

This is Eastern Michigan University's Career Corner, and welcome to season two: Finding Your Fit.

Welcome back to the Career Corner podcast. My name is Barb Gehring, one of the career coaches in the University Advising and Career Development Center here at EMU. I'm joined with my fellow host and career coach, April Calkovsky. Welcome to the podcast, and thank you for hosting this episode with me today.

Thanks so much for the introduction, Barb. I'm really excited to be here discussing this episode about how students can uncover their strengths, and how that will impact their career development.

In today's episode, we're going to empower students by sharing ways that they can uncover their strengths while highlighting how this will impact their career development. So April, I know you and I are both very passionate about this subject. Your expertise around this topic is greatly valued and appreciated. In the spirit of this topic, can you start by sharing with our listeners ways in which they're able to determine what their strengths are?

So the term strengths is really referring to an official tool called Clifton strengths. Some might have heard of this as Strengths Finder or Strengths Quest. For our purposes, we are just shortening it to strengths. We want to learn more about our strengths to help us identify what we are good at, how we can contribute to a team, and even what types of job functions we might really excel in given a work environment. This type of self-awareness comes in really handy when seeking a career, and when describing yourself during an interview.

Anyone can visit strengthsquest.com to take the official assessment for \$12.99, and learn their top five strengths, or themes of strength. The assessment tool asks you 186 questions about your preferences along a continuum between two points. For instance, I love being around people, or I love spending time alone. You only have 20 seconds to answer each question because you really want to trust your instincts when answering questions. The website has great reports that will help me better understand your specific combination of strengths how they can help you excel, things to watch out for, and ways you can further build your strengths.

Since the official tool does cost money, we career coaches in the US CDC have created a way to make use of strengths free of charge. Our process involves a card sort that allows you to determine your top 10 to 12 strengths and talk through those with us so that we can make sure you're working with the best information possible. We have you read through brief descriptions of the strength to see

which ones resonate with you the most, which ones really feel like, yes, this totally sounds like me. Once we've narrowed down the strengths that describe you, we get into a great discussion about how to use this information.

That was a great description of tools available. We know that career development has many aspects. This is one resource that will allow you to jump into your career development. While you will still continue to learn much more from our additional podcast episodes, this knowledge adds value to many aspects of your life.

Absolutely, Barb, and we are here to support and coach you through your path. It is so important to know ourselves in order to find the career options that are going to fill us with purpose and bring meaning to our lives and sustain us in ways beyond a paycheck. We really want all of our students to live full lives.

I am sure our listeners are wondering how this information might be useful. One thing we do know is knowledge is power. So the more you know about yourselves more empowered you become in your career development. Our goal is to provide you with the tools needed to know your strengths and be skilled at describing them and a polished and professional way. April, it would be great if you could explain some ways that knowing your strengths can benefit our listeners in their career development.

Certainly, Barb. One of my favorite ways to use the knowledge of our strengths is supporting our interviewing techniques. The theme description cards we use provide great statements that can be mashed together and tweaked to answer that tough first question, "So tell me about yourself." When you have 10 to 12 strengths, you can use the "I am" statements from those two to five of those cards to create a great answer. Additionally, you can more thoughtfully answer questions like, "What are some of your strengths?" Or, "What is your key strength?" And, "What is one of your weaknesses?" Or, "What is something you struggle with?" Employers want real answers to these questions, not the same old answers everyone gives like, "My strength is the ability to learn quickly," Or, "To be a great team player."

When you know your themes of strength you can go deeper. You can instead say, "I'm a relationship builder. I care about getting to know my team members in a way that maximizes our productivity and helps us work better together." When it comes to weaknesses, they don't want to hear, "Oh, I could be better at time management." Instead, you can use your knowledge of your strengths to talk about what happens when you're off kilter.

Say you're having a bad day or didn't get enough sleep. That's when your strengths actually become your weaknesses. Instead of being structured and disciplined, when you're off kilter, that looks like stubbornness and inflexibility to other people. In an interview, you could say something like, "While being structured and disciplined is usually a strength of mine, I recognize that I'm feeling overwhelmed or stressed, I can be perceived as inflexible. What I do when I recognize that is happening is I use my ability to be empathetic and a good communicator to listen to the concerns of others and return to my more adaptable self."

Finally I love to help students craft answers to, "Why should we hire you?" Or, "What are you going to bring to our team?" The theme descriptions cards are really helpful with that as well. We also want to know where we don't have strength. We don't have to be strong in everything. We can't be. We need to know where is that I'm strong, and where do I need support? And then use our strengths to help us find those people who have strength where we do not. Even though we aren't using the official assessment, we can really benefit from the card sort.

What a great explanation, April. Thank you so much. This topic is so exciting because it really allows our listeners to increase their personal awareness. It's also such an excellent tool to have when navigating not only your career path, but your life overall. It helps to identify where you might be in need of those around you to have the opposite strengths as you, to find success in class and work situations. I think this will be a great time to provide our listeners with the ways in which they can begin to learn about their strengths. Can you share ways that they can begin learning their strengths and how to best utilize them in their career development process?

Absolutely, Barb. One option is to pay for the official assessment at strengthsquest.com. It costs about \$12.99, but EMU students and alumni are welcome to use the card sort method free of charge. So schedule an appointment with a career coach through Handshake, or by calling our office. Let us know in the appointment message that you want to complete the straight assessment, and we can send the cards to you via email with instructions for completing the exercise before our appointment. Then during the appointment, we will dive into the meaning of your results and how to use this information to your advantage.

Being prepared is a key component to building confidence. We know that you have so many things to focus on with your schoolwork, the uncertainty of things going on in the world, and the well-being of you and your loved ones. Knowing your strengths could help with some of these by allowing you to know what your strengths are and how to best utilize them in your daily life. We are here for you, and when you are ready to begin this journey.

So to wrap things up, remember that you can schedule an appointment through Handshake, or by calling our office to meet with me, Barb, or other amazing career coaches Logann and Brad. Remember, we are here to support you in learning all you need to know regarding your personal career development journey.

Well, Eagles, we thank you for listening to our podcast today. Stay tuned for next week's episode: Experiential Learning: Internships, Co-ops, and Volunteer Work and How to Find Them, hosted by myself and Logann. As always, stay safe, stay healthy, and remember that we're here for you and we support your goals.