

Case studies

Using a Strength Finder Test for Mental Toughness

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Abstract

In the light of the mental distress in workplaces, it is important to create vital organisations. The Strength Finder Test and Mental Toughness training program are designed to help people draw on their individual strengths and improve their interactions. I have used them in various companies in Japan. The Strength Finder Test introduces Japanese Kanji characters to raise awareness of our strengths and improve employee communication. The Mental Toughness program introduces SF to the organisation.

Introduction

I developed my Mental Toughness program as an active mental health measure. In total 258 students participated in this program. All reported an increase in confidence. They said they acted more positively and appreciated their colleagues more. I had used “*Now Discover Your Strengths*” (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001) in my Mental Toughness seminars. However I found that the translated words of the strength elements, for example Significance, Intellection and Restorative etc., were too difficult for Japanese people to understand and are rarely used. I felt there were too few character strengths that Japanese people could relate to, so I therefore developed my Strength Finder Test, Gogen, especially for them.

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This tool has been developed following a psychological survey of approx. 1,500 people over a period of two years in cooperation with a professor and graduate students from the Hiroshima University Psychology Department. 32 character strengths represented by traditional Japanese Kanji characters are shown in the chart below. Kanji is used as the written image for each individual's strengths. We can interpret Kanji characters in different ways. They inspire our imagination and help us to accept our strengths. The Gogen five strengths test was easily accepted by Japanese people, as we can represent one strength in one Kanji character. A questionnaire of 207 questions automatically selects five Kanji character strengths (out of a possible 32) to show which suit that person best.

愛 (ai)	Love	勇 (isami)	Bravery	癒 (iyashi)	Healing
敬 (uyamai)	Respect	恩 (on)	Obligation	気 (ki)	Empathy
義 (gi)	Reason	極 (kiwami)	Perfectionism	謙 (ken)	Humility
志 (kokorozashi)	Ambition	策 (saku)	Strategy	情 (jou)	Mercy
信 (shin)	Belief	創 (sou)	Creativity	起 (tatsu)	Active
慎 (tsutsushimi)	Discretion	包 (tsutsumu)	Embracing	解 (toku)	Solution
望 (nozomi)	Futuristic	拝 (hai)	Worship	育 (hagukum)	Nurturing
率 (hikiiru)	Leadership	等 (hitoshiki)	Fairness	誠 (makoto)	Sincerity
学 (manabi)	Learning	雅 (miyabi)	Elegance	柔 (yawara)	Adaptability
結 (yui)	Connectivity	優 (yu)	Kindness	陽 (yo)	Brightness
律 (ritsu)	Controllability	和 (wa)	Peacefulness		

Many participants write down or print their five Kanji character strengths and carry them at all times in their wallets or bags to remind themselves of their talents and strengths. Some even find that their name matches some of their five strengths. They are surprised and happy when that happens, because they cherish their name given by their parents. I have received a lot of feedback explaining that their Kanji strengths also match their personality. They strive to lead lives to better suit their personality.

Using the Strength Finder Test in seminars and coaching

I use my Strength Finder Test Gogen and Strength cards in my seminars and for coaching. They allow people to talk about their own individual strengths. I have used my strengths cards as follows: firstly I divide participants into groups of 4/5 and get them to introduce themselves and talk about their assets. Next they choose strength cards for the other group members and tell them why they hand them that card. While individuals are listening to the reasons for their strengths, they seem so accepting and joyful, commenting: “I’m happy to receive praise for my good points from other people”. Surprisingly the participants can discover strengths in other group members even if they have just met for the first time.



Mental toughness training for students

We run a 2-day Mental Toughness training. The first day focuses on Strengths, while day 2 introduces SF. Before the training starts, the participants have already completed the Gogen Strength Finder test and received their 5 strengths.

After an introduction on mental toughness, the students talk to each other about their five strengths. Following that, they receive feedback from other members.

We look at the top 5 strengths. Sometimes strengths are perceived as weaknesses. I then tell them that my strongest element is “creativity”, which can also be understood as a

weakness. I could easily spend my time day dreaming if I didn't channel my energy. Strength and weakness are two sides of the same coin.

Then they make an artistic collage about their desired future to visualise how they would be taking advantage of their strengths.

At the end of the day, they exchange their own individual positive messages with each other. They spend the interval between the two seminar days, usually three or four weeks, focusing on their strengths every day.

On the second seminar day, I introduce SF. We start the workshop outdoors by the river near my office. The participants bring the collage they made on day one and place it on the top of a tree branch, bush or plant. They can look at it from up close or from far away. That way they can sense and feel different perspectives on their future perfect.

Next we do a scaling walk. In pairs they answer the following questions:

- Your mental toughness goal score is 10 and your start is 1. Please show me where your current score position is?
- Please tell me the reasons why you chose that scale score and what are your current resources?
- Let's both walk to score 10 position. You achieved your goal, so what are you thinking now you are standing here?
- Let's return now to your current score position. (You can change your score position.) How has this experience changed your goal position?
- What score is your target now? Please walk to that position now.
- How do you feel in this position? Suppose you got here, what would you have done to move up to this point? What went well? What did you gain or discover? Who helped and supported you? Did you make use of all your strengths?
- What will be your next step?

The physical scaling pair work increases self-resourcefulness and gives students a sense of self-achievement. “I can really do it on my own!”

At the end of the Mental Toughness program students declare their future intent. Standing in a circle, each participant stands up in turn and declares their intended plan of action to everyone, therefore increasing self-confidence and self-strength. We compliment each person with words of encouragement.

I received much feedback from the students’ questionnaires. For example, “Experiencing each program workshop was just like taking off different layers of armour”, “When I knew my strengths and became more aware of them, I began to value other people’s strengths”, “I feel greatly relaxed to know my own strengths”, “I felt relieved after I had realised and understood my strengths”, “I felt supported by my group members’ feedback”, “I noticed that taking advantage of my strengths rather than weaknesses leads to me believing in myself”.

Conclusion and Discussion

I have found that we gain self-confidence when we become more aware of our own strengths. In Japan we have few opportunities to talk about our strengths, as we are too humble and modest. The Strength Test and cards allow people to talk about it more easily.

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