was hunting down the Mona Lisa in the Louvre museum, I turned a corner and was blinded by the flashing of a thousand cameras snapping the tiny picture. For some reason, I stored that visual image away. Then I noticed a 'No Flash Photography' sign, and I stored that away too. I thought it was odd because I remembered reading that flash photography can harm paintings. Then about six months later, I read that the Mona Lisa has been stolen at least twice in this century. And suddenly I put it all together. The only explanation for all these facts is that the real Mona Lisa is not on display in the Louvre. The real Mona Lisa has been stolen, and the museum, afraid to admit their carelessness, has installed a fake. I don't know if it's true, of course, but what a great story."

Andrea H., interior designer: "I have the kind of mind where everything has to fit together or I start to feel very odd. For me, every piece of furniture represents an idea. It serves a discrete function both independently and in concert with every other piece. The 'idea' of each piece is so powerful in my mind, it must be obeyed. If I am sitting in a room where the chairs are somehow not fulfilling their discrete function -- they're the wrong kind of chairs or they're facing the wrong way or they're pushed up too close to the coffee table -- I find myself getting physically uncomfortable and mentally distracted. Later, I won't be able to get it out of my mind. I'll find myself awake at 3:00 a.m., and I walk through the person's house in my mind's eye, rearranging the furniture and repainting the walls. This started happening when I was very young, say seven years old."

### Ideas for Action:

- Seek a career in which you will be given credit for and paid for your ideas, such as marketing, advertising, journalism, design, or new product development.
- You are likely to get bored quickly, so make some small changes in your work or home life. Experiment. Play mental games with yourself. All of these will help keep you stimulated.

- Finish your thoughts and ideas before communicating them. Lacking your Ideation talents, others might not be able to "join the dots" of an interesting but incomplete idea and thus might dismiss it.
- Not all your ideas will be equally practical or serviceable. Learn to edit your ideas, or find a trusted friend or colleague who can "proof" your ideas and identify potential pitfalls.
- Understand the fuel for your Ideation talents: When do you get your best ideas? When you're talking with people? When you're reading? When you're simply listening or observing? Take note of the circumstances that seem to produce your best ideas, and recreate them.
- Schedule time to read, because the ideas and experiences of others can become your raw material for new ideas. Schedule time to think, because thinking energizes you.
- You are a natural fit with research and development; you appreciate the mindset of visionaries and dreamers. Spend time with imaginative peers, and sit in on their brainstorming sessions.
- Partner with someone with strong Analytical talents. This person will question you and challenge you, therefore strengthening your ideas.
- Sometimes you lose others' interest because they cannot follow your abstract and conceptual thinking style. Make your ideas more concrete by drawing pictures, using analogies or metaphors, or simply explaining your concepts step by step.
- Feed your Ideation talents by gathering knowledge. Study fields and industries different from your own. Apply ideas from outside, and link disparate ideas to generate new ones.

## LEARNER

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

It's very likely that you enjoy sharing your point of view with individuals who ask, "What do you think?" When you are familiar with the topic, problem, or people involved, you are quite comfortable expressing yourself. Otherwise, you set out to discover the facts and weigh them with care before speaking your mind -- that is, giving advice or openly stating your ideas. Driven by your talents, you comprehend what has gone wrong. Eagerly, you uncover facts. Sorting through lots of information rarely intimidates you. You welcome the abundance of information. Like a detective, you sort through it and identify key pieces of evidence. Following these leads, you bring the big picture into view. Next, you generate schemes for solving the problem. Finally, you choose the best option after considering prevailing circumstances, available resources, and desired outcomes. Instinctively, you see yourself as a contributing member of the group. You enjoy partnering with intelligent people. You like to exchange information, share observations, or offer tips for doing things more easily, efficiently, or swiftly. You are happiest collaborating with individuals who are not stingy with what they know. You have an ability to figure out how everyone on the team can benefit from each other's knowledge, skills, experiences, or wisdom. Because of your strengths, you regularly devote yourself to gaining knowledge and acquiring skills. You are happy with life when you have lots of time to make more discoveries. How? You probably read, solve problems, write, rehearse, or practice. By nature, you feel rather good about life when people answer your questions and keep you well informed about topics that affect you personally or professionally. You prefer to be bombarded with facts, data, or explanations. Receiving only bits and pieces of information is likely to raise your level of anxiety, suspicion, or frustration. You are apt to become upset when individuals forget or refuse to tell you something you think you have a right or a need to know.

### Learner sounds like this:

Annie M., managing editor: "I get antsy when I am not learning something. Last year, although I was enjoying my work, I didn't feel as though I was learning enough. So I took up tap dancing. It sounds strange, doesn't it? I know I am never going to perform or anything, but I enjoy focusing on the technical skill of tapping, getting a little better each week, and moving up from the beginners' class to the intermediate class. That was a kick."

Miles A., operations manager: "When I was seven years old, my teachers would tell my parents, 'Miles isn't the most intelligent boy in the school, but he's a sponge for learning, and he'll probably go really far because he will push himself and continually be grasping new things.' Right now, I am just starting a course in business-travel Spanish. I know it is probably too ambitious to think I could learn conversational Spanish and become totally proficient in that language, but I at least want to be able to travel there and know the language."

Tim S., coach for executives: "One of my clients is so inquisitive that it drives him crazy because he can't do everything he wants to. I'm different. I am not curious in that broad sense. I prefer to go into greater depth with things so that I can become competent in them and then use them at work. For example, recently one of my clients wanted me to travel with him to Nice, France, for a business engagement. So I started reading up on the region, buying books, and checking the Internet. It was all interesting and I enjoyed the study, but I wouldn't have done any of it if I wasn't going to be traveling there for work."

### Ideas for Action:

- Refine how you learn. For example, you might learn best by teaching; if so, seek out opportunities to present to others. You might learn best through quiet reflection; if so, find this quiet time.
- Develop ways to track the progress of your learning. If there are distinct levels or stages of learning within a discipline or skill, take a moment to celebrate your progression from one level to the next. If no such levels exist, create them for yourself (e.g., reading five books on the subject or making three presentations on the subject).
- Be a catalyst for change. Others might be intimidated by new rules, new skills, or new circumstances. Your willingness to soak up this newness can calm their fears and spur them to action. Take this responsibility seriously.
- Seek roles that require some form of technical competence. You will enjoy the process of acquiring and maintaining this expertise.
- As far as possible, shift your career toward a field with constantly changing technologies or regulations. You will be energized by the challenge of keeping up.
- Because you are not threatened by unfamiliar information, you might excel in a consulting role (either internal or external) in which you are paid to go into new situations and pick up new competencies or languages quickly.
- Research supports the link between learning and performance. When people have the opportunity to learn and grow, they are more productive and loyal. Look for ways to measure the degree to which you and others feel that your learning needs are being met, to create individualized learning milestones, and to reward achievements in learning.
- At work, take advantage of programs that subsidize your learning. Your organization may be willing to pay for part or all of your instructional coursework or for certifications. Ask your manager for information about scholarships and other educational opportunities.
- Honor your desire to learn. Take advantage of adult educational opportunities in your community. Discipline yourself to sign up for at least one new academic or adult learning course each year.
- Time disappears and your attention intensifies when you are immersed in studying or learning. Allow yourself to "follow the trail" by scheduling learning sessions during periods of time that will not be interrupted by pressing engagements.

## CONTEXT

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

It's very likely that you may examine certain kinds of circumstances, opportunities, or problems. You might listen to experts discuss current events. Once in a while, you figure out how bits and pieces of information from the past explain what is happening today. To some degree, you grasp the complexity of various situations. Perhaps your time-consuming investigations puzzle individuals who notice or deal with only what is most obvious. Chances are good that you occasionally turn to historians for information about the past. Perhaps you narrow your quest for knowledge to specific topics or eras. Because of your strengths, you create a vision of the future by unraveling what happened in the past. You strive to understand the what, when, who, where, how, and why of events. You are determined to create a framework of facts so you can put things in perspective. Driven by your talents, you may derive pleasure from conversing with people who value history. Perhaps you are intrigued by the varied philosophical views certain experts have concerning the causes of specific events or the behavior of particular historic figures. By nature, you might like visiting, thinking, or working with people who have a keen appreciation of past events or an accurate understanding of historic figures.

### Context sounds like this:

Adam Y., software designer: "I tell my people, 'Let's avoid vuja de.' And they say, 'Isn't that the wrong word? Shouldn't it be déjà vu?' And I say, 'No, vuja de means that we're bound to repeat the mistakes of our past. We must avoid this. We must look to our past, see what led to our mistakes, and then not make them again.' It sounds obvious, but most people don't look to their past or don't trust that it was valid or something. And so for them, it's vuja de all over again."

Jesse K., media analyst: "I have very little empathy, so I don't relate to people through their present emotional state. Instead, I relate to them through their past. In fact, I can't even begin to understand people until I have found out where they grew up, what their parents were like, and what they studied in college."

Gregg H., accounting manager: "I recently moved the whole office to a new accounting system, and the only reason it worked was that I honored their past. When people build an accounting system, it's their blood, sweat, and tears; it's them. They are personally identified with it. So if I come in and blandly tell them that I'm going to change it, it's like me saying I am going to take your baby away. That's the level of emotion I was dealing with. I had to respect this connection, this history, or they would have rejected me out of hand."

### Ideas for Action:

- Before planning begins on a project, encourage the people involved to study past projects. Help them appreciate the statement: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

- If you are in a role that requires teaching others, build your lessons around case studies. You will enjoy the search for the appropriate case, and your students will learn from these precedents. Use your understanding of the past to help others map the future.
- At work, help your organization strengthen its culture via folklore. For example, collect symbols and stories that represent the best of the past, or suggest naming an award after a person who embodied the historical traditions of your organization.
- Partner with someone with strong Futuristic or Strategic talents. This person's fascination with what "could be" will stop you from becoming mired in the past, while your deep understanding of context will stop him or her from ignoring the lessons of the past. Together you are more likely to create something that lasts.
- Accept change. Remember that your Context talents do not require you to "live in the past." Instead, you can actually become known as an active agent for positive change. Your natural sense of context should allow you to identify more clearly than most the aspects of the past that can be discarded and those that must be retained to build a sustainable future.
- Use fact-based comparisons to prior successes to paint a vivid picture for others of "what can be" in the future. The real-life illustrations you create can build confidence and emotional engagement.
- You recognize that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Probe your friends and coworkers about actions that might have contributed to their current successes so you can help them make better choices in the future. This will help them put their decisions into an overall context.
- Read historical novels, non-fiction, or biographies. You will discover many insights that will help you understand the present. You will think more clearly.
- Compare historical antecedents and situations to your current challenge. Identifying commonalities may lead you to a new perspective or an answer to your problems.
- Seek out mentors who have a sense of history. Listening to their memories is likely to spark your thought process.

## ACHIEVER

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

Because of your strengths, you do much more than just try to live up to your commitments. You persist working until you can deliver on your promises. This certainly enhances your reputation for being trustworthy, reliable, and dependable. By nature, you occasionally establish weekly performance targets for yourself. You may also organize or plan new projects. This partially explains why you know where you are headed, how you plan to proceed, and when you might reach your goal. To some extent, pushing hard for desired results excites you. Instinctively, you often go out of your way to stay informed about newsworthy topics. Numerous people probably count on you to tell them about information updates, due dates, meeting changes, or special assignments. It's very likely that you work tirelessly to help members of a team, group, department, class, or family identify what they have in common. Once you establish a basis for understanding each other, you set the stage for negotiating agreements and resolving conflicts. Driven by your talents, you channel your energy into your work or studies. You seldom count the hours you work. Feeling fully engaged in what you do is a major source of satisfaction. You believe there is always something more challenging you can pursue. Given your ability to withstand hardship, adversity, and stress, it is no surprise you love what you do. You strive to do more and more of it each day.

### Achiever sounds like this:

Melanie K., ER nurse: "I have to rack up points every day to feel successful. Today I've been here only half an hour, but I've probably racked up thirty points already. I ordered equipment for the ER, I had equipment repaired, I had a meeting with my charge nurse, and I brainstormed with my secretary about improving our computerized logbook. So on my list of ninety things, I have thirty done already. I'm feeling pretty good about myself right now."

Ted S., salesperson: "Last year I was salesperson of the year out of my company's three hundred salespeople. It felt good for a day, but sure enough, later that week, it was as if it never happened. I was back at zero again. Sometimes I wish I wasn't an achiever because it can lead me away from a balanced life and toward obsession. I used to think I could change myself, but now I know I am just wired this way. This theme is truly a double-edged sword. It helps me achieve my goals, but on the other hand, I wish I could just turn it off and on at will. But, hey, I can't. I can manage it and avoid work obsession by focusing on achieving in all parts of my life, not just work."

Sara L., writer: "This theme is a weird one. First, it's good because you live in pursuit of the perpetual challenge. But in the second place, you never feel as though you've reached your goal. It can keep you running uphill at seventy miles an hour for your whole life. You never rest because there's always more to do. But, on balance, I think I would rather have it than not. I call it my 'divine restlessness,' and if it makes me feel as if I owe the present everything I have, then so be it. I can live with that."

### Ideas for Action:

- Select jobs that allow you to have the leeway to work as hard as you want and in which you are encouraged to measure your own productivity. You will feel challenged and alive in these environments.
- As an achiever, you relish the feeling of being busy, yet you also need to know when you are "done." Attach timelines and measurement to goals so that effort leads to defined progress and tangible outcomes.
- Remember to build celebration and recognition into your life. Achievers tend to move on to the next challenge without acknowledging their successes. Counter this impulse by creating regular opportunities to enjoy your progress and accomplishments.
- Your drive for action might cause you to find meetings a bit boring. If that's the case, appeal to your Achiever talents by learning the objectives of each meeting ahead of time and by taking notes about progress toward those objectives during the meeting. You can help ensure that meetings are productive and efficient.
- Continue your education by attaining certifications in your area or specialty in addition to attending conferences and other programs. This will give you even more goals to achieve and will push your existing boundaries of accomplishment.
- You do not require much motivation from others. Take advantage of your self-motivation by setting challenging goals. Set a more demanding goal every time you finish a project.
- Partner with other hard workers. Share your goals with them so they can help you to get more done.
- Count personal achievements in your scoring "system." This will help you direct your Achiever talents toward family and friends as well as toward work.
- More work excites you. The prospect of what lies ahead is infinitely more motivating than what has been completed. Launch initiatives and new projects. Your seemingly endless reserve of energy will create enthusiasm and momentum.
- Make sure that in your eagerness to do more at work, you do not skimp on quality. Create measurable outcome standards to guarantee that increased productivity is matched by enhanced quality.

**INCLUDER**



## Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out, and make an effort to include them.

## Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

It's very likely that you sometimes try to include people in groups so no one is ignored, left out, or overlooked. Instinctively, you might harbor tender feelings for individuals who are quite different from you. Perhaps your openhearted -- that is, kind and generous -- nature impels you to reach out and draw various kinds of people into your life. Because of your strengths, you are fond of most people. You tend to be nonjudgmental. You usually find something good and likeable about every person you meet. Often you want to involve them in your activities and introduce them to others. You are undoubtedly puzzled by individuals who actively search for reasons to exclude people from their circle of friends, family members, coworkers, classmates, or teammates. Chances are good that you sometimes enjoy surrounding yourself with companions rather than being alone. By nature, you sense there is something good in each person you meet. Your open approach to people makes you a very likeable individual.

## Includer sounds like this:

Harry B., outplacement consultant: "Even as a child, although I was very shy, I always made sure that I was the one inviting others to play. When picking teams or sides in school, I never wanted anyone not to participate with us. In fact, I can remember when I was ten or eleven, I had a friend who was not a member of our church. We were at a church banquet, and he showed up at the door because typically we had our youth activity at the church on that night. Immediately, I got up, brought him over to our family, and sat him down at the table."

Jeremy B., defense lawyer: "When I first started this job, I met people and became fast, furious friends with them almost on day one, only to find out later that, you know, this person's got a lot of issues, and I've already included them in dinner parties and our social circle. My partner, Mark, is like, 'What is it exactly that made you want to include this person?' And then it's a matter of figuring out what pushed my buttons when I first met them, what made me enjoy them so much. And, you know, making sure that this is the aspect of them that Mark and I focus on . . . because once I include someone in my circle, I don't dump them."

Giles D., corporate trainer: "In class, I seem to be able to sense when someone is disengaging from the group discussion, and I immediately draw them back into the conversation. Last week, we got into a lengthy discussion about performance appraisals, and one woman wasn't talking at all. So I just said, 'Monica, you've had performance appraisals. Any thoughts on the subject?' I really think this has helped me as a teacher because when I don't know the answer to something, very often it is the person I pull in who supplies the answer for me."

## Ideas for Action:

- Consider roles in which you can take responsibility for representing voices that are not usually heard. You will derive a great deal of satisfaction from being a spokesperson for these people.
- Look for opportunities to bring together people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. You can be a leader in this area.
- Help those who are new to an organization or group get to know other people. You will always be adept at quickly making people feel accepted and involved.

- An anti-elitist, you may clash with those who feel they have earned the right to perks and power. Rather than disputing their claim, use your Includer insights to help everyone find common ground and value in their contributions.
- Acknowledge the dissonance you feel when you must be the bearer of bad news. Look for partners who can help you justify your position so you don't apologize or soften the message too much.
- Not every person is lovable or even likeable. While many of your friends or colleagues may be put off by difficult people, you have a natural capacity to truly care for all people. Let others know that if they ever come to the end of their rope with a problematic individual, they can call on you to step in.
- Choose roles in which you are continuously working and interacting with people. You will enjoy the challenge of making everyone feel important.
- Partner with someone who has dominant Activator or Command talents. This person can help you when you have to deliver news that might hurt someone's feelings.
- Realize that people will relate to each other through you. You are a conduit for information. You can interact with all parts and all people in a group and keep them effectively connected to each other.
- Explain what we all have in common. Help others understand that to respect the differences among us (our diversity), we must begin by appreciating what we all share (our similarity).

## Strengths Discovery Activity

As you begin to think about your talents, consider this equation:

$$\begin{array}{l} \mathbf{Talent} \text{ (a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving)} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ } \mathbf{Investment} \text{ (time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building} \\ \text{your knowledge base)} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ } \mathbf{Strength} \text{ (the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance)} \end{array}$$

Here is an example:

$$\begin{array}{l} \mathbf{Talent is:} \text{ Truly listening to your customers' wants and needs} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ } \mathbf{Investment is:} \text{ Researching products and keeping up-to-date on the industry} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ } \mathbf{Strength is:} \text{ Consistently providing near-perfect customer service} \end{array}$$

Now, think about what *you* naturally do best. How can you invest in that talent to build strength?

Do your own Strengths Discovery Interview:

$$\begin{array}{l} \mathbf{Your Talent is:} \text{ _____} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ } \mathbf{Your Investment is:} \text{ _____} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ } \mathbf{Your Strength is:} \text{ _____} \end{array}$$

## My Strengths-Based Action Plan

Now that you have discovered your top five themes and considered action items for development, choose 1-3 themes that describe you best, and list them below. Talk to people who know you well, and ask them to describe how you embody these themes. Ask them for specific examples of times when they have seen you using each theme in action or how each theme manifests itself in you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, write down some specific actions that you could take in the next week, month, and year to build and apply your strengths. Refer to your Personalized Strengths Insights and Ideas for Action if you need help.

In the next week, I will:

- 
- 
- 

In the next month, I will:

- 
- 
- 

In the next year, I will:

- 
- 
- 

Next, list the name of at least one person who you will meet with to review this plan. Be sure to choose someone who can help you to keep these goals "top of mind" and who will help you leverage your talents to build strengths.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_