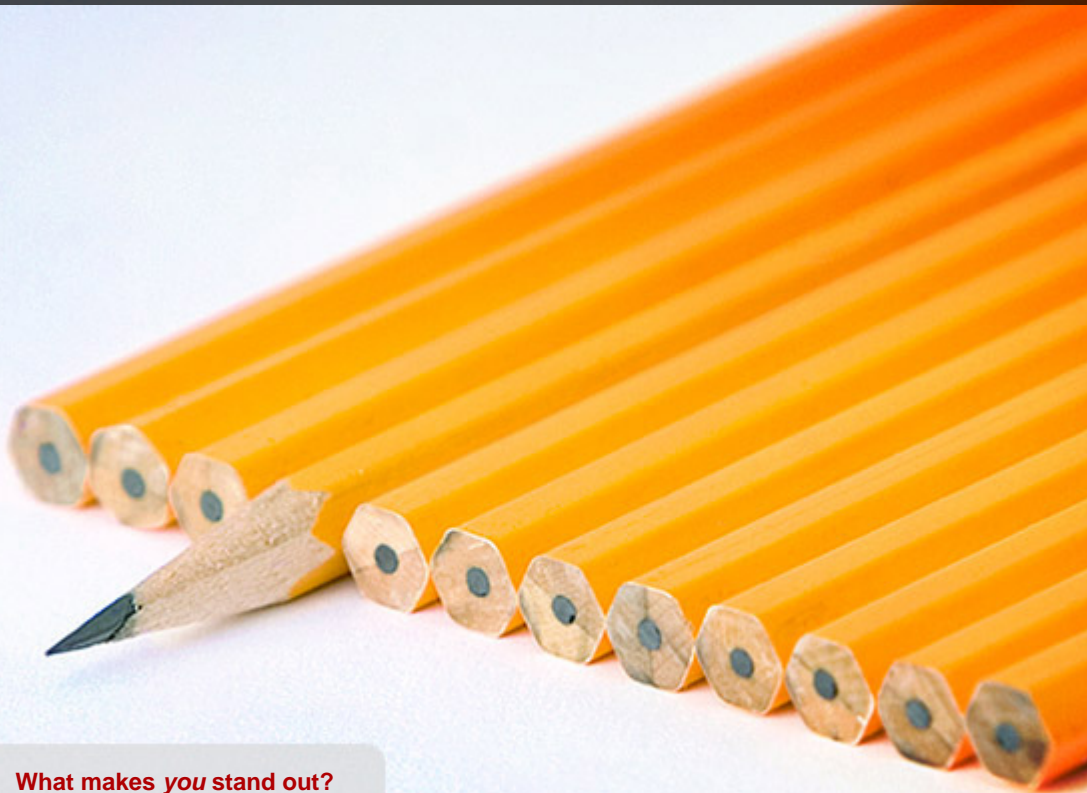


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Strengths Discovery and Action-Planning Guide



What makes *you* stand out?

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TODD STEVENS

Your Top 5 Themes

Strategic

Learner

Relator

Input

Achiever

What's in This Guide?

- For each of your top five themes, you will find:
 - A brief Shared Theme Description
 - Your Personalized Strengths Insights, which describe what makes you stand out from others with the same theme in their top five
 - Some examples of what the theme "sounds like" — real quotes from people who also have the theme in their top five
 - 10 Ideas for Action
- A Strengths Discovery Activity to get you thinking about how your talents and your investment work together to build strengths that you can apply to your work and personal life
- A Strengths-Based Action Plan for review with a friend, manager, or colleague

STRATEGIC

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

Driven by your talents, you customarily pinpoint the core problems and identify the best solutions. You artfully and skillfully eliminate distractions. This helps people gain a clear understanding of what is happening and why it is happening. You frequently identify ways to transform an obstacle into an opportunity. By nature, you notice that the right word usually pops into your mind just when you need it. Your comfort with language makes the oral or written expression of your ideas or feelings appear almost effortless. Others benefit from your ability to transmit information, thoughts, or emotions by using a vocabulary they can easily understand. It's very likely that you notice that multiple solutions to nagging problems automatically pop into your mind. You usually study each option from many different angles. After carefully evaluating the entire situation, you likely choose the alternative that makes the most sense. Why? You habitually aim to outscore or outperform most of your rivals most of the time. Chances are good that you long to know more so that you remain on the cutting edge of your field or areas of interest. Your inventive mind usually generates more possibilities than you can handle or fund. Nonetheless, you are committed to acquiring knowledge and/or skills. You study everything involved in a situation and conceive entirely new ways of seeing or doing things. What you already know prompts you to ask questions and delve even deeper into a subject or problem.

Strategic sounds like this:

Liam C., manufacturing plant manager: "It seems as if I can always see the consequences before anyone else can. I have to say to people, 'Lift up your eyes; look down the road a ways. Let's talk about where we are going to be next year so that when we get to this time next year, we don't have the same problems.' It seems obvious to me, but some people are just too focused on this month's numbers, and everything is driven by that."

Vivian T., television producer: "I used to love logic problems when I was a kid -- you know, the ones where 'if A implies B, and B equals C, does A equal C?' Still today, I am always playing out repercussions, seeing where things lead. I think it makes me a great interviewer. I know that nothing is an accident; every sign, every word, every tone of voice has significance. So I watch for these clues and play them out in my head, see where they lead, and then plan my questions to take advantage of what I have seen in my head."

Simon T., human resources executive: "We really needed to take the union on at some stage, and I saw an opportunity -- a very good issue to take them on. I could see that they were going in a

direction that would lead them into all kinds of trouble if they continued following it. Lo and behold, they did continue following it, and when they arrived, there I was, ready and waiting. I suppose it just comes naturally to me to predict what someone else is going to do. And then when that person reacts, I can respond immediately because I have sat down and said, 'Okay, if they do this, we'll do this. If they do that, then we'll do this other thing.' It's like when you tack in a sailboat. You head in one direction, but you jinx one way, then another, planning and reacting, planning and reacting."

Ideas for Action:

- Take the time to fully reflect or muse about a goal that you want to achieve until the related patterns and issues emerge for you. Remember that this musing time is essential to strategic thinking.
- You can see repercussions more clearly than others can. Take advantage of this ability by planning your range of responses in detail. There is little point in knowing where events will lead if you are not ready when you get there.
- Find a group that you think does important work, and contribute your strategic thinking. You can be a leader with your ideas.
- Your strategic thinking will be necessary to keep a vivid vision from deteriorating into an ordinary pipe dream. Fully consider all possible paths toward making the vision a reality. Wise forethought can remove obstacles before they appear.
- Make yourself known as a resource for consultation with those who are stumped by a particular problem or hindered by a particular obstacle or barrier. By naturally seeing a way when others are convinced there is no way, you will lead them to success.
- You are likely to anticipate potential issues more easily than others. Though your awareness of possible danger might be viewed as negativity by some, you must share your insights if you are going to avoid these pitfalls. To prevent misperception of your intent, point out not only the future obstacle, but also a way to prevent or overcome it. Trust your insights, and use them to ensure the success of your efforts.
- Help others understand that your strategic thinking is not an attempt to belittle their ideas, but is instead a natural propensity to consider all the facets of a plan objectively. Rather than being a naysayer, you are actually trying to examine ways to ensure that the goal is accomplished, come what may. Your talents will allow you to consider others' perspectives while keeping your end goal in sight.
- Trust your intuitive insights as often as possible. Even though you might not be able to explain them rationally, your intuitions are created by a brain that instinctively anticipates and projects. Have confidence in these perceptions.
- Partner with someone with strong Activator talents. With this person's need for action and your need for anticipation, you can forge a powerful partnership.
- Make sure that you are involved in the front end of new initiatives or enterprises. Your innovative yet procedural approach will be critical to the genesis of a new venture because it will keep its creators from developing deadly tunnel vision.

LEARNER

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

Driven by your talents, you earnestly direct your attention toward the ideas, issues, situations, or possibilities that stir your curiosity. In fact, you devote more time than most people do to exploring topics, problems, prospects, opportunities, or techniques that pique -- that is, arouse or excite -- your interest. When something has to be completed, you are eager to acquire the necessary knowledge or skills to meet the challenge. Instinctively, you yearn to be inspired by your work. You want experience to be your teacher. You need to feel enthused by your work or studies. You constantly acquire knowledge and skills. Whenever you study facts, ponder concepts, test theories, or sharpen your skills, you feel most alive. You are inclined to avoid people and situations that prevent you from expanding your mind. Chances are good that you may prefer to read, write, and ponder philosophies, theories, or concepts that interest you. You might prefer to be alone with your thoughts rather than engage people in small talk at a social event. Because of your strengths, you may be an individual performer who signs up for tough classes. Perhaps your desire to excel is amplified when the only path to a good grade is a steep one.

Learner sounds like this:

Annie M., managing editor: "I get antsy when I am not learning something. Last year, although I was enjoying my work, I didn't feel as though I was learning enough. So I took up tap dancing. It sounds strange, doesn't it? I know I am never going to perform or anything, but I enjoy focusing on the technical skill of tapping, getting a little better each week, and moving up from the beginners' class to the intermediate class. That was a kick."

Miles A., operations manager: "When I was seven years old, my teachers would tell my parents, 'Miles isn't the most intelligent boy in the school, but he's a sponge for learning, and he'll probably go really far because he will push himself and continually be grasping new things.' Right now, I am just starting a course in business-travel Spanish. I know it is probably too ambitious to think I could learn conversational Spanish and become totally proficient in that language, but I at least want to be able to travel there and know the language."

Tim S., coach for executives: "One of my clients is so inquisitive that it drives him crazy because he can't do everything he wants to. I'm different. I am not curious in that broad sense. I prefer to go into greater depth with things so that I can become competent in them and then use them at work. For example, recently one of my clients wanted me to travel with him to Nice, France, for a business

engagement. So I started reading up on the region, buying books, and checking the Internet. It was all interesting and I enjoyed the study, but I wouldn't have done any of it if I wasn't going to be traveling there for work."

Ideas for Action:

- Refine how you learn. For example, you might learn best by teaching; if so, seek out opportunities to present to others. You might learn best through quiet reflection; if so, find this quiet time.
- Develop ways to track the progress of your learning. If there are distinct levels or stages of learning within a discipline or skill, take a moment to celebrate your progression from one level to the next. If no such levels exist, create them for yourself (e.g., reading five books on the subject or making three presentations on the subject).
- Be a catalyst for change. Others might be intimidated by new rules, new skills, or new circumstances. Your willingness to soak up this newness can calm their fears and spur them to action. Take this responsibility seriously.
- Seek roles that require some form of technical competence. You will enjoy the process of acquiring and maintaining this expertise.
- As far as possible, shift your career toward a field with constantly changing technologies or regulations. You will be energized by the challenge of keeping up.
- Because you are not threatened by unfamiliar information, you might excel in a consulting role (either internal or external) in which you are paid to go into new situations and pick up new competencies or languages quickly.
- Research supports the link between learning and performance. When people have the opportunity to learn and grow, they are more productive and loyal. Look for ways to measure the degree to which you and others feel that your learning needs are being met, to create individualized learning milestones, and to reward achievements in learning.
- At work, take advantage of programs that subsidize your learning. Your organization may be willing to pay for part or all of your instructional coursework or for certifications. Ask your manager for information about scholarships and other educational opportunities.
- Honor your desire to learn. Take advantage of adult educational opportunities in your community. Discipline yourself to sign up for at least one new academic or adult learning course each year.
- Time disappears and your attention intensifies when you are immersed in studying or learning. Allow yourself to "follow the trail" by scheduling learning sessions during periods of time that will not be interrupted by pressing engagements.

RELATOR

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

Driven by your talents, you sometimes identify with people who share their ambitions, hopes, or intentions with you. Because of your strengths, you occasionally feel in sync with life when you have clarified either your own or someone else's performance objectives. Perhaps you enjoy talking with certain types of people who seem to be aware of their personal or professional goals. By nature, you embody the adage: "If you want to get something done, ask a busy person." You deliver peak performances when you can tackle a task. You experience tremendous satisfaction each time you accomplish something. You probably like being held accountable for your actions and words. Chances are good that you might do your best training after you become well-acquainted with someone. Perhaps you want to discover each individual's unique personality traits, work style, goals, motivations, interests, or talents. Maybe these insights tell you what suggestions to make or what tips to offer during coaching sessions.

Relator sounds like this:

Gavin T., flight attendant: "I have many wonderful acquaintances, but as for true friends that I hold dear, not very many. And I'm real okay with that. My best times are spent with the people I'm tightest with, like my family. We are a very tight-knit Irish Catholic family, and we get together every chance we can. It's a large family -- I have five brothers and sisters and ten nieces and nephews -- but we all get together about once a month and yuk it up. I'm the catalyst. When I'm back in Chicago, even if there is no birthday or anniversary or whatever, I become the excuse for getting together and hanging out for three or four days. We really enjoy one another's company."

Tony D., pilot: "I used to fly in the Marines, and, boy, you had better be comfortable with the word 'friend' in the Marines. You had better feel good about trusting someone else. I can't tell you how many times I put my life in someone else's hands. I was flying off my friend's wing, and I'd be dead if he couldn't get me back safely."

Jamie T., entrepreneur: "I'm definitely selective about my relationships. When I first meet people, I don't want to give them very much of my time. I don't know them; they don't know me -- so let's just be pleasant and leave it at that. But if circumstances make it so that we get to know each other better, it seems like a threshold is reached where I suddenly start wanting to invest more. I'll share more of myself, put myself out for them, do things for them that will bring us a little closer, and show that I care. It's funny because I am not looking for any more friends in my life. I have enough. And yet with each new person I meet, as soon as that threshold is reached, I feel compelled to go deeper and deeper. Now I have ten people working for me, and I would call each of them my very good friend."

Ideas for Action:

- Find a workplace in which friendships are encouraged. You will not do well in an overly formal organization. In job interviews, ask about work styles and company culture.
- Deliberately learn as much as you can about the people you meet. You like knowing about people, and other people like being known. By doing this, you will act as a catalyst for trusting relationships.
- Let it be known that you are more interested in the character and personality of others than in their status or job title. This is one of your greatest talents and can serve as a model for others.
- Let your caring show. For example, find people in your company to mentor, help your colleagues get to know each other better, or extend your relationships beyond the office.
- No matter how busy you are, stay in contact with your friends. They are your fuel.
- Be honest with your friends. True caring means helping the other person be successful and fulfilled. Giving honest feedback or encouraging your friend to move out of a role in which he or she is struggling is a compassionate act.
- You probably prefer to be seen as a person, an equal, or a friend, rather than as a function, a superior, or a title. Let people know that they can address you by your first name, rather than formally.
- You might tend to withhold the most engaging aspects of your personality until you have sensed openness from another person. Remember, building relationships is not a one-way street. Proactively "put yourself out there." Others will quickly see you for the genuine individual you are, and you will create many more opportunities to cultivate strong, long-lasting connections.
- Make time for family and close friends. You need to spend quality moments with those you love in order to "feed" your Relator talents. Schedule activities that allow you to get even closer to the people who keep you grounded and happy.
- Make an effort to socialize with your colleagues and team members outside of work. It can be as simple as lunch or coffee together. This will help you forge more connected relationships at work, which in turn can facilitate more effective teamwork and cooperation.

INPUT

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

By nature, you may pay close attention to specific categories of current events. Some people merely

recount what they heard, saw, or read. Perhaps you dive deeper into the topic. You might generate a few theories, concepts, or philosophies to explain some of the reasoning behind certain newsmakers' decisions. Sometimes, you can gather information about events, policy statements, people, or crises. Your fresh insights might draw equally engaged thinkers into the conversation. Because of your strengths, you may relish conversations with specific people whose vocabularies are as sophisticated as their thinking. Discussing certain philosophies, theories, or concepts with them might prove to be exhilarating. Perhaps you do not have to translate this or that word or explain the basic points of a complex thought. You might like to ask questions and be readily understood. Occasionally, you pull together insights so that you can use some of this knowledge later. Instinctively, you frequently use academic sounding words to talk about your ideas or areas of expertise. You intentionally spend time broadening your vocabulary by looking up words in the dictionary and committing their meanings to memory. It's very likely that you may interpret and straightforwardly outline ideas, processes, or projects that some people have difficulty understanding.

Input sounds like this:

Ellen K., writer: "Even as a child, I found myself wanting to know everything. I would make a game of my questions. 'What is my question today?' I would think up these outrageous questions, and then I would go looking for the books that would answer them. I often got in way over my head, deep into books that I didn't have a clue about, but I read them because they had my answer someplace. My questions became my tool for leading me from one piece of information to another."

John F., human resources executive: "I'm one of those people who thinks that the Internet is the greatest thing since sliced bread. I used to feel so frustrated, but now if I want to know what the stock market is doing in a certain area or the rules of a certain game or what the GNP of Spain is or other different things, I just go to the computer, start looking, and eventually find it."

Kevin F., salesperson: "I'm amazed at some of the garbage that collects in my mind, and I love playing Jeopardy and Trivial Pursuit and anything like that. I don't mind throwing things away as long as they're material things, but I hate wasting knowledge or accumulated knowledge or not being able to read something fully if I enjoy it."

Ideas for Action:

- Look for jobs in which you are charged with acquiring new information each day, such as teaching, research, or journalism.
- Devise a system to store and easily locate information. This can be as simple as a file for all the articles you have clipped or as sophisticated as a computer database.
- Partner with someone with dominant Focus or Discipline talents. This person will help you stay on track when your inquisitiveness leads you down intriguing but distracting avenues.
- Your mind is open and absorbent. You naturally soak up information in the same way that a sponge soaks up water. But just as the primary purpose of the sponge is not to permanently contain what it absorbs, neither should your mind simply store information. Input without

output can lead to stagnation. As you gather and absorb information, be aware of the individuals and groups that can most benefit from your knowledge, and be intentional about sharing with them.

- You might naturally be an exceptional repository of facts, data, and ideas. If that's the case, don't be afraid to position yourself as an expert. By simply following your Input talents, you could become known as the authority in your field.
- Remember that you must be more than just a collector of information. At some point, you'll need to leverage this knowledge and turn it into action. Make a point of identifying the facts and data that would be most valuable to others, and use this information to their advantage.
- Identify your areas of specialization, and actively seek more information about them.
- Schedule time to read books and articles that stimulate you.
- Deliberately increase your vocabulary. Collect new words, and learn the meaning of each of them.
- Identify situations in which you can share the information you have collected with other people. Also make sure to let your friends and colleagues know that you enjoy answering their questions.

ACHIEVER

Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

Your Personalized Strengths Insights

What makes you stand out?

It's very likely that you occasionally work in earnest to coordinate plans, events, and projects. You might orchestrate a cross-country move, accommodate a handicapped person's special needs, or direct a community event. Instinctively, you sometimes spend hours assessing the reasons why you failed or missed a goal. In other instances, you may examine why you were caught off guard by a crisis, stalled by a problem, or stymied by an obstacle. When you arm yourself with the right answers, you might attempt to do certain things better. You might try to break through some barriers and succeed. Driven by your talents, you sometimes invest much physical or mental energy doing what you know you do well. Perhaps your selectivity is the key to your success. To some extent, your work ethic enables you to reach desirable goals. Because of your strengths, you might earnestly evaluate problems by identifying the basics facts. Perhaps you let reason rather than emotion guide you to the proper solution or conclusion.

Achiever sounds like this:

Melanie K., ER nurse: "I have to rack up points every day to feel successful. Today I've been here only half an hour, but I've probably racked up thirty points already. I ordered equipment for the ER, I

had equipment repaired, I had a meeting with my charge nurse, and I brainstormed with my secretary about improving our computerized logbook. So on my list of ninety things, I have thirty done already. I'm feeling pretty good about myself right now."

Ted S., salesperson: "Last year I was salesperson of the year out of my company's three hundred salespeople. It felt good for a day, but sure enough, later that week, it was as if it never happened. I was back at zero again. Sometimes I wish I wasn't an achiever because it can lead me away from a balanced life and toward obsession. I used to think I could change myself, but now I know I am just wired this way. This theme is truly a double-edged sword. It helps me achieve my goals, but on the other hand, I wish I could just turn it off and on at will. But, hey, I can't. I can manage it and avoid work obsession by focusing on achieving in all parts of my life, not just work."

Sara L., writer: "This theme is a weird one. First, it's good because you live in pursuit of the perpetual challenge. But in the second place, you never feel as though you've reached your goal. It can keep you running uphill at seventy miles an hour for your whole life. You never rest because there's always more to do. But, on balance, I think I would rather have it than not. I call it my 'divine restlessness,' and if it makes me feel as if I owe the present everything I have, then so be it. I can live with that."

Ideas for Action:

- Select jobs that allow you to have the leeway to work as hard as you want and in which you are encouraged to measure your own productivity. You will feel challenged and alive in these environments.
- As an achiever, you relish the feeling of being busy, yet you also need to know when you are "done." Attach timelines and measurement to goals so that effort leads to defined progress and tangible outcomes.
- Remember to build celebration and recognition into your life. Achievers tend to move on to the next challenge without acknowledging their successes. Counter this impulse by creating regular opportunities to enjoy your progress and accomplishments.
- Your drive for action might cause you to find meetings a bit boring. If that's the case, appeal to your Achiever talents by learning the objectives of each meeting ahead of time and by taking notes about progress toward those objectives during the meeting. You can help ensure that meetings are productive and efficient.
- Continue your education by attaining certifications in your area or specialty in addition to attending conferences and other programs. This will give you even more goals to achieve and will push your existing boundaries of accomplishment.
- You do not require much motivation from others. Take advantage of your self-motivation by setting challenging goals. Set a more demanding goal every time you finish a project.
- Partner with other hard workers. Share your goals with them so they can help you to get more done.
- Count personal achievements in your scoring "system." This will help you direct your Achiever talents toward family and friends as well as toward work.

- More work excites you. The prospect of what lies ahead is infinitely more motivating than what has been completed. Launch initiatives and new projects. Your seemingly endless reserve of energy will create enthusiasm and momentum.
- Make sure that in your eagerness to do more at work, you do not skimp on quality. Create measurable outcome standards to guarantee that increased productivity is matched by enhanced quality.

Strengths Discovery Activity

As you begin to think about your talents, consider this equation:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Talent (a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving)} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ Investment (time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building} \\ \text{your knowledge base)} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ Strength (the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance)} \end{array}$$

Here is an example:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Talent is: Truly listening to your customers' wants and needs} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ Investment is: Researching products and keeping up-to-date on the industry} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ Strength is: Consistently providing near-perfect customer service} \end{array}$$

Now, think about what *you* naturally do best. How can you invest in that talent to build strength?

Do your own Strengths Discovery Interview:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Your Talent is:} \quad \underline{\hspace{15em}} \\ \mathbf{X} \text{ Your Investment is:} \quad \underline{\hspace{15em}} \\ \hline \mathbf{=} \text{ Your Strength is:} \quad \underline{\hspace{15em}} \end{array}$$

My Strengths-Based Action Plan

Now that you have discovered your top five themes and considered action items for development, choose 1-3 themes that describe you best, and list them below. Talk to people who know you well, and ask them to describe how you embody these themes. Ask them for specific examples of times when they have seen you using each theme in action or how each theme manifests itself in you.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Now, write down some specific actions that you could take in the next week, month, and year to build and apply your strengths. Refer to your Personalized Strengths Insights and Ideas for Action if you need help.

In the next week, I will:

In the next month, I will:

In the next year, I will:

Next, list the name of at least one person who you will meet with to review this plan. Be sure to choose someone who can help you to keep these goals "top of mind" and who will help you leverage your talents to build strengths.

Name: _____ Date reviewed: _____

Name: _____ Date reviewed: _____