

Realising more potential in strengths coaching

Sophie Francis and Sue Langley provide an overview of the 'Realise2' approach to strengths to take your strengths coaching to the next level.

Strengths are at the heart of positive approaches to coaching. They're also an authentic, energising and accessible resource that can be harnessed to achieve valued outcomes.

Once people know what their strengths are, they can use them more often and more effectively. Studies show that when people use their strengths, they become energised and confident. They reach goals faster and more easily, and experience less stress and greater well-being.

Realising your strengths means knowing and growing them. It also means being mindful of when, how and how much to use your strengths to achieve optimal performance, development and potential.

As coaches, we can help our clients deepen their awareness of their strengths and cultivate the practical wisdom to achieve the best outcomes and be the best they can be.

"Realising our strengths is the smallest thing we can do to make the most difference." Alex Linley.

A next generation approach

The science, practice and philosophy of strengths has a rich history from Peter Drucker's strengths-based management advice to the pioneering work informing Gallup's StrengthFinder and the VIA Inventory of Character Strengths.

There's a growing body of popular and scholarly books, research, assessments and interventions that has made coaches and their clients keen to understand and work with strengths.

Strengths are defined by Alex Linley as a "pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance". This definition, together with a growing body of research, informs the 'Realise2' model, developed by Linley and his colleagues at Capp.

Realise2 represents an important development in positive psychology and strengths coaching. By differentiating strengths in terms of performance, energy and use, Realise2 adds a holistic lens to traditional approaches.

Whether you are familiar with Realise2 or not, you can apply this lens quite simply when working with clients' strengths. By adding the dimension of energy and context, you can build a more dynamic understanding of where strengths are prevalent and how best they can be capitalised.

For each strength consider:

- Performance – How well does your client do it?
- Energy – How good does your client feel when doing it? How much energy does your client gain?

- Use – How often does your client do it? In which contexts?

"Simply put, strengths energise people, enabling them to be at their best."

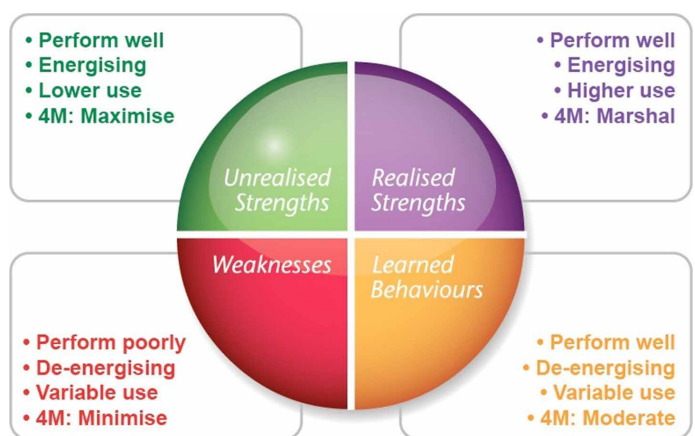
Alex Linley.

Assessing strengths using the Realise2 model

The Realise2 assessment accurately measures 60 strengths across each dimension to give an in-depth perspective on people's capabilities and growth potential.

Four quadrants highlight:

1. Realised strengths – something you are good at, enjoy doing and do often. These are generally your most recognised and available resources for sustained performance, well-being and engagement.
2. Learned behaviours – something you are good at but find draining. These can reveal areas of potential burnout in your current role or the overuse of certain strengths.
3. Weaknesses – something you are poor at and find draining. These are the areas where performance and motivation are lowest, yet are often the focus of development.
4. Unrealised strengths – something you are good at and enjoy doing but do less often. These strengths can be areas of untapped potential, waiting for the right situation or opportunity to surface and develop.



Identifying and unpacking strengths in this way opens a rich and honest conversation. Clients connect to deeper levels of responsibility for and acceptance of their unique strengths and weaknesses. They explore these in the context of the real challenges they face in their work and lives, the changes that may need to happen, and the emerging potential they may be yearning and ready to discover in themselves.

Deepening awareness through 'strengths spotting'

'Strengths spotting' is a simple and powerful tool developed by Alex Linley to augment structured assessments and strengths coaching. In particular, it enables you to tap into the energy behind strengths.

By asking clients to share stories about their strengths, you will pick up valuable cues you can then feed back to them to affirm their sense of self and create a positive platform for development and action.

When people talk about their strengths, they feel energised, positive and engaged. They appear animated and enthused, and their body language becomes more open, confident and receptive. They also express themselves more easily, graphically and in detail.

Strengths spotting questions may include:

- When you are at your best, what are you doing?
- From where do you get the most energy? What activities give you a buzz?
- What everyday things do you enjoy doing?
- What would you describe as your most significant accomplishment?
- What are the things you have picked up quickly or learned almost effortlessly?
- What gives you the greatest sense of being authentic?
- What do you do now – that you also did as a child?

You can also listen for and observe strengths at play in daily behaviour. People are more likely to prioritise tasks that require using strengths, volunteer to be involved, and garner admiration and respect from others.

In contrast, when people talk about or operate from their weaknesses their energy levels drop, and they tend to become more self-critical and backward looking.

Developing and calibrating strengths

Many coaches stop at helping people identify their strengths or they simply urge them to use their strengths more often. This doesn't always produce optimal results or help clients improve or refine the way they use their strengths to suit the situation.

Strengths are far less static than many people think. They evolve, changing with the context and role. Approaching strengths with a growth mindset puts people in the driver's seat of their own development and helps them achieve greater mastery and agility.

For leaders, this can mean dialing down certain strengths they habitually overplay. For example, strengths of competitiveness and drive may help a leader attain ambitious performance targets and attract rewards, but they can also demoralise team members over time. These strengths may be so energising to the leader that he or she doesn't notice the impact they have on others.

At the same time, the leader may discount strengths he or she underplays such as listening and empathic connection. Dialing up these strengths may help the leader manage the risks of going too far so he or she can lead more effectively and mindfully.

Encouraging clients to develop complementary strengths rather than consistently relying on the same strengths increases their versatility. This strategy is particularly useful when coaching leaders to experiment with new behaviour or transition into roles that demand different capabilities than those that propelled

their success. In many cases, it will involve drawing on others who may have complementary strengths.

Optimal strengths use involves applying the right strengths, in the right amount, in the right way, and at the right time. To help clients use strengths appropriately and strategically, you might ask questions such as:

- What impact does the way you use your strengths have on others?
- How might you adapt the way you use that strength to gain a better outcome in this situation?
- Which strengths could help you best reach this goal? In what combination?
- To get even better results, how can you draw on the strengths of your team?

Strategies for leveraging strengths

The Realise2 model offers a practical and integrated framework you can use to support your clients to use their strengths mindfully and effectively. In a nutshell, you can:

- Marshal realised strengths – use them appropriately for the situation and context. For optimal performance, draw on a symphony of strengths, refine the way they use them and avoid overplaying them.
- Moderate learned behaviours – use them in moderation and only when necessary. For sustainable performance, reduce overusing and relying on these behaviours by refocusing their role and “sandwiching” the task between energising strengths and delegating.
- Minimise weaknesses – use them as little as possible and only where necessary. Make weaknesses irrelevant by compensating with strengths or complementary partners when not business critical.
- Maximise unrealised strengths – find opportunities to use them more. For growth and development, take responsibility for putting strengths into action, set goals, and look for and learn from role models. ■

To find out more, take the Realise2 assessment or become an accredited Realise2 practitioner visit www.langleygroup.com.au/realise2.

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