



PEOPLE

PERFORMANCE

PROCESS

Core Strengths Accountability

Brewing Up Ownership and Initiative

Ireland maintained a political position of neutrality throughout World War II, but the word apparently was slow to reach the Dublin-based Guinness brewery.

At the outset of the war, Great Britain sent more than 150,000 under-trained and under-equipped troops into France to help fend off German forces along the Belgian border, and Guinness promised all of the soldiers a bottle “stout, beer, or draught to enjoy with their Christmas dinner.”¹

As the holiday neared, however, Guinness faced a problem – it lacked the workforce to keep its promise. That significant hurdle easily could have led to a Christmas catastrophe; instead, it created the backdrop for something special. Maybe not a Christmas miracle, but definitely something unexpected and out of the ordinary.¹

When word of the Guinness labor shortage got out, retired workers began showing up to help. Then, when that wasn’t enough, workers from competing breweries arrived to lend a hand. And on Christmas Day 1939, every soldier had his pint.

Why?

The workers weren’t filling bottles to earn a bonus or to avoid a pink slip. Nor was there some biological motivation in play – you know, basic needs like food, water, or shelter. They simply found it important to give the soldiers a taste of home – and the encouragement that came with it. They were operating on what psychology professor Harry Harlow in the 1940s would label “intrinsic motivation.” In other words, they were expressing something every employer dreams of seeing in its workforce – accountability by choice.

The Core Strengths Accountability program can't provide free beer for everyone, but it can help organizations tap into that same type of intrinsic motivation in a unique and powerful way.

Based on more than 40 years of rigorous research and brought to life with cutting-edge technology and teaching methods, we've put together a course that, pardon the pun, is rather stout because it takes the unique approach of creating intrinsic accountability by connecting motivations to behavioral strengths.

When leaders and their teams better understand what drives them and the people around them, they are better equipped to effectively deal with the challenges they face – even when those challenges involve conflict. Core Strengths Accountability shows managers how to make the connection between motivations and behaviors to produce the type of intrinsic accountability that leads to a more engaged workforce and better results.

This overview will help you understand how and why it works, which will help you understand how and why it's just the right brew for you and your organization.

Connecting at the Core

When we ask leaders what they really want when they ask people to “be accountable,” we get a variety of responses but they almost always land on two ideals: Ownership and initiative. To paraphrase the collective responses from more than 40 years of asking that question: “I want people to take ownership of their responsibilities and to take initiative in their work,” they say.

In too many organizations, however, that's just not happening. Even the most highly skilled and well-intentioned workers too often fall short when it comes to owning their responsibilities and taking initiative in their work.

Leaders typically try to solve for this by using processes and systems to promote accountability – they do things like schedule meetings, assign and measure key metrics, and use the latest and greatest task or project management software. But those systems and processes don't always lead to the best behaviors, and the results suffer.

What's typically missing is a connection to motivations.

When we find ourselves in a high-stakes situation, we naturally tap into our personal motivations (the way we're hard-wired to approach things) and draw on the interpersonal strengths that feel best to us. Those strengths are like a security blanket – they make us feel comfortable. Very often, however, they aren't the ones that work best for the situation. By developing a better understanding of our motivations and what's motivating the people around us, we can make better decisions about how to respond. And because we then own the choices around those actions, we naturally become more accountable to the results.

Traditional approaches to accountability focus on a one-size-fits-all set of techniques that don't consider individual differences. At the root of most of these techniques is the assumption that one person can “hold” another person accountable: “If I do or say the right things, in the right way, I'll get other people to do what they are ‘supposed’ to do.” But telling people what to do, or even asking them nicely, only generates compliance – not a true sense of ownership and real accountability.

True accountability can't be demanded or imposed. It happens only when people are empowered to choose the interpersonal strengths that are best for them and the situation they face. When people feel coerced, they may comply – but they do so only as long as they are experiencing external pressure, and their compliance isn't sustainable.

The Core Strengths approach teaches people how to choose strengths in light of motivations, which allows them to produce better results for themselves, their team, and their organization. Having a choice of which strengths to use fosters accountability, because people feel responsible for what they freely choose², and they take ownership of their choices, actions, and results.

This is the *skill of accountability*: Giving meaning to work by connecting it to motives (taking ownership) and choosing the right strengths at the right time (taking initiative) to create personal responsibility. That's the heartbeat of accountability by choice.

Practical and Actionable

Tim Perlick, senior director of professional development of CME Group (Chicago Mercantile Exchange), considers Core Strengths Accountability “foundational” to his organization's leadership and career development programs.

“Our managers are excited by what they learn, and are eager to use the tools and resources,” he said. “The improvement in working relationships and communication has led to increased accountability, collaboration, and innovation.”

And Jonathan McGrael, sales director at Arbor Pharmaceuticals, said his managers “are using strengths-based skills in their coaching conversations, and reporting that they are more effective than ever before.”

Regardless of the industry or the size or type of organization, Core Strengths Accountability provides a common language and easy-to-understand structure for creating practical and actionable changes that produce sustainable accountability.

Banking on Accountability

When branch managers throughout a large banking organization began referring a high number of interpersonal conflicts to the human resources department, the bank's executives recognized it as a sign of an accountability issue. And as they discovered more warning signs, they knew they needed to see the behaviors change.

Rather than offer rewards or issue threats that might temporarily address the symptoms, however, they decided to teach the branch managers a better approach – one that would help them internalize their accountability. That approach, of course, came from Core Strengths Accountability.

After completing the Core Strengths program, the managers improved their interpersonal skill ratings by 67 percent. They also cut the amount of time they spent dealing with conflict by 25 percent. When these managers chose to take accountability for the high-stakes situations facing their teams, they not only improved real-time results, they also cut their employee turnover rate in half. That's the sort of dividends that will make any banker smile.

Creating a Culture of Accountability

Regardless of what motivates us, we all bring certain strengths to work each day. Some of those strengths are technical skills or are related to our expertise on a subject, while other strengths involve our interpersonal or relational abilities.

Some experts say you should “focus on your strengths” and not worry about your weaknesses. Some give you a test that reveals a few of your top strengths. Others tell you that the way to workplace effectiveness is to “encourage the heart”; that is, to focus only on intrinsic motivation or drive. That’s all good, but it’s also incomplete.

Focusing only on a few strengths can be limiting; it can stop people from stretching to achieve their potential, and it’s unrealistic. The world doesn’t deliver only those situations where a person can succeed by using their one or two top strengths. People face all manners of challenges in their work and personal lives, as well as all kinds of individuals. To respond to each situation and interact with each stakeholder productively, they need to draw from a wider array of strengths.

Focusing on the heart, or on intrinsic motivations and drives, leaves many people wondering exactly how to do that. Tapping into internal motivations is a valuable approach, but it’s difficult because people’s motives aren’t always readily visible.

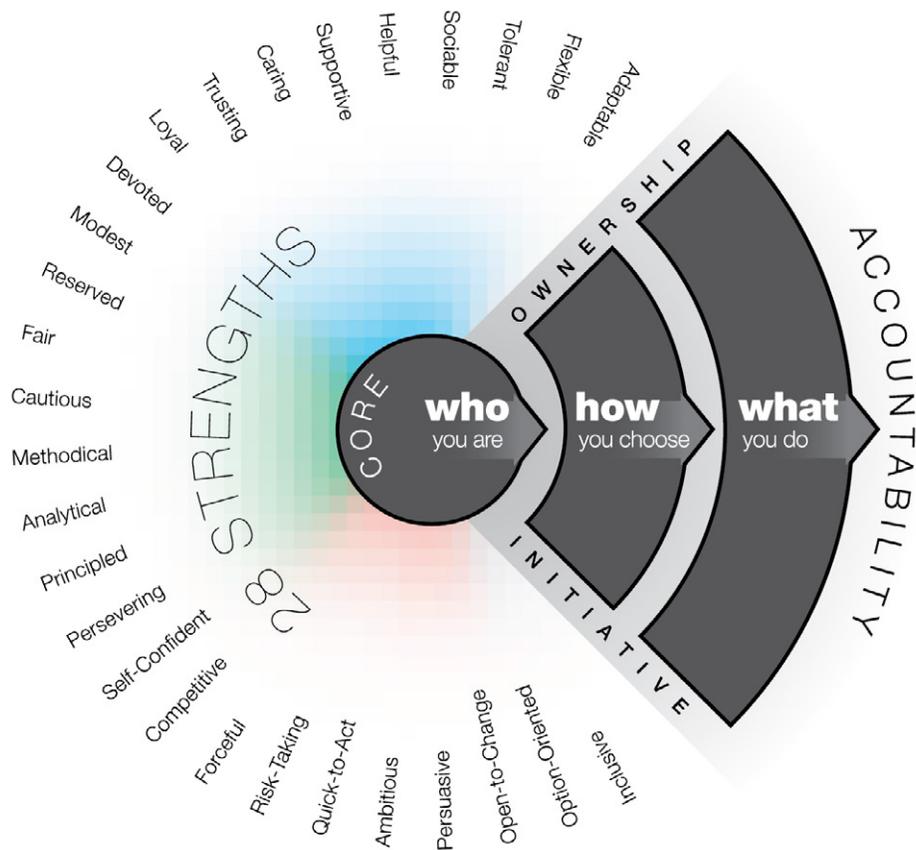
Core Strengths, however, uses the award-winning Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) precisely for this purpose: to enable people to quickly understand their core motivations, while accurately identifying the core motivations of others. The Core Strengths approach shows people exactly how to connect strengths to their core motivations by empowering them to actively choose the most appropriate strengths – thus fostering accountability for the outcomes of their actions.³ It provides a simple, easy-to-remember method for people to identify not just what they do, but why they do it—and how they could do it better.

The Core Strengths model uses 28 strengths that are accessible to anyone at any time (Figure 1). These strengths are simply the behaviors we use to get results. In other words, the strengths are what we do. So how do we pick from among all those strengths? Well, it’s not something we have to leave to chance. There’s a skill involved, which means we can learn it and practice it and get better at it. This skill is how we chose. That decision is informed by something deeper – something that doesn’t really change because it’s our core self. That’s who we are, and that’s where we find our motivations.

What You Do ...

When we learn the core skills of assessing a situation (including our motivations and the motivations of others) and making choices that are aligned with our core personality, we can “dial up” the strengths the situation calls for – and thus deliver their best performance. In short, we become mindful of all the choices available, intentional in our use of strengths, and accountable for the outcomes our choices produce.

Figure 1: The Core Strengths model



Who You Are ...

Core Strengths Accountability is powered by the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) and the Strengths Portrait, two valid and reliable assessments⁴ that enable self-awareness – the prerequisite to effective choices.

The Strengths Portrait shows how we prioritize our 28 interpersonal strengths. The SDI describes individual differences in personality from the perspective of motivations that lie at our core. The SDI provides a personality profile by charting our Motivational Value System (MVS) and Conflict Sequence, two useful tools in assessing motivations in different situations. The SDI uses three primary groupings for how people are motivated:

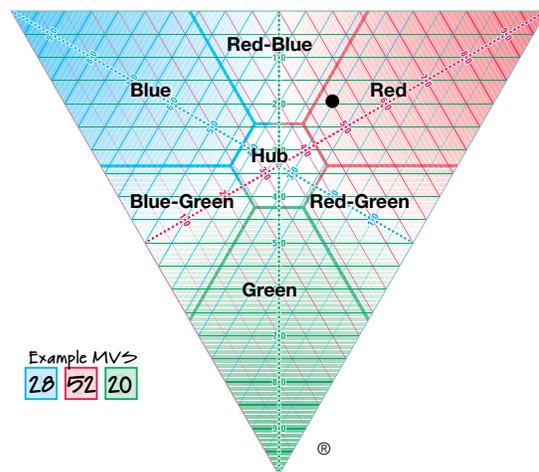
- People – a concern for helping and developing others
- Performance – a concern for directing action and achieving results
- Process – a concern for establishing clear and meaningful order

Everyone prioritizes these three primary motivations differently. The SDI defines seven personality types – we call these Motivational Value Systems (MVSs) – based on how the three motivations work together in different people (Figure 2). They are color-coded, so you might be a Blue (people), a Red (performance), a Green (process) or some combination – HUB (all three), Red-Green (performance/process), Blue-Green (people/process), or Red-Blue (performance/people).

People with different Motivational Value Systems use the same strengths for different reasons – a foundational insight that is the real power behind the Core Strengths Accountability approach. For instance, here are four different reasons to use the strength “Inclusive” – each reason connecting to a different Motivational Value System:

- **Blue MVS (people focus):**
“I want to include others so that each person feels valued.”
- **Red MVS (performance focus):**
“I want to include others so that everyone will be committed to the task.”
- **Green MVS (process focus):**
“I want to include others to make sure no vital information is overlooked.”
- **Hub MVS (equal focus on people, performance, and process):**
“I want to include others because we will be more effective together.”

Figure 2: Sample Motivational Value System



When we see that we can connect specific strengths to the motives within our core, we find it easier to choose strengths that previously felt foreign or uncomfortable because they were so seldom used. This ah-ha moment frees people to more readily draw from a wider array of strengths – while still feeling true to themselves.

How You Choose ...

Our core influences how we see situations and people. Over time, we create filters that often help us navigate situations more quickly because they help us focus on what matters to us and not get distracted by things we deem unimportant. But those same filters can cause blind spots; they can cause us to miss or distort things, and that leads to poor decisions and, in some cases, creates conflict.

Our filters can make it difficult to correctly assess what’s happening in a given high-stakes workplace situation, such as when a key customer defects, a project misses a critical deadline, or a negotiation shuts down. Without an accurate assessment, we can’t identify how we should interact with others to get the results we need. On the other hand, if we are aware of our filters, we’re better positioned to make the right choices – we know when we need to be forceful with a particular stakeholder and when we should be supportive; we know when we should move forward cautiously with a person and when to take swift action.

Our filters also can put false limits on our options. Too often, we mistakenly assume we have only a handful of interpersonal strengths available to use in a situation when, in fact, we have an entire arsenal. Self-imposed constraints limit our ability to respond productively to situations and interact effectively with others. They, their teams, and their organizations pay the price in lost potential, mediocre performance, and poor decision-making.

Core Strengths training helps remove self-limiting constraints and empower people to interact more productively. The program accomplishes this by teaching people to make more effective choices based on more accurate assessments of high-stakes situations – understanding what is motivating themselves and others to behave the way they do. Equally important, Core Strengths teaches people how to draw from a full palette of interpersonal strengths and quickly determine which behaviors are needed, when, and with which stakeholders in every situation.

Multiplying Accountability

If one person in an organization latches on to the Core Strengths Accountability approach, that person’s performance and engagement will dramatically improve, and everyone around that person will reap benefits by association. So imagine how those improvements multiply when entire teams and organizations adopt the approach.

When people understand their own MVS and the MVS of the people they work with, then the entire group becomes self-aware, which allows everyone to more effectively deal with high-stakes situations and more confidently embrace accountability by choice. They discover better ways to communicate and collaborate. When managers create the conditions that encourage accountability by choice:

- People take ownership and initiative for using the right strengths at the right time.
- Each individual’s “personal why” – the intent behind his or her choice of strengths – directly supports the team’s and organization’s performance.
- The process of making mindful choices about strengths delivers exceptional business results.

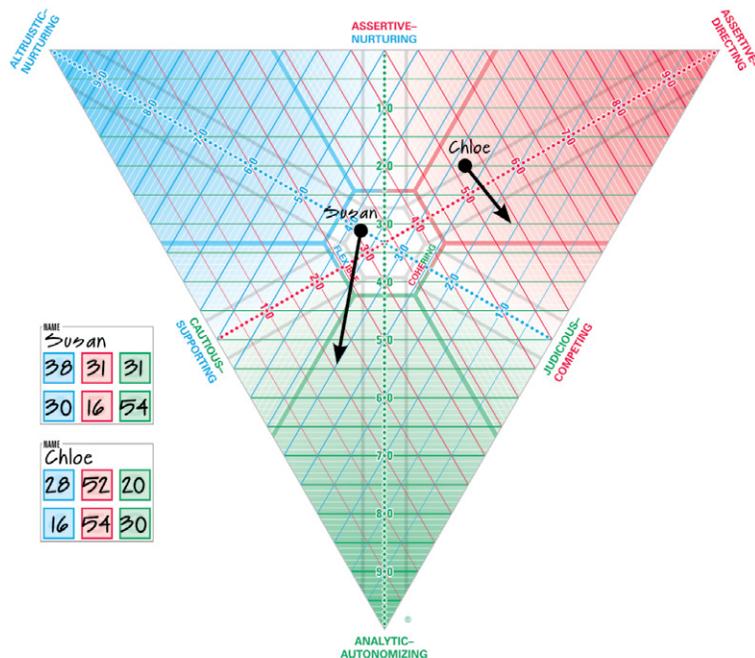
Navigating Conflict

The SDI also shows how conflict affects the way we see situations and how we make choices about the interpersonal strengths we will use. In other words, our motives are different when we’re faced with conflict and they can move during the three common stages of the conflict. The SDI uses the Conflict Sequence to map our motivations during conflict on a grid (Figure 3) that matches up with the MVS. The arrow represents the direction a person moves as conflict intensifies. Note that the labels also change to represent the motivations behind our responses to conflict.

The sample SDI results in Figure 3 provide insights into how differences in Motivational Value Systems might play out. Chloe’s MVS shows a stronger concern for performance than for people or process, while Susan’s shows a relatively equal blend of all three – with the concern for people a bit stronger than for performance or process.

In good times, Susan may appreciate Chloe’s desire to get things done and Chloe may appreciate Susan’s desire to include people and consider multiple perspectives. They may experience conflict, however, if Chloe perceives Susan’s option-seeking as a lack of focus or, worse, a lack of loyalty, or if Susan views Chloe’s competitiveness as fighting or as an unwillingness to consider others’ ideas.

Figure 3: Sample Conflict Sequence results: Two-person relationship



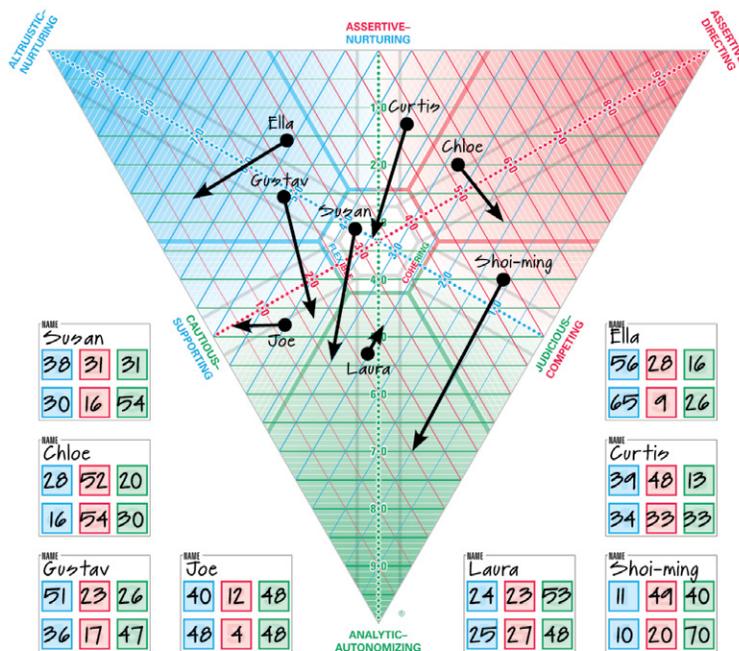
When those types of perceptions trigger conflict, Susan will likely want to slow things down and analyze the situation, while Chloe will probably want to speed things up and take action quickly. Awareness of each other's motivations when things are going well and during conflict can help them understand each other and appreciate their differing motivations so they can interact more effectively.

Differences in MVSs also play out in group relationships (Figure 4). For instance, the sample conflict sequence results shown in the figure represent several relationships (including the one between Susan and Chloe).

When things are going well, the group shown in Figure 4 has at least one person in each MVS. This does not necessarily mean the group is effectively integrating people, performance, and process. The group's diversity in motivation may serve as a source of productivity, but it may also be the basis for conflict.

When conflict arises, some members start analyzing (arrowheads in green), others begin accommodating (arrowheads in blue), and others start asserting (arrowheads in red). These movements influence which interpersonal strengths each person decides to use. Their choices may help to resolve conflict, or they could make things worse. When members can draw on their understanding of their own and each other's MVS and how their motivations change during conflict, they can select strengths more intentionally and interact with maximum effectiveness.

Figure 4: Sample Conflict Sequence results: Group relationship



Experiencing Core Strengths Accountability

The people who show up for workshops generally fall into one of two categories – the learners and the facilitators. OK, sometimes you have the sleepers, but you won't find them in a Core Strengths Accountability workshop. So let's look at the training experience from the perspective of learners and facilitators.

Learners

Learners typically spend half a day (4 hours) in the course, although it's designed in a way that allows for longer versions for organizations that want a deeper dive into the content. Either way, the course features interactive lessons on how to assess a business situation and choose the right strengths to use, provocative discussions with peers, use of state-of-the-art tools including the SDI and the Strengths Portrait, and hands-on exercises that let the participants practice the skills essential for accountability by choice. All of these techniques bring to life what the participants are learning by connecting key concepts from the training with real-world challenges from a familiar context.

Two pre-work assessments prepare the participants for the workshop, and they leave with ongoing reinforcement and learning opportunities that make Core Strengths Accountability sustainable long after the initial classroom session.

Preparation

Learners are invited to the program and provided with links to the SDI and Strengths Portrait online assessments. They get the results during the course and use them in multiple activities.

Modules

The course is presented in five modules.

- 1. Accountability Through Strengths:** Learners receive their Strengths Portrait results and are introduced to the Core Strengths Accountability model. They begin developing an action plan (example below) by identifying a high-stakes situation at work and two stakeholders of that situation. They continue to work on this plan in each of the remaining modules. They also watch a video that introduces them to three characters – a programmer, a manager, and an architect – who are featured in subsequent videos to provide rich examples of the concepts the training teaches.

Figure 5: Accountability Action Planner

The screenshot displays the 'ACCOUNTABILITY ACTION PLANNER' tool. It includes a section for 'My High-Stakes Situation' with a detailed description of a marketing strategy change. Below this is a 'Myself' section with a Strengths Portrait for 'Eileen' showing scores for Inclusive, Caring, and Option-Oriented. The 'My Tip Strengths' section lists Inclusive, Caring, and Option-Oriented. The 'Stakeholder #1' section identifies 'Mark VP of Sales' with strengths Ambitious, Competitive, and Self-Confident. The 'Stakeholder #2' section identifies 'Ann VP of Marketing' with strengths Analytical and Reserved. The bottom of the image shows a grid of 28 Core Strengths, including Persuasive, Click-to-Act, Ambitious, Persevering, Analytical, Reserved, Cautious, Caring, Devoted, Helpful, Supportive, Tolerant, Inclusive, Option-Oriented, Risk-Taking, Forceful, Competitive, Self-Confident, Principled, Methodical, Fair, Modest, Loyal, Trusting, Sociable, Flexible, Adaptable, and Open-to-Change.

- 2. Understanding Your Core:** Learners receive the MVS portion of their SDI results and take part in experiential activities to reinforce the MVS concepts. Videos in this segment use the architect's story to summarize key concepts. Learners also receive an SDI Quick Guide and use it to further develop their action plan.

3. **Interpreting through Filters:** To explore how they choose the right behaviors, learners look at how filters in their MVS can result in different meanings for the same strength. This section includes a video depicting how filters manifest themselves in an example from the programmer's life. Learners then apply what they've learned about filters to their high-stakes situation by completing the next steps of their action plan.
4. **Navigating Conflict:** Learners are introduced to the idea that changing motivations during conflict is part of their core personality. They receive the Conflict Sequence portion of their SDI results and take part in experiential activities that help them deepen their understanding of the concepts. A video featuring the manager ties all of these ideas together with a clear example of the way conflict begins, progresses, and is resolved. Learners conclude by considering the existence or potential for conflict in their high-stakes situation and documenting their commitments in their action plans.
5. **Putting Core Strengths to Work:** The Core Strengths model is used to summarize the workshop and to clearly and compellingly show the link between choice and accountability. Learners are then encouraged to make mindful selections of strengths to manage their high-stakes situation and their relationships with their stakeholders. The final video shows how each of the three characters has put his or her core strengths to work. Post-course reinforcement and learning opportunities are described. These are included with the course at no additional charge.

Reinforcement and Continued Learning

Each learner gets access to LearnerSource, where they can print a certificate of completion, access documents for continuing education credits, watch additional videos, reprint their SDI and Strengths Portrait results, and download SDI images to add to their e-mail signatures or social media profiles. Through LearnerSource, they also can choose to give an SDI and Strengths Portrait to another person. Most share this link with a person outside their work environment, such as a spouse, some other family member, or a friend. Access to LearnerSource is opened to the learners after they complete their course evaluation.

Resources

- Strengths Portrait (online assessment and results)
- Strength Deployment Inventory (online assessment and results)
- Learner Guide
- SDI Quick Guide
- Working with Core Strengths (book)
- Access to LearnerSource (online resources)
- Guest access to one SDI and Strengths Portrait (with an online learning module for the guest)



Facilitators

Every organization has a unique culture and training needs, so training often works best when internal facilitators deliver it. The Core Strengths Accountability program is designed so that internal certified trainers can deliver it with ease and expertise.

To become certified, aspiring facilitators attend a half-day public Core Strengths Accountability workshop. These workshops deliver the full program and are offered in cities across the United States.

Then they attend a two-day Facilitator Certification Course, where they:

- Learn how to deliver the Core Strengths Accountability program in their organization.
- Practice facilitation and program delivery skills.
- Gain access to the Core Strengths training community and trainer resources.

They leave that course prepared to immediately deliver Core Strengths Accountability training and to join a community of more than 4,000 certified Core Strengths Accountability facilitators.

Resources

- A complete set of the learner resources (described above)
- A facilitator manual
- Access to FacilitatorSource (to administer online assessments, and to receive updates and additional resources)
- A USB remote and key. This custom-designed interface allows seamless access to the presentation platform. It includes the ability to display group results, present the slide content, play the videos, and operate on-screen timers for activities and breaks.



Getting Started

Each facilitator is authorized to present the Core Strengths content under an organizational license. As a condition of the license, the facilitators are expected to provide this learning experience to at least 50 people within the first year of certification.



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