

Strengths and Virtues



As part of the development of a new 'Positive Psychology', a group of leading American scientists decided in 2000 to try and define the universal 'human strengths'. They researched around 200 texts drawn from all over the earth and spanning 3000 years of human history – including Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, St. Augustine, the Old Testament, the Talmud, Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tze, Bushido (the samurai code), the Koran, and the Upanishads. As a result they were able to identify a core set of human virtues shared by every single one of these traditions:

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

In addition they identified a range of 'strengths' – personal characteristics or behaviour by which these virtues can be attained. These 24 strengths are as follows.

Wisdom and Knowledge

1. Curiosity / Interest in the world

An openness to experience; flexibility about things that don't fit your preconceptions

2. Love of Learning

Taking pleasure in learning new things; taking every opportunity to expand your knowledge and expertise

3. Judgement / Critical Thinking / Open-Mindedness

Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being objective

4. Ingenuity / Originality / Practical Intelligence

Finding new and practical ways of achieving results; creativity; 'street wisdom'

5. Social Intelligence / Personal Intelligence / Emotional Intelligence

Understanding your own and others' motives and feelings; acting in socially effective ways

6. Perspective

Able to adopt the 'big picture' so as to act wisely; good at problem-solving and giving advice

Courage

7. Valour and Bravery

Willing to confront challenges and difficulty; prepared to adopt unpopular or dangerous positions

8. Perseverance / Industry / Diligence

Finishing what you start; prepared to take on difficult projects; doing what you say you'll do – and more

9. Integrity / Genuineness / Honesty

Living in a genuine, authentic way; down to earth and without pretence

Humanity and Love

10. Kindness and Generosity

Helping other people; putting others' interests as highly as your own

11. Loving and Allowing Oneself to be Loved

Valuing and engendering close and intimate relations with others

Justice

12. Citizenship / Duty / Teamwork / Loyalty

Working hard for the success of the group; valuing group goals and purposes; respecting authority

13. Fairness and Equity

Avoiding any personal bias; being guided by principles concerning equality; tackling prejudice

14. Leadership

Organising activities well and seeing that they happen; maintaining good relations in and between groups

Temperance

15. Self-Control

Checking your own impulses when appropriate; repairing negative feelings; managing yourself

16. Prudence / Discretion / Caution

Being careful; not saying things you might regret; resisting the impulse to act only for the short term

17. Humility and Modesty

Not seeking the spotlight; letting your accomplishments speak for themselves; unpretentious

Transcendence

18. Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

Appreciating excellence in all domains; able to feel awe and wonder

19. Gratitude

Not taking things for granted; expressing gratitude to others; appreciating life

20. Hope / Optimism / Future-Mindedness

Maintaining a positive stance towards the future; expecting the best; leading a goal-directed life

21. Spirituality / Sense of Purpose / Faith / Religiousness

Strong and coherent set of beliefs about larger purpose or meaning; acting in accordance with these beliefs

22. Forgiveness and Mercy

Forgiving those who hurt or offend you; able to transform how you feel; generosity of spirit

23. Playfulness and Humour

Laughing and creating laughter; seeing the light side of life

24. Zest / Passion / Enthusiasm

Throwing yourself body and soul into activities; inspiring others.

For more about this classification of strengths and virtues, see 'Authentic Happiness' by Martin E.P. Seligman (2002)

To help you identify your own key strengths, you can complete a survey on the following website: www.authentichappiness.com. You have to first complete a registration form, and then complete the survey: VIA Signature Strengths Survey (it takes 20 to 30 minutes). The results can be fascinating...

