

Using Martin Seligman's Authentic Happiness Test for Team Building

by [Lyndsay Swinton](#)

Are you afraid that using Dr Martin Seligman's "[authentic happiness tests](#)" at work might get you laughed out of the board-room? Fear not! Let me explain how Seligman's signature strengths questionnaire built self awareness and understanding in my tiny team.

Dr Martin Who?

First things first, let's address the credibility question. [Dr Martin Seligman](#) is currently Professor of Psychology at the esteemed University of Pennsylvania and was President of the American Psychological Association. His rigorously tested research has determined what it takes to be happier, regardless of personal circumstance and his many books have been translated in to more than 16 languages. In short, he's a big hitter.

Positive Psychology and Authentic Happiness

Cynics and pessimists may think they've hit the jackpot when you start talking about positive psychology and authentic happiness. Well, they can sit quietly and drink from they're half empty glasses as you tell them that Seligman's research has demonstrated that it is possible "to feel more satisfied, to be more engaged with life, find more meaning, have higher hopes, and probably even laugh and smile more, regardless of one's circumstances."

I'd bet even the most seasoned cynic would benefit from a spoonful of that medicine. The clincher is the questionnaires are based on fact based research and are not the out-pouring of a maniacal management guru.

What do Signature Strengths have to do with team building?

It takes 20 minutes to fill in the VIA [Signature Strengths questionnaire](#). Each team member answered the free, online questionnaire and sent me a copy of their automatically generated results. You can see a summary of the team's results [here](#) – just click to enlarge the diagram :o)

Top Strength	Modesty and humility	Industry, diligence, and perseverance	Humor and playfulness	Zest, enthusiasm, and energy	Forgiveness and mercy
	You do not seek the spotlight, preferring to let your accomplishments speak for themselves. You do not regard yourself as special, and others recognize and value your modesty	You work hard to finish what you start. No matter the project, you "get it out the door" in timely fashion. You do not get distracted when you work, and you take satisfaction in completing tasks.	You like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. You try to see the light side of all situations	Regardless of what you do, you approach it with excitement and energy. You never do anything halfway or halfheartedly. For you, life is an adventure.	You forgive those who have done you wrong. You always give people a second chance. Your guiding principle is mercy and not revenge
Second Strength	Citizenship, teamwork, and loyalty	Creativity, ingenuity, and originality	Social intelligence	Curiosity and interest in the world	Humor and playfulness
	You excel as a member of a group. You are a loyal and dedicated teammate, you always do your share, and you work hard for the success of your group	Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible.	You are aware of the motives and feelings of other people. You know what to do to fit in to different social situations, and you know what to do to put others at ease.	You are curious about everything. You are always asking questions, and you find all subjects and topics fascinating. You like exploration and discovery.	You like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. You try to see the light side of all situations
Third Strength	Capacity to love and be loved	Hope, optimism, and future-mindedness	Curiosity and interest in the world	Kindness and generosity	Kindness and generosity
	You value close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated. The people to whom you feel most close are the same people who feel most close to you.	You expect the best in the future, and you work to achieve it. You believe that the future is something that you can control.	You are curious about everything. You are always asking questions, and you find all subjects and topics fascinating. You like exploration and discovery	You are kind and generous to others, and you are never too busy to do a favor. You enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if you do not know them well.	You are kind and generous to others, and you are never too busy to do a favor. You enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if you do not know them well.
Fourth Strength	Humor and playfulness	Gratitude	Fairness, equity, and justice	Creativity, ingenuity, and originality	Citizenship, teamwork and loyalty
	You like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. You try to see the light side of all situations	You are aware of the good things that happen to you, and you never take them for granted. Your friends and family members know that you are a grateful person because you always take the time to express your thanks.	Treating all people fairly is one of your abiding principles. You do not let your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people. You give everyone a chance.	Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible.	You excel as a member of a group. You are a loyal and dedicated teammate, you always do your share, and you work hard for the success of your group.
Fifth Strength	Kindness and generosity	Judgment, critical thinking, and open-mindedness	Love of learning	Fairness, equity, and justice	Social intelligence
	You are kind and generous to others, and you are never too busy to do a favor. You enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if you do not know them well.	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides are important aspects of who you are. You do not jump to conclusions, and you rely only on solid evidence to make your decisions. You are able to change your mind.	You love learning new things, whether in a class or on your own. You have always loved school, reading, and museums-anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn.	Treating all people fairly is one of your abiding principles. You do not let your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people. You give everyone a chance.	You are aware of the motives and feelings of other people. You know what to do to fit in to different social situations, and you know what to do to put others at ease.

There are many benefits of completing this survey

- Individuals learn what their signature strengths are, and can use this to increase their sense of well-being both at home and at work.
- Work-mates can better understand what makes each other “tick”
- Work can be organized around people’s strengths

How my team used the Signature Strengths questionnaire results

My team spent some time discussing their own and the team’s results and came up with the following conclusions and actions;

- They will use the knowledge to create more effective [Personal Development Plans](#), so they begin to use their strengths daily.
- To keep the 3 jokers happy, we started taking turns in leading [ice-breaker games](#) when we’re all together. It takes 10 minutes and is serious fun.
- We start the week with an informal catch-up, chatting about the weekend and sharing what our goals are for the week. This takes 30 minutes at most and is invaluable.
- We’ve introduced a charity fund-raising matching scheme – the company will match your fund-raising efforts up to £250 (about \$300 to 500, depending on the exchange rate :o)
- We’ve introduced a learning scheme – the company will contribute up to £100 for a non work related course. Our managing director is planning to take up guitar lessons and I’m planning attending a Glasgow school of art course in the summer.

Team's Strengths

Wisdom and knowledge						
<i>cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge</i>	Creativity		2		4	
	Curiosity			3	2	
	Open mindedness		5			
	Love of learning			5		
	Perspective					
Courage						
<i>emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal</i>	Bravery					
	Persistence		1			
	Integrity					
	Vitality				1	
Humanity						
<i>interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others</i>	Love	3				
	Kindness	5			3	3
	Social intelligence			2		5
Justice						
<i>civic strengths that underlie healthy community life</i>	Citizenship	2				4
	Fairness			4	5	
	Leadership					
Temperance						
<i>strengths that protect against excess</i>	Forgiveness and mercy					1
	Humility/modesty	1				
	Prudence					
	Self regulation					
Transcendence						
<i>strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning</i>	Appreciation of beauty and excellence					
	Gratitude		4			
	Hope		3			
	Humor	4		1		2
	Spirituality					

We looked at our signature strengths in the context of all 24 signature strengths and on a more detailed level we noticed

- Our performance manager (me) likes to “work hard to finish what you start”. Looks like I’m in the right job as this is my top signature strength – kicking butt makes me happy (nicely of course)!
- Our customer service administrator has 2 humanity signature strengths – interpersonal strengths that involve befriending and tending to others. Another person in the right job.
- Our managing director is an unstoppable force of nature – his zest, enthusiasm and energy make for an exhilarating, if occasionally exhausting, workplace. Without him we’d lose momentum.
- Our company, [Uncommon Knowledge](#), is in the right field (psychology and mental health training), as Wisdom and Knowledge and Humanity are two groups where we share many strengths.

Happy employees = happy customers = happy shareholders

Using Dr Martin Seligman’s authentic happiness tests, including the VIA Signature Strengths, provide powerful insights into what makes us and our team tick. Adjusting the workplace to enable people to utilize their strengths daily ensures their mental health and well-being. We all know [happy employees = happy customers = happy shareholders](#), so it’s company time well invested. No navel gazing required.