Class Activities

# Chapter 3: Engaging Strengths

## Guide to the Class Activities

Each activity is designed based on Fink’s Learning Taxonomy and is tagged with the following tags under the taxonomy’s learning and assessment structure:

1. Foundational Knowledge (F)

2. Application (A)

3. Integration (I)

4. Human Dimension (H)

5. Caring (C)

6. Learning How to Learn (L)

These activities may be used in either small-group or large-group settings, depending on class size and time available. Some may also be suitable as homework.

## Activities

### Building Strong Teams #1 (A, I, H, C)

The goal of this activity is for students to understand the importance of building teams that have complementary strengths, while also experiencing the challenges of making it a reality. In preparation, have students complete the “Leadership Strengths Questionnaire” (Item 3.2 under Application) and identify their greatest strengths based upon the results. In class, randomly assign them to groups and ask them to determine the “strengths composition” of the group. What strengths are well represented in the group and which ones are not? Then ask the groups to consider how they might seek to adjust the distribution of strengths among their members to achieve greater balance if this were a real world setting (for example, corporate leadership team, non-profit board of directors, or public agency managers).

### Building Strong Teams #2 (A, I, H, C)

As in exercise #1, have students complete the “Leadership Strengths Questionnaire”. In class, ask them to identify their greatest strength and then have them get into groups based upon that strength. Ask them to consider the following questions:

* Which group is the largest? Smallest? Are all the groups roughly equivalent?
* What does that suggest about the distribution of strengths across the class?
* Do they consider this distribution to be similar to what they might find outside of the class setting? Why or why not?
* What are the consequences if teams/working groups have very similar strengths?

### Discovering the Strengths of Others (I, H)

It is important to know one’s own strengths. However, it is also important to know the strengths of co-workers, team members, and subordinates. This activity is intended to provide students an opportunity to become more comfortable with that process. Create different scenarios and invite students to role play having conversations where they want to learn more about the strengths of another person. Here are some suggested scenarios, though many more are possible:

* A manager interviewing a job applicant where fitting into a tight-knit team is essential.
* A person talking to her neighbor who is looking for volunteers to work collaboratively on a new project at the neighborhood community center.
* A new president of the board for a non-profit organization wanting to know more about one of his/her colleagues on the board.
* A new police chief getting acquainted with one of his assistant chiefs who has been with the department for many years.

### Discovering the Strengths of Others #2 (A, I, H)

A common technique used in marketing is developing personas or user profiles of potential customers and clients. The profiles are then used as “target audiences” for developing new products and testing marketing campaigns.

For the leadership class, form groups of 4-5 students and have each one create a specific persona that will be used in a group problem-solving situation later on. The persona should:

* Have 4 strengths from either the StrengthsFinder or VIA list of talents/strengths;
* Have one weakness;
* Have some demographic attributes (age, gender, type of job, etc.);
* Have some lifestyle interests (sports, movies, outdoor enthusiast, etc.);
* Be generally likable; and
* Have a name.

Students should create a visual representation of their persona in a consistent format (e.g. 4” x 6” note card, or 8” x 11 ½” sheet of construction paper) using images from magazines or other sources. Sample profile:

Photo

Jim, American

Age 30

Retail manager

Baseball fan

Strengths: Achiever, Command, Self-Assurance, Futuristic

Weakness: Includer

Likable: Handles stress well, self-deprecating humor

1. Once students have created the personas, have them exchange personas and discuss what it would be like to work with such a person on a team. What would this type of person contribute to the team? How might they be challenging to work with?
2. Put the profiles on a table in the middle of the group and imagine them as a team working together to address a community problem (one example below). Discuss: What would each persona contribute to solving the problem? Are there any gaps in the distribution of strengths (e.g. more influencing than relationship building) How would the personas’ strengths work together? Would their weaknesses compound one another or offset one another? Are strengths moderated in any way by age, gender, or other demographic information? Groups should come up with a 3-step (minimum) plan to address the problem that realistically represents the thinking of their combined personas. Scenario:
   1. Due to a budget shortfall and a projected decline in tax revenue for the near future, one of your city’s community services must be eliminated. The mayor will act on the recommendation of your community advisory panel. Which service should be cut (tailor this to your own location): Youth sports leagues, adult sports leagues, kids summer camps, after-school drop off center, public playgrounds, community swimming pool, energy efficiency home upgrade program, residential recycling, 4th of July parade, holiday lights downtown, etc.? What are the reasons for your choice? How will you communicate this choice to those most affected?
3. Students should keep their user profiles for use later in the course.

## Writing Assignments

### Comfort Zones (F, A, I)

Have students write a brief paper describing task-oriented group experiences where they felt most comfortable. What made this a good experience? How does that fit with the ideas discussed in this chapter regarding strengths and positive work environments?

### Sketch-noting (F, A, I)

Sketch-noting is described in the Class Activities for chapter 1. Making sketch notes is not about drawing, or artistry, but about making marks on paper (or a white board) to help oneself think. There is no right or wrong way to do this. Everyone will do it differently.

For chapter 3 ask students to sketch out the relationship between their identified strengths from the StrengthsFinder, the VIA classification, or Capp model. Have them mark how the strengths are connected to each other and interact with each other. How do they envision that process? Where in the sketch would they mark down their weaknesses? How do the weaknesses relate to the strengths? After they put down how they see their attributes interacting, what questions do they have about their abilities as leaders or potential growth areas?

### One Minute Paper Topics (F, A, I)

The most important things I can do right now to further develop my strengths are…

What are your “learned behaviors” and what might you do to address them?