

United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

EPA 210-K-98-002

Institute for Individual and Organizational Excellence

(3605)



# **Developing Your Strengths**

**Guidance for Individual Development  
and Continuous Personal Improvement**

**Edition 1**

# Why Develop Your Strengths?

- ❖ make your job more engaging and rewarding
- ❖ increase your value to your organization
- ❖ begin learning a lot more about matters that are interesting to you and relevant to the Agency's work

This is a do-it-yourself guide to help you create, in just a few weeks, an individual development plan to enhance your career and your overall group or team contribution.

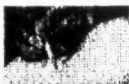
## Peak Work Experiences

Looking at your entire life experience, can you recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, or most excited about your job? (Think about current and earlier work experiences, or experiences outside of work. Recall efforts that went well; in which you invested time and energy.)

*What made those experiences exciting?*



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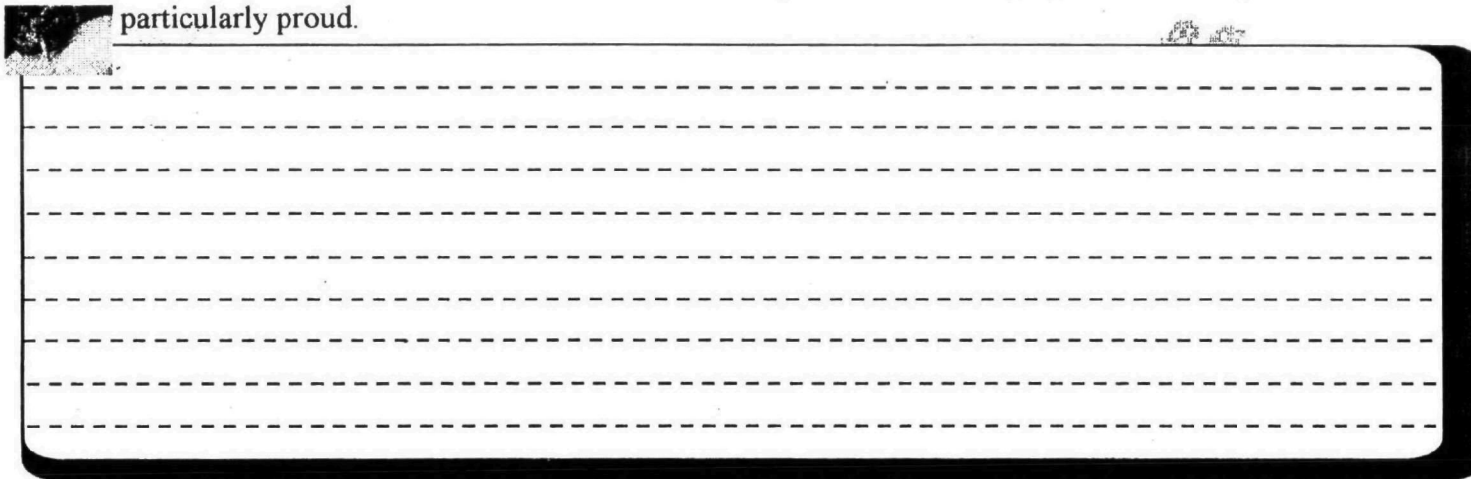
## Values -- What are the qualities you value most about:

***Yourself*** -- Without being humble, what do you value the most about yourself -- as a human being, a friend, a family member? (For example, "I care about other people and I value that about me.")

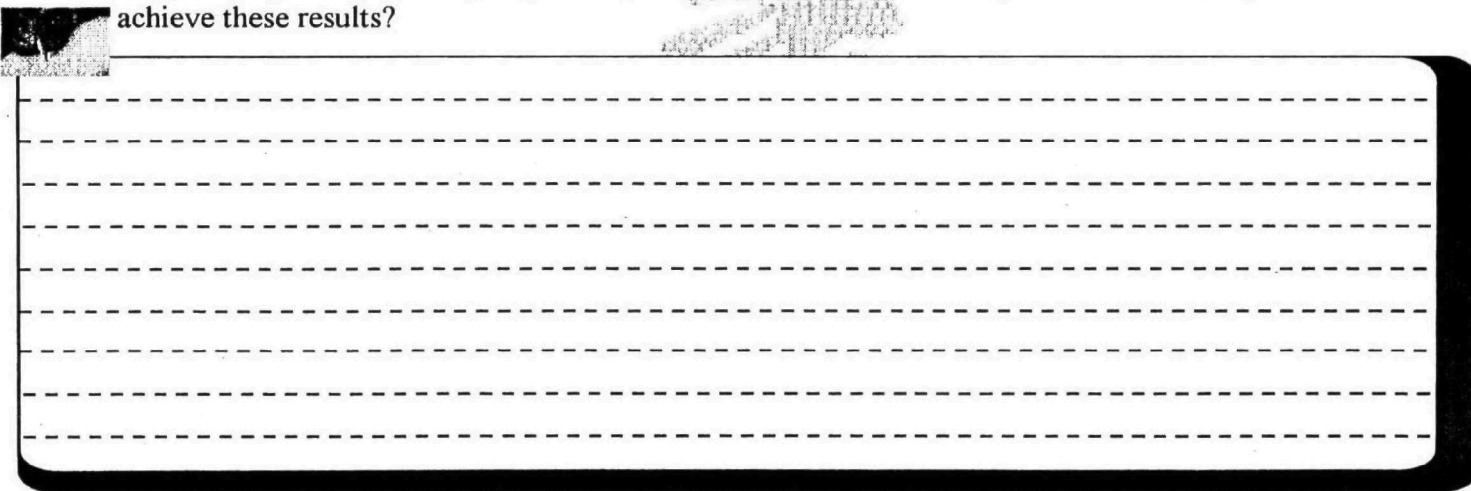
***Your work*** — What do you value about your work?

***Your organization*** — What is it about the organization that you value?

**Achievement Areas** -- Describe two or three pieces of work or projects of which you are particularly proud.



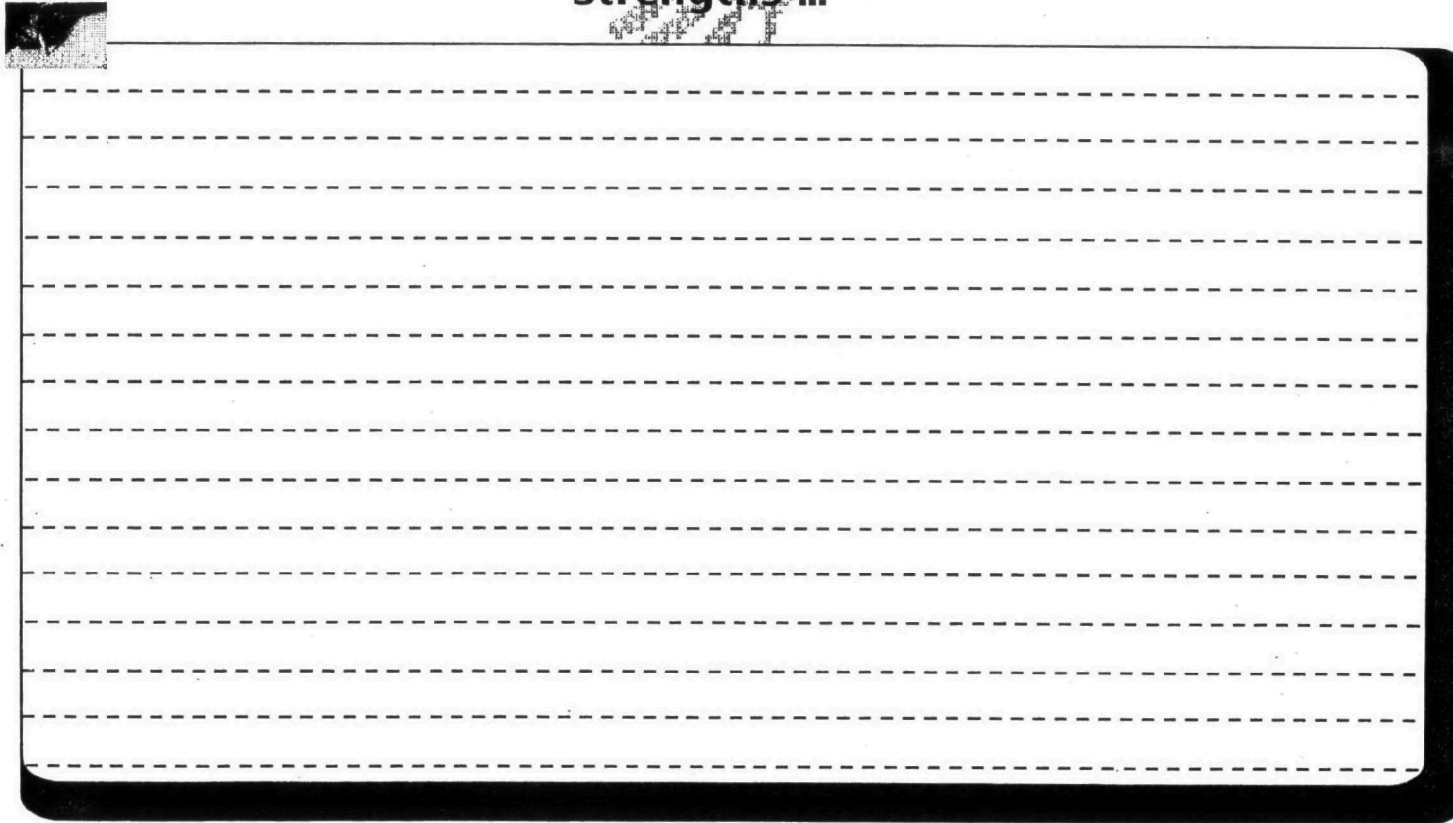
What was it about you -- your unique qualities, skills, knowledges, or strengths -- that made it possible to achieve these results?



## STRENGTHS

Consider your strongest areas. These strengths are not necessarily what is expected of you now. Write down the ones that stand out. If there are one to three people with whom you can talk concerning your most valuable abilities or qualities, ask each to suggest a few strengths. Add that information to this list.

**Strengths ...**



## YOUR ORGANIZATION'S PLANS

Next, let's get clear on what's expected of your organization. If he or she hasn't already, or if you don't know, ask your supervisor or team leader to identify your organization's goals. What is your shop "on the hook for" this year?

**Your group must ...**



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## DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Work assignments are often the most effective way to enhance and make use of your major strengths. The kinds of tasks, activities, and projects that you enjoy most are most likely to be ones you are good at. To the extent that your strengths support your organization's goals and activities, the more you do those kinds of things, the more your organization will benefit. So, it's a good idea to explore how you could be working more where you are strongest and less with activities you tend to avoid.

Compare the list you just prepared on Page 7 to your list of strengths on page 6. Identify ways that you could apply a strength you have to one or two of those efforts.

**Possible work assignments...**

**Colleagues comments ...**


Talk with your supervisor, team leader, or colleagues about these possibilities and add other ideas they may have. At this point, the list of possible assignments may look too long. Don't commit yourself to any of these yet, but find out what matters your colleagues would welcome getting your help with or handing off to you — note that information above.



**Self Development Activities** -- Imagine becoming truly expert at each of your strengths — You can accomplish this with self development activities such as independent and library reading and research, volunteer assignments, or enrollment in an institution of higher learning. These kinds of activities can often be undertaken without significant cost and can help you a lot if you take responsibility for your own development. (Note those ideas on page 19 under “Self Development”.)

**Formal Programs** — These activities include classroom training, distance learning courses, details, rotational assignments, or other structured developmental activities aimed at improving your ability to perform your job. (Record these possibilities on page 19.)



## Potential coach ...

[illegible]

10

## FUNCTIONS WHICH DON'T MATCH WELL WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

The important part of self-development is maximizing strengths. But let's face it — all jobs include tasks that **must be performed** regardless of our level of skill. So in our planning we need to address those tasks. List below two or three parts of your job you avoid doing, don't enjoy doing, don't know much about, or don't think you are very good at. If the task will continue to be important in your organization and you could easily learn to do it well, jot down a plan for learning it through study/reading, training, coaching, or practice:





## COMPLETING YOUR IDP FORM

From this point, transferring the information and recommendations you've developed onto your IDP form shouldn't be difficult. Your plans should link to organizational goals, maximizing your strengths to benefit you and your organization. Your plans should also minimize the negative impact of your weaknesses. List as activities on the IDP form the work assignments, self development activities, and formal programs that you've thought of.

Consider your copy of the IDP as a draft version as you discuss it with your supervisor. She or he will want to use it as a workforce planning tool, comparing your strengths and recommendations with those of your peers. You and your supervisor will work together in preparing a final IDP that works best for you and strengthens your organization.

***Initial meeting with supervisor*** — *Working on strengths* – Have an initial conversation with your supervisor about how you would like to help the organization more while practicing your personal skills. Mutual agreement on such matters may not be easy to reach, but if you can work more in your strength areas while helping the organization, everyone wins. (Your supervisor will probably need to talk to your colleagues and check on funding for training before making commitments.)

*Working on your least favorite tasks* – Also go over your initial thinking on these from pages 11-12 and propose adjustments or training in those areas.

***Follow-up meeting with supervisor and post-meeting follow up*** — Once the supervisor has had an opportunity to meet with your colleagues and check on funding, you may be able to agree on your development plan. You and your supervisor should then sign the final IDP form and discuss follow-up needed to carry out those agreements.



Since your development is primarily your responsibility, your supervisor will probably rely on you to set up follow-up meetings with colleagues, complete training requests, and make travel preparations, if needed. It's wise to prepare and execute training forms for the year within two weeks after this meeting with your supervisor. The two of you should set 2-3 specific goals for your development during this discussion and note them on page 17 under "Developmental Goals."

## PERFORMS and Your IDP

*PERFORMS*, EPA's two-tier performance rating system, represents the Agency's emphasis on professional *development* and management *coaching* as keys to organizational success. Development is no longer seen as a luxury or a reward. It is a necessity benefitting the entire organization. The intention is for employees and supervisors to complete this form together and use it as a discussion piece as it is developed. Your completed agreement will represent a clear, mutual understanding of organizational goals and objectives, and an appreciation of individual roles and contributions.

**Employee** – This is to help you plan your development and increase the value you add to your organization. It will be effective only if you take an active role in your development, and direct positive energy to what you can influence.

**Supervisor** – This is a coaching tool to help you align your employees' efforts with your organization's work, while increasing their individual capability.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Pages 11 and 12 should reflect your thinking about the activities which you don't tend to like as much, but which need to be done. Make sure you've completed those pages.

P.17 Enter your name. Enter the effective dates.

Under "Development Plans / Activities"

From the possible work assignments you listed on page 8, select 1-3 which you believe make sense and which your colleagues are receptive to. Consult with your Team Leader or Supervisor about those choices if possible, and incorporate their ideas. List those in the left column. In the center column, describe each, list any support you'd need, and define what success would look like for the assignment. In the right column, show beginning and ending dates.

To find out what formal programs are available, get a copy of the USDA Graduate School Training Opportunities brochure or see your Training Officer.

P.19 Page 9 called for you to note possible self-development activities and formal programs on page 19. If you have not yet completed the left column of page 19, do it now. Then, complete the middle and right columns as you did on pages 17 and 18.



# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ Effective Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Developmental Goal(s)** - *Set 2-3 specific goals in consultation with your supervisor. Those goals should support your organization's goals.*

DEVELOPMENT PLANS / ACTIVITIES	Description/Support required, Success Measures	Time Frame
Work Assignments		



DEVELOPMENT PLANS / ACTIVITIES	Description/Support required, Success Measures	Time Frame
<b>Self Development Activities</b>		
<b>Formal Programs</b>		

DEVELOPMENT PLANS /ACTIVITIES	Description/Support required, Success Measures	Time Frame
<b>Self Development Activities</b>	(Cont. from previous page — if necessary)	
<b>Formal Programs</b>		

DEVELOPMENT PLANS / ACTIVITIES	Description/Support required, Success Measures	Time Frame
(Cont. from previous page — if necessary)		

*I endorse the above developmental activities and will make resources available to realize them.*

Employee Signature	Date	Manager Signature	Date
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## **Note**

Additional self-development tools are available on the Human Resources website.

## **Bibliography**

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