

Discover Your Natural Strengths: The Key to Happiness is Being True to You

by Desiree Bauer

Mary groans and rolls over as she hits the snooze button again. Sighing she thinks about the day ahead of her as she washes her antidepressant down with a gulp of water. “Another day, another dollar”, she muses. At least the meds will take some of the sting out of it.

Mary works in the customer service department of a major computer company. She fell into the job while she was looking for work last year. She hates listening to customer complaints hour after long hour. She thinks it’s the company’s responsibility to build a better product and the customer’s responsibility to read the manual. Computers, after all, are based on logic. She gets totally frustrated trying to explain the details to cranky customers who aren’t logical at all. And the phone. It never quits ringing. Oh, how she hates Mondays.

Colleen wakes up before the alarm rings full of anticipation about her day. She works with Mary in the customer service department at the same computer company. But, unlike Mary, she looks forward to another day of trouble-shooting customer complaints and turning those cranky people into loyal customers. Every ring of the phone is an opportunity. Every problem is a challenge. Every customer is a friend in the making. She bounces out of bed looking forward to another day on the job.

Why are these two people living such different realities working the same job in the same company? Colleen’s choice of work is based on her own personal strengths for trouble-shooting problems and her deep desire to make people happy. Sadly, Mary hasn’t identified her natural strengths and is paying the price for it both physically and mentally. She has decided that any job is better than nothing. Mary has yet to learn that living a personal and professional life based on your natural strengths is the foundation of success and satisfaction.

Where do our strengths come from? Our brains can naturally be divided into four areas, each with its own functionally specialized type of thinking. The chemical bath and the amount of electrical resistance around each area determine the amount of energy used to complete certain tasks. If the area has little electrical resistance then its specific type of thinking is performed extremely fast. We call it a natural strength because it is efficient, easy to do and comes naturally to us. A strength is the type of thinking that we default to first, and then we continue to use the other areas of our brains to complete the tasks demanded of us. Let’s take a look at what those sections are all about.

The frontal left portion of the brain is responsible for our analytical and logical thinking. Frontal Lefts are usually very decisive and enjoy leading others. You’ll notice that in a group of people who have gotten together to work on a project, it doesn’t take long for someone to come forward and take the responsibility for directing the group. They are usually Frontal Lefts. They are naturally skilled at decision-making, setting priorities and negotiating. Frontal Lefts believe that there is always a logical solution and will put logic before feelings. Others may see them as cold and uncaring but that’s only because it takes their brain longer to access their warm, fuzzy side. Frontal Lefts also fully believe

in the right toll for the right job. They are easy to identify since they likely have a garage full of tools or a kitchen full of gadgets.

Frontal Rights are creative, visionary people that enliven our imagination with the possibilities of what could be. They are naturally talented at seeing the picture and are very intuitive about trends. Frontal Rights are often involved in creating new business. They are leaders in invention and innovation and are likely to have the latest technogadgets. They are exceptional at trouble-shooting and problem solving. They also have a wacky sense of humour that keeps them in stitches and the rest of us, too when we finally get the joke! Front Rights are easy to identify since they likely have “piling” systems, not filing systems. Those of us who live or work with them soon learn that they see every horizontal surface as an opportunity to stack something. Frontal Rights are usually adverse to detailed paperwork and prefer to be creating rather than making sure that the i’s are dotted and the t’s are crossed. They are usually the last to file their Income tax return every year.

Basal Lefts, on the other hand, are very detail-oriented and love to make sure that every bit of information is carefully recorded and easily located. They believe that everything has a place and everything should be in its place. After all, that’s what makes the world work efficiently and effectively. Basal Lefts have read the Policies and Procedures manual – and expect that you have, too – and they also know where that big binder is located. They are exceptionally talented at holding to and monitoring deadlines and schedules, performing routine tasks – whether operational or administrative. They believe in the rules and abide by the rules. Basal Lefts are continually amazed that Frontal Rights survive!

Basal Rights are the warm, people-oriented folks that we all love to around. They are naturally gifted at making sure that we are happy, comfortable and well looked after. Harmony and peace are a priority for Basal Rights. They are highly intuitive about people and sensitive to body language. They dislike friction and will go out of their way to be the peacemakers both at home and at work. Basal Rights are likely to organize the company bowling league, remember everyone’s birthday and send handwritten cards and notes to keep in touch.

Getting back to Mary and Colleen, it would be safe to assume that Mary is a Frontal Left (analyzer) and not the Basal Right (empathizer) that is needed to successfully do her job. Being naturally logical and analytical, her natural weakness is that she puts logic over feelings and therefore doesn’t have much compassion for her customer’s problems. Consequently, her customer satisfaction rating is very low and both she and her employer are frustrated by her inability to perform up to the standards required despite all of the training programs she’s attended.

Like 75% of us¹, since Mary is working all day using an area of natural weakness, she will be burning up to 100 times more energy to get through her day. It’s no wonder she is stressed out and fatigued. She will likely gain weight as she constantly reaches for more carbs to supply her brain with the fuel she needs to function. She will become frustrated as she struggles to manage her weight without success. If she continues in this job, she will be on a downward spiral to poor health. She will become overwhelmed, exhausted,

¹ Dr. Katherine Benziger, PhD

depressed and chronically anxious. She is already part of the 77% of Canadian workers using her benefits plan for mental health issues and chances are that she will become one of the 75% of Canadian workers who will end up on short-term disability leave.² Being the wrong person for this job will ultimately cost Mary her health and the cost to her employer's bottom line and the health care system will be enormous. If Mary had identified her strengths and chosen a job based on those strengths, she would be living a much more positive life.

As for Colleen, she chose a career based on her strengths. She is quite likely a Frontal Right-Basal Right combination which would give her strong trouble-shooting abilities as well as a deep desire to make her customers happy. She enjoys her job, her customers love her and the company benefits from her high customer satisfaction ratings. Colleen is energized by her work and still has time and energy at the end of the day to enjoy her family and her hobbies.

So where do you fit in? Are you an analyzer, visualizer, organizer or empathizer? How do you feel at the end of your day? Will you be collapsing on your couch or looking forward to an evening doing the things you enjoy? For optimal health and happiness, ensure that at least 51% of your day is spent using your natural strengths.

If you are continually fatigued, depressed and catching every bug that goes around, then perhaps it's time to do an analysis of your personal and professional life. Identify your strengths and then adjust your life to fit you! Recognize that you were born with natural strengths and your challenge is to find out what they are. When you base your life and career on your strengths, you will spend your days feeling good. When you feel good, you will enjoy a successful and satisfying life. Isn't that what we all want?

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² Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004 Study