

Strengths-Based Efficiency

Deep Dive Modules · Self Exploration

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Part 1 · Overview

Strengths-Based Efficiency

Leveraging Natural Talents for Professional Excellence

Reading Sections

From Awareness to Mastery: Building a Strengths-Based Practice

Self-Assessment

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Part 2 · What Is Strengths-Based Efficiency?

What Is Strengths-Based Efficiency?

Strengths-based efficiency is the deliberate practice of identifying, developing, and strategically leveraging your natural talents and developed capabilities to maximize professional effectiveness while maintaining energy, satisfaction, and longevity in substance use disorder treatment work.

It is the difference between working harder and working smarter — between grinding through each day depleted and ending each day energized by the knowledge that you contributed your best. The concept rests on a simple but revolutionary premise: you will always produce better results, with less effort, when operating from your areas of natural strength than when struggling through areas of persistent weakness.

The research is unambiguous: people who use their strengths daily are six times more likely to be engaged at work, three times more likely to report excellent quality of life, and significantly less likely to experience burnout.

For substance use disorder treatment professionals, this matters enormously. The field is characterized by high emotional demands, chronic staffing challenges, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout rates that decimate the workforce. Much of this attrition is preventable — not through more self-care workshops or pizza parties, but through fundamentally restructuring how professionals engage with their work by aligning responsibilities with natural talents.

Think of it this way: every clinician on your team has a unique strengths profile — a particular combination of talents that makes them exceptional at certain aspects of treatment. When these clinicians are consistently deployed to tasks that align with their strengths, the entire treatment system operates at a higher level — and each individual experiences the deep satisfaction that comes from contributing their best.

Reflection Questions

1. How would you describe your current relationship with your professional strengths? Are you clearly aware of them, or do they operate mostly in the background?

2. Think about a recent workday that left you feeling energized and effective. What were you doing? What strengths were you using?

3. If you could redesign your role to spend 80% of your time in your strengths zones, what would that look like?

4. How much of your professional development energy currently goes toward building strengths versus correcting weaknesses?

5. How does the concept of strengths-based efficiency challenge or confirm what you have experienced in your career?

Part 3 · Why Deficit-Focus Dominates — And What It Costs

Why Deficit-Focus Dominates — And What It Costs

The treatment field, like most professional environments, has been built on a deficit-focused model of development. From clinical supervision to performance reviews to continuing education, the dominant question is: "What are you doing wrong, and how can you fix it?" This approach feels intuitive, logical, and responsible. It also happens to be profoundly inefficient and, when taken to its extreme, actively harmful to both professionals and the patients they serve.

The deficit model has deep roots. Most educational systems are built on identifying and correcting weaknesses. Clinical training follows the same pattern: supervision sessions disproportionately focus on what went wrong in a session rather than what went brilliantly. Performance evaluations catalog areas needing improvement. The message, repeated across years of training and practice, is clear: your weaknesses are more important than your strengths.

This approach carries enormous hidden costs. The first cost is engagement. When professionals spend the majority of their time and energy on tasks that fall outside their natural talents, they experience chronic low-grade frustration, diminished confidence, and reduced motivation.

The second cost is performance. Gallup's research has demonstrated that the greatest room for growth exists in areas of existing strength — not weakness. Deficit correction produces adequacy at best. Strength development produces excellence.

The third cost is retention. Treatment professionals do not typically leave the field because they lack skills — they leave because they lack energy, satisfaction, and the experience of meaningful contribution.

The fourth cost is patient care. Patients in recovery deserve clinicians who are operating at their peak — engaged, energized, and bringing their finest capabilities to every interaction.

Reflection Questions

1. Think about your most recent performance evaluation or supervision session. What percentage of the conversation focused on what you do well versus what needs improvement?

2. Can you identify a specific area of persistent weakness that you have invested significant development energy into with minimal return?

3. How has the deficit-focused model affected your professional confidence and sense of competence?

4. Think about a colleague who left the treatment field. Was their departure related to skill deficiency, or to burnout and disengagement?

5. If your organization shifted from a deficit-focused to a strengths-focused development model, what would change?

Part 4 · The Science of Strengths: What the Research Tells Us

The Science of Strengths: What the Research Tells Us

The strengths-based approach is not a feel-good philosophy or a participation-trophy mentality. It is grounded in decades of rigorous research across positive psychology, organizational behavior, neuroscience, and performance science.

The foundational research comes from Donald Clifton and the Gallup organization, whose studies spanning over 40 years and involving millions of individuals established that people who use their strengths every day are six times more likely to be engaged at work. Gallup's research across over 1.2 million work teams demonstrated that teams with managers who focus on employee strengths have 12.5% higher productivity than teams with managers who focus on employee weaknesses.

Neuroscience provides the mechanism. When you operate from an area of natural strength, your brain is literally working more efficiently. Neural pathways associated with strengths are more developed, requiring less cognitive load to produce superior results.

Dr. Richard Boyatzis's research using functional MRI imaging demonstrated that when individuals discussed their strengths, brain regions associated with creativity, motivation, and positive emotion activated — the parasympathetic nervous system engaged, broadening cognitive capacity and openness to learning. When individuals discussed their weaknesses, the sympathetic nervous system activated — the stress response — narrowing cognitive capacity and triggering defensive processing.

Working from weakness literally triggers your threat response. Working from strength activates your growth system.

For substance use disorder treatment professionals, these findings have direct clinical implications. Burnout is not inevitable — it is the predictable consequence of chronic strengths deprivation. Professional development is not a matter of fixing what is broken — it is a matter of amplifying what already works.

Reflection Questions

1. Does understanding the neuroscience of strengths change how you think about the value of strengths-focused development?

2. Think about a time when you were "in flow" at work — deeply engaged, time passing quickly, performing at your best. What strengths were you using?

3. The research shows that people who use their strengths daily are six times more likely to be engaged. How engaged do you feel in your current role?

4. How could the research findings about strengths-based teams apply to your treatment team?

5. If strengths deprivation is a primary driver of burnout in the treatment field, what implications does this have for staff retention programs?

Part 5 · From Awareness to Mastery: Building a Strengths-Based Practice

From Awareness to Mastery: Building a Strengths-Based Practice

Understanding strengths-based efficiency intellectually is the beginning. Transforming it into a lived daily practice is the journey. This transformation moves through predictable stages — from unconscious potential to deliberate mastery.

Stage One is Strengths Discovery. Many treatment professionals have never been asked to systematically identify their strengths. Discovery involves formal assessment (tools like CliftonStrengths, VIA Character Strengths), reflective analysis (examining patterns across your career), and external feedback (asking trusted colleagues what they see as your unique contributions). The goal is a clear, specific strengths profile.

Stage Two is Strengths Mapping. Once you know your strengths, you map them against your current role. Where do your daily responsibilities align with your strengths? Where do they misalign? This mapping reveals both opportunities and friction points.

Stage Three is Strengths Application. This involves amplification (deliberately increasing time devoted to strengths-aligned activities), optimization (finding ways to apply strengths to tasks that previously felt neutral), and delegation or partnering (strategically sharing responsibilities with colleagues whose strengths complement your weaknesses).

Stage Four is Team Strengths Integration. Individual strengths optimization reaches its full potential when it becomes a team practice. This involves creating a team strengths map and using it to inform task allocation, project assignments, and collaborative structures.

Stage Five is Organizational Culture Change. The highest expression of strengths-based efficiency is an organizational culture where strengths identification, development, and deployment are woven into every system — hiring, onboarding, supervision, evaluation, professional development, and strategic planning.

The journey from awareness to mastery is not linear. You will cycle through these stages repeatedly as your strengths continue to develop. The critical commitment is not to perfection but to intention — the daily decision to lead with your best rather than being consumed by your worst.

Reflection Questions

1. Which stage of strengths development do you believe you are currently in — Discovery, Mapping, Application, Team Integration, or Culture Change?

2. Can you articulate your top three strengths with specificity — not just general labels but detailed descriptions of how they manifest in your clinical work?

3. Looking at your current role through the Stage Two mapping lens, what is the ratio of strengths-aligned to misaligned responsibilities?

4. What would Stage Four — Team Strengths Integration — look like on your specific treatment team?

5. Write a personal strengths-based efficiency commitment statement.

Part 6 · Strengths-Based Efficiency Self-Assessment

Strengths-Based Efficiency Self-Assessment

Rate each statement: 1 (Not at all like me) to 5 (Very much like me)

I can clearly identify my top 3-5 natural talents and how they show up in my clinical work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I regularly notice patterns in which activities and tasks energize me versus drain me professionally

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I understand how my unique strengths contribute specifically to my effectiveness in substance use disorder treatment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I can connect my most satisfying professional experiences directly to moments when I was using my strengths

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I am as aware of my strengths as I am of my areas for improvement

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I can articulate my strengths clearly to colleagues, supervisors, and patients without false modesty or inflation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I notice when I am performing well with less effort — recognizing this as evidence of operating from strength

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I understand the difference between skills I have developed through effort and natural talents that come more easily

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I regularly and deliberately apply my strengths to my daily professional responsibilities

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I can recognize when I am operating from my strengths versus working outside my strong areas

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I actively look for opportunities to apply my strengths more effectively in my current role

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I know how to leverage my strengths to overcome professional challenges and obstacles

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I notice that my performance is clearly enhanced when I intentionally utilize my strengths

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I use my strengths to approach difficult clinical situations rather than relying only on standard protocols

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel a sense of flow and engagement when working within my strengths zones

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have strategies for managing necessary tasks that fall outside my natural strength areas

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I can identify the unique strengths that each of my close colleagues brings to our treatment team

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I notice when team members are operating from their strengths versus struggling outside their strong areas

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I understand how different team member strengths complement each other for enhanced overall effectiveness

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I actively appreciate and communicate recognition of colleague strengths and contributions

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I collaborate in ways that deliberately leverage the complementary strengths of team members

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I help create opportunities for colleagues to contribute through their strongest capabilities

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I notice how strengths diversity affects our team problem-solving and innovation capacity

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I foster team environments where diverse strengths are celebrated and strategically utilized

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

My current role responsibilities align well with my natural strengths the majority of the time

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I actively look for opportunities to modify or craft my role to better utilize my strengths

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I understand how the alignment between my role and my strengths affects my job satisfaction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I can identify which specific responsibilities energize me and which ones exhaust me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have proactively communicated with supervisors about how to better leverage my strengths in my role

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I approach necessary non-strength tasks strategically rather than letting them consume my energy

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I seek out or volunteer for projects and responsibilities that align with my natural talents

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have a clear understanding of what my ideal role would look like based on my strengths profile

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

My organization supports and encourages strengths-based approaches to professional development

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

Supervisory practices in my organization emphasize strengths utilization alongside deficit correction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

Our team culture values and celebrates the diverse strengths that different staff members bring

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel empowered to advocate for organizational practices that support strengths utilization

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

Professional development opportunities in my organization build on existing strengths rather than only addressing weaknesses

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I receive regular feedback about my strengths effectiveness, not only about areas needing improvement

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

My organization creates systems and structures that allow staff to contribute through their strongest capabilities

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel that my unique strengths are recognized and valued by organizational leadership

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

Scoring guide

Reset all progress? This cannot be undone.

Your Strengths Utilization Profile

Part 7 · Exercise 1: Professional Strengths Wheel Explorer

Professional Strengths Wheel Explorer

Naming What You Are Actually Good At

You Have Been Studied for Your Faults

Ask a clinician to list their deficits and the answer arrives in seconds, fully formed, with examples. Ask for their strengths and you get a pause, a hedge, and something vague about caring a lot. That asymmetry is not modesty and it is not accuracy — it is training. Years of supervision, evaluation and coursework built the deficit list for you. Nobody built the other one. This exercise builds it, and it will feel awkward, which is the evidence that it is needed.

1. How easily can you name your top strengths out loud, without qualifying them?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

2. Name three things you do better than most clinicians you work alongside. Not what you value most — what you are measurably better at.

Be specific and honest...

3. For each one, describe how it shows up inside an actual session. A strength you cannot describe behaviourally is a label, not a strength.

Be specific and honest...

Take the strongest one first. Evidence, not self-belief.

1. What is the concrete evidence for your strongest capability — a case that turned, a task people hand you without discussion, a thing you get asked for by name?

Be specific and honest...

2. Which of your three came easily from the very start, and which did you build through years of deliberate effort? Both are real, but they behave differently under pressure.

Be specific and honest...

3. Which strength do you undersell because it comes easily, and therefore feels to you like it does not count?

Be specific and honest...

The reading calls this external feedback, and it is the part of discovery most people skip because it requires asking.

1. What do colleagues come to you for when there is no organisational reason they have to?

Be specific and honest...

2. Ask one trusted colleague this week what they think you are unusually good at. Write their answer here verbatim, including the part that surprised you.

Be specific and honest...

1. Write your strengths profile in three sentences, as you would say it in a supervision meeting — without false modesty and without inflation.

Be specific and honest...

2. How much of last week did you actually spend inside that profile?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

Part 8 · Exercise 2: Energy Audit — What Fuels vs. Drains You

Energy Audit

What Fuels You, and What Quietly Costs You

Energy Is the Better Data

You can talk yourself into believing you enjoy a task. You can list its importance, its necessity, the reasons a good clinician would not complain about it. What you cannot argue with is how you feel at four in the afternoon. Energy is the most honest instrument you have for locating a strength, because it reports before your professional identity has time to intervene. Track it for one week and it will tell you things about your role that a year of reflection has not.

1. List the tasks from last week that left you with more energy than you started with. Be granular — "group" is not a task; "running a group where the newest member finally spoke" is.

Be specific and honest...

2. What do those have in common? Name the shared element rather than the shared category.

Be specific and honest...

3. When during the day do you have most access to that work? Most clinicians spend their best hours on their worst tasks and never notice they chose it.

Be specific and honest...

1. List the tasks that reliably cost you disproportionate energy for the result they produce.

Be specific and honest...

2. What share of a typical week is spent in that draining column?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

3. Which of these are genuinely necessary, and which have simply never been questioned by anyone including you?

Be specific and honest...

The reading makes a strong claim: burnout is not inevitable in this field, it is the predictable consequence of chronic strengths deprivation. Test that claim against your own history rather than accepting it.

1. Think of your worst professional period. What was your strengths ratio then, and how much of what you called burnout was actually a year spent outside your strong areas?

Be specific and honest...

2. Where in your week does working outside your strengths trigger the threat response the imaging research describes — defensiveness, narrowed thinking, procrastination? Name the specific recurring situation.

Be specific and honest...

1. Name one hour of next week you can move from the draining column into the fuelling column. What is it, and who needs to be told?

Be specific and honest...

2. What makes that hour hard to protect, and what is your actual answer when the pressure arrives?

Be specific and honest...

Part 9 · Exercise 3: Strengths-in-Action Journal

Strengths-in-Action Journal

Catching the Moments You Do Not Notice

Flow Leaves Fingerprints

The moments when you were operating at full capacity are the ones you are least likely to remember, because they did not feel like effort — and effort is what your memory files as work. So the good hours vanish and the hard ones stay, which is how a clinician ends a strong week convinced it was a poor one. This journal collects the evidence your memory discards.

1. Describe a recent moment where the work went unusually well and did not feel hard. What were you doing in the ten minutes before, during, and after?

Be specific and honest...

2. Which strength was carrying it? Name the strength first, then the specific behaviour that expressed it.

Be specific and honest...

3. What did the person on the other side of that moment get, that they would not have got from a competent clinician without that particular strength?

Be specific and honest...

4. Now a second moment, from a different part of the job — administrative, team, or supervisory rather than clinical.

Be specific and honest...

1. How often does your best work come out of the tasks that cost you the least?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

2. Where in your work does high effort reliably produce mediocre results? That gap is usually the edge of a strength zone, marked precisely.

Be specific and honest...

Strengths are not weather. They need conditions, and the conditions are usually mundane.

1. What conditions were present in those moments — time of day, caseload that week, who was in the room, how much preparation you had?

Be specific and honest...

2. Which of those conditions are actually within your control, and which have you been treating as fixed without checking?

Be specific and honest...

1. How often do you notice a strength in the moment rather than weeks later, if at all?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

2. For the next week, end each day with one sentence: which strength did I use today, and what did it produce? Write today's now.

Be specific and honest...

3. What normally stops you noticing this in real time?

Be specific and honest...

Part 10 · Exercise 4: Role-Strengths Alignment Map

Role-Strengths Alignment Map

Mapping the Job You Have Against the Strengths You Have

Alignment Is a Ratio, Not a Verdict

No role is a perfect fit, and a map that returns "this job is wrong for me" has usually been read too fast. The useful question is a percentage: what share of your week runs through your strengths, and is that share moving up or down over time? A clinician at seventy percent and a clinician at thirty percent are doing the same job with completely different careers ahead of them. This is Stage Two of the reading, and it is the stage most people skip on their way to complaining.

1. List the eight to ten recurring responsibilities that make up your week, with a rough share of your time against each. Use last week, not a typical week.

Be specific and honest...

2. Which of these did you choose, and which arrived without anyone asking you?

Be specific and honest...

1. Sort every responsibility into three lists: strongly aligned with your strengths profile, neutral, and misaligned. Write all three out.

Be specific and honest...

2. Overall, how well does your current role fit the strengths you named in Exercise 1?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

1. Take the single most misaligned responsibility that consumes real time. What specifically makes it hard for you — not what makes it hard in general?

Be specific and honest...

2. Is there anyone on your team who is strong exactly where you are weak on that task? Name them.

Be specific and honest...

1. How much of what you are genuinely good at is going unused in your current role?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

2. What are you good at that this role gives you almost no opportunity to use?

Be specific and honest...

3. What has it cost the team that this capability sits idle? Answer this as a manager would, not as a grievance.

Be specific and honest...

1. What is your current strengths-aligned percentage, and what is a realistic target six months out? Not the ideal — the realistic one.

Be specific and honest...

2. What is the first thing that would have to change for that number to move at all?

Be specific and honest...

Part 11 · Exercise 5: Team Strengths Appreciation Grid

Team Strengths Appreciation Grid

The Portfolio Nobody Is Managing

A Team Is a Strengths Portfolio, Managed or Not

Every treatment team already allocates work by strength to some degree — the difference is whether anyone is doing it deliberately. Left alone, allocation happens by seniority, by availability, by who spoke last in the meeting, and by who is too tired to refuse. The result is a team where several people are quietly excellent at things they are never asked to do. Stage Four of the reading is simply the decision to manage the portfolio on purpose.

1. List each close colleague and the one capability each brings that the team would genuinely miss. Specific enough that they would recognise themselves in it.

Be specific and honest...

2. Who on the team has a strength that is currently invisible, because their assigned role has never required it?

Be specific and honest...

3. What does your team consistently do well, and whose strengths is that quietly resting on?

Be specific and honest...

1. Which colleague's strengths most directly cover your weak areas? What would a deliberate working partnership on that look like in practice?

Be specific and honest...

2. How deliberately does your team allocate work by strength rather than by availability or seniority?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

1. Name a recurring task currently held by someone it does not suit, and the person it would suit better. Then answer the harder question: why has it not moved?

Be specific and honest...

Recognition of a capability is not the same as thanks for an effort, and clinicians can tell the difference instantly.

1. When did you last tell a colleague specifically what they are good at? Not gratitude — an observation about a capability, with evidence.

Be specific and honest...

2. Write what you will say to one colleague this week. The strength, the evidence, and the effect it had on a client or on the team.

Be specific and honest...

1. The research puts strengths-focused teams at 12.5% higher productivity. On your team specifically, what would that look like — which outcome, for which clients, improves?

Be specific and honest...

2. What is the smallest step toward a team strengths map that you could take this month without needing anyone's permission?

Be specific and honest...

Part 12 · Exercise 6: Strengths-Based Problem Solving

Strengths-Based Problem Solving

Attacking the Problem From Your Best Angle

Most Problems Are Approached From the Weakest Available Angle

When something is stuck, the default move is the standard protocol — the approach that belongs to nobody in particular and therefore draws on nobody's strength. It is defensible, it is documented, and it is often the reason the problem has not moved in three weeks. The alternative is not to abandon the protocol but to ask a different question first: what would this look like if I solved it with the thing I am actually best at?

1. Name a real problem in your work right now that has not moved in weeks. A client, a team dynamic, a process, a referral that keeps failing.

Be specific and honest...

2. How have you been attacking it so far, and which capability has that approach been running on?

Be specific and honest...

3. What have you already tried that did not work? For each attempt, name the strength it was built on — you may find they were all built on the same one.

Be specific and honest...

1. Take your top strength and apply it directly. What would a solution look like if it had to be built entirely out of that one capability?

Be specific and honest...

2. Now the same with your second strength. Two angles you would not otherwise have generated.

Be specific and honest...

1. How readily do you take problems to colleagues whose strengths are unlike yours?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

2. Whose strength is best suited to this problem? What exactly would you have to ask them, and what has stopped you asking so far?

Be specific and honest...

1. Which of these angles are you actually going to try, and by what date?

Be specific and honest...

2. What will tell you within two weeks whether it worked? Name the observable thing, not the feeling.

Be specific and honest...

Part 13 · Exercise 7: Job Crafting Action Plan

Job Crafting Action Plan

Amplify, Optimise, Partner

Crafting Is Not the Same as Complaining

The same request lands in two completely different ways depending on what it is built around. "I hate doing intakes" is a complaint, and a supervisor hears a problem to be managed. "I want to run the group programme because that is where I produce the most, and here is who could take the intakes and why it would suit them" is a proposal, and a supervisor hears a solution. Both may be true. Only one of them moves.

1. Which strengths-aligned activity do you want more of, and how much more? State it in hours per week, not as a wish.

Be specific and honest...

2. What would you produce with those hours that the organisation would actually notice and could point at?

Be specific and honest...

The middle move of Stage Three, and the one most available to you — nobody has to approve it.

1. Take a neutral task you cannot drop. How could you do it through one of your strengths instead of grinding through it as written?

Be specific and honest...

2. Which neutral task, done through a strength, would stop being neutral altogether?

Be specific and honest...

1. Which responsibility could be traded with a colleague so that both of you land closer to your strengths? Name the trade and both sides of it.

Be specific and honest...

2. How willing are you, in practice, to ask for a change in your responsibilities?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

1. Write the opening two sentences of that conversation, framed around what the organisation gets rather than what you want.

Be specific and honest...

2. What is the objection you expect, and what is your honest answer to it? If you have no answer, that is the work before the meeting.

Be specific and honest...

1. Three changes, each with a date and a first step. Write them out.

Be specific and honest...

2. Which one happens this week regardless of how the conversation goes?

Be specific and honest...

Part 14 · Exercise 8: Patient Care Strengths Integration

Patient Care Strengths Integration

What Reaches the Person in Front of You

The Fourth Cost Is the One That Matters

The reading lists four costs of deficit-focused practice — engagement, performance, retention, and patient care — and the fourth is not last because it is least. People early in recovery read a room faster than almost anyone, because for years their safety depended on it. They can tell when a clinician is present and when a clinician is running on fumes, and they draw conclusions from it about whether they are worth the effort. Your strengths ratio is not a private matter of job satisfaction. It arrives in the room ahead of you.

1. Which of your strengths does a client actually experience? Describe it from their chair, in what they would see and hear.

Be specific and honest...

2. Describe a specific clinical moment where a natural strength did more than the technique would have.

Be specific and honest...

3. What do you do in a session that you have never seen another clinician do?

Be specific and honest...

1. How different is the clinician your last client of the day gets from the one your first client gets?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not at all · Very much

2. Be exact about what changes as the day runs down — presence, patience, curiosity, follow-through. Which one goes first, and who has been receiving that version of you?

Be specific and honest...

1. Which kind of client do you do your best work with, and what is it about your strengths profile that explains it?

Be specific and honest...

2. Which kind do you struggle with? Name what that client actually needs, and whether it is something you would have to build or something you should borrow from a colleague.

Be specific and honest...

Your clients have spent years being assessed for deficits by systems, families and themselves. You are demonstrating a model whether or not you intend to.

1. Where do you genuinely do strengths-based work with clients, and where do you slip back into cataloguing what is wrong with them?

Be specific and honest...

2. Name one client this week whose strengths you will say out loud to them. Write the sentence you will use.

Be specific and honest...

1. What is the one change to how you run a session that would let more of your strength reach the person in front of you?

Be specific and honest...

Part 15 • Exercise 9: 7-Day Strengths Utilization Check-In

7-Day Strengths Utilization Check-In

Seven Days of Data Instead of One Impression

A Week Is More Honest Than a Reflection

Ask yourself right now what percentage of your work runs through your strengths and you will produce a number shaped by whatever happened this morning. Track it for seven days and you get something else entirely — a pattern, with days in it you would not have predicted. Five minutes at the end of each day is enough. The point is not the individual entries; it is the shape they make by Sunday.

One strength you deliberately used today, and what it produced.

Your response...

One task today that ran on something other than a strength. What did it cost you?

Your response...

One strength you saw in a colleague or a client today. Did you say it out loud?

Your response...

Did today tilt toward the growth response — curiosity, energy, wide thinking — or the threat response — defensiveness, narrowed focus, avoidance? Name what tipped it.

Your response...

Strengths utilisation today (1 = ran on weakness all day, 10 = worked from strength)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Ran on weakness · Worked from strength

One strength you deliberately used today, and what it produced.

Your response...

One task today that ran on something other than a strength. What did it cost you?

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Ran on weakness · Worked from strength

1. Add up the seven ratings. What is your average, and how does it compare to the number you would have guessed on Day 1?

Review your week...

2. Which day scored highest, and what was structurally different about it — caseload, schedule, who you worked with, what you were asked to do?

Review your week...

3. Which strength appeared most often across the week? That is your working strength, whatever your assessment results say.

Review your week...

4. How many days tilted toward the threat response rather than the growth response, and what was the common trigger?

Review your week...

5. What is the one change to how next week is built that would raise the average by a point? Name it as an action with a day attached.

Review your week...

Part 16 · Exercise 10: Strengths-Based Development Plan

Strengths-Based Development Plan

From Awareness to Practice, With Dates On It

Development Plans Fail Because They Are Written About the Wrong Person

Most professional development plans are addressed to a version of you who does not exist — one with more time, fewer clients, and no bad weeks. This one is addressed to the actual you, in the actual role, and it asks only for moves that would survive a difficult February. Select what is genuinely plausible in your setting, write each system in your own words, then commit to the single one that starts first.

Stage One of the reading. Which of these have you actually completed, rather than intended to?

Write this part of the plan in your own words — as if you were handing it to someone else to run:

Describe the practice, when it runs, and what makes it survive a bad week...

Deliberately increasing time inside your strengths. Choose what would survive a bad month, not what sounds impressive.

Write this part of the plan in your own words — as if you were handing it to someone else to run:

Describe the practice, when it runs, and what makes it survive a bad week...

The reading notes that supervision disproportionately reviews what went wrong. What would you change about how yours runs?

Write this part of the plan in your own words — as if you were handing it to someone else to run:

Describe the practice, when it runs, and what makes it survive a bad week...

Stage Four. Which of these could you start on your team without waiting for a policy?

Write this part of the plan in your own words — as if you were handing it to someone else to run:
Describe the practice, when it runs, and what makes it survive a bad week...

If burnout is chronic strengths deprivation, protection is a scheduling problem before it is a wellness one.

Write this part of the plan in your own words — as if you were handing it to someone else to run:
Describe the practice, when it runs, and what makes it survive a bad week...

Stage Five. Slower, and the only stage that outlasts you in the organisation.

Write this part of the plan in your own words — as if you were handing it to someone else to run:
Describe the practice, when it runs, and what makes it survive a bad week...

1. Which practice starts first, and on what day does it begin?

Make this concrete...

2. Which stage of the reading are you actually in — Discovery, Mapping, Application, Team Integration, or Culture Change — and what is the evidence for that answer rather than the flattering one?

Make this concrete...

3. Who will you tell about this plan, and who is allowed to ask you how it is going?

Make this concrete...

4. Write your strengths-based efficiency commitment statement. One paragraph, in your own words, specific enough that someone reading it in six months could tell whether you kept it.

Make this concrete...
