

Strengths, values and virtue

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.” - Aristotle

Below are values in action as described by Peterson and Seligman after reviewing every list of virtues they could find, from structured religions to organizational guides. Although there isn't one specific virtue that occurred on every list, the researchers were able to distill six broad categories that appeared on nearly every list. I added a 7th to represent the growing emphasis around environment.

This is offered as a framework for global discussion and research, with Peterson and Seligman defining character strengths as specific ways of cultivating virtues through repetition and practice. Individuals and cultures will vary as to which virtues they hold in value; paths overlap within/across these lists.

Living your values is encouraged with the belief in its inherent gratification. Seligman describes gratifications as work or ways of being that engage you fully, draw on your strengths and immerse you in the experience of “flow” without self-consciousness. Review this list, **rate each of your values in action as 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = almost always** experience.

1) **Wisdom and knowledge: cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.**

	1	2	3	4
• Creativity: thinking of novel ways to do/express				
• Curiosity: Openness and wonder of the people and world around you				
• Open-mindedness: awareness of your framework & expanding into new perspectives				
• Love of learning: trying new skills, exploring topics, and deepening knowledge				
• Perspective: holding multiple views as having value				

2) **Courage: the exercise of emotions and will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.**

	1	2	3	4
• Authenticity: speaking your personal truth and presenting yourself genuinely				
• Bravery: not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain				
• Persistence: finishing your commitments to self				
• Zest: approaching life with excitement and energy				

3) **Humanity: interpersonal “tending and befriending” of the fabric of humankind.**

	1	2	3	4
• Kindness: addressing others with compassion and tenderness				
• Love: vulnerability and connection with others and self				
• Social intelligence: awareness and consideration of the values of self and others				
• Culture: honoring tradition and history				

4) Justice: civic actions that foster healthy community.

	1	2	3	4
• Fairness: equitable treatment of others to foster equal opportunity, precision				
• Leadership: modelling and/or organizing activities to navigate change and growth				
• Teamwork: working cohesively and authentically with others				
• Autonomy: exercising personal freedom				

5) Temperance: living life in balance.

	1	2	3	4
• Forgiveness: forgiving yourself and those around you				
• Modesty: contentment with doing (instead of announcing) strengths				
• Prudence: being aware of being at choice to create your results				
• Self-regulation: understanding your ability to respond, not react				

6) Transcendence: contemplation of meaning into connections to the universe.

	1	2	3	4
• Appreciation of beauty and excellence: noticing and marveling in the wonder around you				
• Gratitude: being aware of and thankful for tiny and grand experiences in your life				
• Hope: expecting the best and working to achieve it				
• Humor: seeing the levity in situations and experiences				
• Spirituality: experiences life as sacred and purposeful				

7) Environment: stewardship of planetary health.

	1	2	3	4
• Wonder: awe within and around nature				
• Stewardship: sense of connection to personal decisions impacting the environment				

Your core values are likely those that triggered your strongest response.

Contemplate: Which values in action did you rate as a 1 in your life? Which were 4?

Still exploring? What would you do/be/have if you had more resources? What would that lead to? Your goals, at their deepest root, are clues to your core values.

When we are acting upon our core values we are willing to break societal norms. Where do you find yourself stretching your behavior outside of your typical comfort zone?

Sources

Peterson C., Seligman M. E. P. (2004). Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/martin-seligman-psychology/>

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