

character strengths, 12 suggestions **(9-11): jobs, reminders, & meditations**

(this handout with active hyperlinks was posted as a blog at www.goodmedicine.org.uk on 5.08.16)

I've recently written a couple of posts on how we might use our character strengths more deliberately - see *"Twelve practical suggestions for exploring our character strengths (1 to 5): learning, spotting, relationships, and writing"* and *"Twelve practical suggestions for exploring our character strengths (6 to 8): supports, wellbeing, and new ways"*. Here are a further three options to consider.

9.) Job crafting (and job change). There are over two dozen research articles about the value of "character strengths in the workplace" cited on the VIA Institute website. At the European Positive Psychology conference in Angers a few weeks ago there was a whole symposium on this topic. Have a look at the VIA website articles ... they're gently inspiring ... a call to arms. Findings include: *"Character strengths use at work is connected with not only job satisfaction but also productivity and organizational citizenship behavior. These connections are explained by high positive emotions and engagement (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2016)"*, *"In a study of nearly 10,000 New Zealand workers that examined indicators of flourishing, workers who reported a high awareness of their strengths had a 9.5 times more likely to be flourishing than those with low strengths awareness. Moreover, workers who reported high strengths use were 18 times more likely to be flourishing than those with low strengths use (Hone et al., 2015)"*, *"Employees who used four or more of their signature strengths had more positive work experiences and work-as-a-calling than those who expressed less than four (Harzer & Ruch, 2012)"*, *"In a three-year thematic analysis of drivers of employee engagement, focusing on character strengths was among the three most crucial drivers (along with managing emotions and aligning purpose; Crabb, 2011). Specifically, employees are encouraged to identify, use, and alert others of their signature strengths as well as converse with managers about strengths use opportunities in the organization"*, and *"In a qualitative case study of a management development program, a key finding was to help managers develop new "tools" and behaviors and core to these tools was signature strengths use (Berg & Karlsen, 2012)"*. Mm ... note the Hone et al findings (above) on how "strengths awareness" and "strengths use" seem so strongly connected to improved flourishing. Think how well you use your signature strengths at work. Would it be possible to "tweak" your job so that you can use your key strengths even more? There's a whole literature on this kind of "job crafting". For a good academic article on the topic, see Wrzesniewski et al, 2013 (the full text is freely available here) and for a more chatty post, see this one from Stanford Business school (which includes a link to a job crafting "tool"). Job crafting is very likely to benefit your wellbeing ... and also your productivity & job commitment. Everybody wins! Sometimes though, to significantly increase strengths use at work, one may need to cut one's losses and simply look for a different job. Here a book like *"What color is your parachute?"* may prove more useful.

10.) Use reminders: Remind yourself of a strength you've chosen to focus on using an object, clothing, a song, a quote, or some other practical reminder. See the two posts that start with *"Power objects, power postures, power clothers, power prayers: all ways to facilitate change"*. This really is rich, creative, productive territory. For example I've just ordered myself a zest t-shirt! The post *"Boosting self-compassion & self-encouragement by strengthening attachment security: twelve practical suggestions"* explores overlapping ideas. And for still more ideas in this area, go to this list of the 24 character strengths at the VIA institute website. Click on a particular strength you want to explore more and see the short linked video clip, the motto, suggested activities, movies, and - maybe particularly important for this reminders exercise - the linked songs. How about listening to clips of the songs and downloading and maybe learning (to hum or sing) any that particularly appeal to you and link you to the strength.

11.) Develop linked meditations: There are many ways of doing this. Some of the suggestions in 10.) above apply here too. For a rich source of ideas and the possible development of a personal 12-breath exercise, see the three blog posts *"To reach the other shore with each step of the crossing: zazen, associative thinking & value-driven behaviour (1st post)"*, *"To reach the other shore with each step ... : linking this with embodied cognition (2nd post)"* and *"To reach the other shore with each step ... : a brief embodied cognition meditation exercise"*. Consider too looking at the excellent book *"Mindfulness and character strengths: a practical guide to flourishing"* by Ryan Niemiec, education director at the VIA Institute ... or even enrolling for the 8-session online *"Mindfulness-based strengths practice"* course.
