Personality, Strengths, and Social Style: Ties to Adler’s Tasks of Life

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Abstract

This paper originated from the writer’s personal experiences and frustrations while working at a new job. Without knowing Adlerian psychology or being in graduate school, the writer knew that feelings of belonging were vital to a human existence. While being on a staff of a wide variety of people, it became clear that the management wanted everyone to be included but did not know how. The constant striving for perfection the writer felt combined with not knowing how to belong in a group created unhappiness. Having explored the Myers-Briggs personality inventory in high school and having taken the Strengths Finder at the beginning of the job, the writer started to understand personality and unique strengths.

Another Adlerian concept that the writer knew before learning Adlerian was the concept of life tasks. The writer had always prioritized balance between work and life outside of work. The writer was able to leave work at the job, leave on time, and manage a highly effective schedule. As it turns out, according to Adler, these are the life tasks (work, social, and love). This paper will have the work task as the lens but will also include the other two tasks and how all three are affected by personality, strengths, and social style.
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Personality, Strengths, and Social Style: Ties to Adler’s Tasks of Life

“Inherent within people are socially constructive forces that guide people towards realizing their potentialities. When people’s tendency toward self-realization is allowed expression, we become free to grow ourselves, we also free ourselves to love and to feel concern for other people, the ideal is the liberation and cultivation of the forces which lead to self realization” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 40). When people are allowed the freedom to express themselves, grow, expand, and develop, many great things can happen. Unfortunately, this does not always work out. Small children are fostered to grow and develop as their unique selves. At what age does this stop? When does society begin to stifle the personal part of growing up? Strengths are developed in youth and carried into adulthood, but when does the child become part of a generalized “who I am supposed to be” profile?

“Playing to our strengths enhances well-being because we are doing what we naturally do best and generating feelings of autonomy, competence, confidence, and self-esteem” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 42). Allowing an infant, a toddler, a child, a teenager, or an adult the freedom and knowledge to use their strengths can be powerful. It can open up a whole world of opportunities.

Strengths are natural, they come from within, and we are urged to use them, develop them and to play to them by an inner, energizing desire. Further when we use our strengths, we feel good about ourselves, we feel better able to achieve things, and we are working toward fulfilling our potential (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 41).

What happens when some or all of this is ignored? One of the most glaringly obvious places it can and is ignored is the work place. This writer has seen and experienced many examples of work place breakdowns and after many years of observation decided to investigate
and write about ideas that can be utilized to prevent them. Breakdowns can include a range of things such as: hostility towards co-workers and management, refusal to do given tasks, team morale breakdown, and a general feeling of apathy at work. Why does this happen? The writer experienced a workplace that was very generalized and used one method for a wide audience. For example, a presentation on a new product is given during a staff meeting. Why are half of the people looking at their phones and not paying attention and why are the other half really excited? Why does a manager have a hard time understanding why his/her staff does not comply with the rules he/she established? The writer has also been personally frustrated and de-motivated by a “one approach fits all” management style. In the past, the writer had been asked repeatedly to do a task that was supposed to help grow business and the writer never did the task. When asked why, the writer did not know other than to simply say, “I do not work that way.” It was not because the writer was trying to be defiant or break any rules but because that task simply was not the correct fit in many dimensions including personality style, strengths, and social style.

This paper will set out to address many questions. Who am I? What do people think of me? What do I think of myself? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What am I good at? Am I an introvert or an extrovert? How do I communicate with others? Why am I different from others at work? All of these questions are related to the self. Knowing oneself can be explored in many ways. This paper will focus from a work point of view but knowing oneself can and will be applicable in other parts of life such as relationships, life balance, love, and many others. The writer will explore personality and strengths combined with understanding interactions with others and how these influence the self. Three assessments were chosen for this research and they include: Myers-Briggs (MBTI), Strengths Finder, and Social Style.
Self

This paper will breakdown the self into three components: self-esteem, self-concept, and self-ideal. Self-esteem often has many questions surrounding the term such as: what is it, how do I get it, where does it come from and what happens if it is low or how do I make it higher? Ultimately self-esteem is a measure of how a person sees oneself and it is sometimes viewed as “good or bad” and “high or low.” Research gives several varying definitions of self-esteem. In his article “Optimal Self Esteem and Authenticity: Separating Fantasy from Reality” Kernis (2003) describes self-esteem as “success dealing with life’s challenges, the operation of one’s true self, and relationships in which people are valued for who they are” (p. 83). He also argues that “all self-esteem is inherently contingent on meeting standards or on some form of social acceptance or validation” (p. 83). Self-esteem is also defined on a broader scale as “generally understood to be an individual’s overall feeling about self” or “a construct consisting of self-related emotions tied to worthiness, value, likeableness and acceptance” (Searcy, 2006, p. 122).

Self-esteem is often defined or referred to as “high or “low,” but what does that mean and how is it developed? A general definition is given by Malar, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger (2011) “People with high self-esteem like, value, and accept themselves, imperfections and all. Low self-esteem represents an unfavorable definition of the self. However, each of us is strongly driven to feel good about ourselves, and we try to maintain and enhance our self-esteem” (p. 37). Knox, Funk, Elliott, and Bush (1998) give a deeper insight into high self-esteem as it relates to gender. “High self esteem in men was related to the capacity to see oneself as having “uniquely superior abilities” whereas a high degree of interconnectedness with others appeared to be related to higher levels of self-esteem in women” (p. 63). Cheng and Furnham (2003) look at self-esteem from a behavior point of view. “Those low in self-esteem isolate themselves from
others more often, tend to be more self-conscious and are also more likely to be depressed than those with high self-esteem. High self-esteem has been reported to be one of the strongest predictors of well-being” (p. 122-123).

Deep in the being of everyone is a desire to be loved, valued, and feel belonging. “People want to believe they are worthy and valuable human beings, and this desire drives their behavior” (Crocker, 2005, p. 200). “Self-esteem may be viewed as the outcome of occupying a meaningful role relative to others” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 131). Since humans are social creatures, self-esteem is developed in different ways but they all include interaction with others. “Self-esteem can be developed in three ways: associations, activity, and aurally. Developed through whom one associates with, what one does, and what one hears about oneself” (Searcy, 2006, p. 123).

In 2006 Searcy expanded upon these definitions: “associations” are defined as social groups, family, peer groups, and friends, “activity” self-esteem happens often through achievement and just doing an activity can often be valuable and “aural” self-esteem develops when someone hears something about oneself and hearing positive praise from significant others is important in the development of self-esteem. (pp. 124-127)

The phrases “I am _____, I am not _____” often indicate thoughts of self-concept. A brief definition of self-concept is “The sum total of all the beliefs about who “I am” (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2005, p. 56). Self-esteem was explored previously and has many social interactions that influence whether self-esteem goes up or down.

Self-concept is very internal to every individual. It is a thought process specific to what we think we are. Malar et al. (2011) defined self-concept as the cognitive and affective understanding of who and what we are. It is about who we think we are and are not and this can
be developed in our minds. “It can take two forms: the “actual self” and the “ideal self” The actual self is based on the perceived reality of oneself, whereas the ideal self is shaped by imagination of ideals and goals related to what a person believes that he or she would like to be or aspire to become. (p. 36)

There are many components to the thought “who you think you are.”

The self-concept is comprised both of the familiar, the home environment, as well as of the strange and the unknown. It is within this tension that humans develop a self concept: the secure home environment provides the base for self confidence and self actualization, the strange and the unknown provides a platform for fears and threats to the self system. (Joerchel, 2007, p. 257)

Self-concept is forever evolving based on environment and challenges in life. “The self concept is made up of various specific views about the self, called “self-conceptions” these self-conceptions vary in their accessibility or degree of activation. Possible selves are a type of self-conception about both what an individual hopes to become and what he or she is becoming (Knox et al., 1998, pp. 64-65).

What do you want to be when you grow up? This is an age-old question that almost every child is asked throughout childhood and into adulthood. Often society will influence the answer: “I want to be a firefighter, a teacher, a doctor, or a lawyer” are common answers. But at the heart of the question is the intention for really deep thinking about the answer. What do you really want to be? Who do you think you can be?

Whereas the self can be defined as a person’s knowledge about him or herself, comprising the attributes that the person thinks he or she actually possesses; the ideal self is a representation of the attributes the person would like to have – an image of the person
to be ideally. The ideal self is recognized as important for at least two reasons. First, the ideal self is a motivator that functions as an incentive for future behavior, a self “to be approached or avoided.” Second, the ideal self is an evaluator of the actual self” (Zentner & Renaud, 2007, p. 557).

The ideal self can be dreamed about and worked towards but others often influence it. Individuals create self-statements such as “I should be ______.” “One’s convictions about what should be are not necessarily reality based. They are not learned from direct experience” (Carlson, 1985, p. 56). Our beliefs come out through a distorted idea of an ideal self. “The ideal self is shaped by imagination of ideals and goals related to what a person believes that he or she would like to become” (Malar et al., 2011, p. 36). Self-ideal is also described as “the term used to denote the self-concept which the individual would most like to possess, upon which he places the highest value for himself” (DeRobertis, 2006, p. 180).

The self-ideal can be a source of struggle and conflict between what a person truly thinks and wants as their self-ideal versus what society or family believes for their self-ideal. “Numerous studies have provided compelling evidence for the role of discrepancies between ideal and actual views of the self in accounting for emotional distress, in particular, depressive disorders” (Zentner & Renaud, 2007, p. 557).

Summary

The self is comprised of many components including self-esteem, self-concept, and self-ideal. The development of the self starts at an early age and is continually changing and evolving. It is important to identify how you feel about yourself, how and where those feelings develop from, and what importance that takes into interactions with others. Schimel, Pyszcznski, Arndt and Greenberg (2001) look to research from Carl Rogers about self-esteem “Rogers
suggested that people who experience unconditional positive regard in their relationships with others develop a healthy self-structure and feel satisfied and confident in their value as persons” (p. 35).

Throughout life the question of “who am I?” occurs often. This is the cornerstone question of the self-concept. It can develop through interactions with others, the home environment, challenges in life, and life circumstances. It is important to be aware of the self-concept and how it is affecting life and also self-esteem. The question “who am I not?” also come up when dealing with self-concept and trying to identify true identity. Both of these questions can and will have an impact on who the individual becomes and what they do with their life.

Society currently puts a lot of pressure on the self-ideal because it is usually the focus. Who are you going to be? What are you going to do? These questions start at an early age and can be seen when children start to interact with each other. One child who is in dance class may not understand why her friend does not want to do dance and it may over time cause tension. Or later in life teachers may have an ideal for a student and the student wants nothing to do with those hopes and dreams. As children grow up into adulthood there may come a point where the self-ideal needs to be reevaluated. Am I who I really want to be? If not, how will I get there? The self-ideal can be very motivating or very damaging if not addressed. This paper will continue to explore other facets of the self; including personality, strengths, and social style.

**Myers-Briggs**

What is personality? How does one figure out what one is made of and how one operates in the world? One method is to find out the four-letter code determined by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. “The aim of type theory is to encourage people to value their type and to
highlight areas of personal development” (Passmore, Holloway & Rawle-Cope, 2010, p. 2). Personality type can help individuals understand their uniqueness and how to best utilize their own personality. The fundamentals of the MBTI assessment are based on Carl Jung’s personality theory and are self-reported based on perceptions. Myers Briggs was a mother-daughter team of Katharine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers and they expanded Jung’s personality theory into personality preferences. “The Jungian definition of cognitive style is by far the most widely used and thoroughly researched, while the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is the most frequently used instrument for identifying style.” Also “MBTI has become the most widely used personality measure for nonpsychiatric populations” (Opt & Loffredo, 2010, p. 557). In his article “Cautionary Comments Regarding the Myers Briggs Type Indicator,” Pittenger (2005) says “both Jung’s theory and supporters of the MBTI treat personality as an invariant that is set at birth and tempered by experience” (Pittenger, 2005, p. 212). The same sentiment is shared by Cummings (1995), “Jung argued that psychological type has a biological foundation and Myers stated that preferences are inborn and no attempt should be made to reverse them; otherwise development may be blocked” (p. 2).

There are four indices that combine to create sixteen different composite types. Some examples include: ISFJ, ENTP, ESFP, and others. These break down into E and I (extraversion and introversion), S and N (sensing and intuition), T and F (thinking and feeling) and J and P (judgment and perception) (Bhardwaj, Joshi, & Bhardwaj, 2010, pp. 99-100). Many studies have come to conclusions about the frequency of these types. Cummings (1995) found 70-75% of the population prefers extraversion versus introversion, 70-75% prefer sensing rather than intuition, 50% prefer thinking instead of feeling, and 50-65% prefer judgment to perception (p. 2). In his article, “The Myers Briggs Type Indicator and Career Obstacles” Healy and Woodward (1998)
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takes a deeper look into the different types, which reveal differences and distinctions. Introverts prefer solitude and privacy while extroverts often pay attention to their environment. Individuals with “sensing” prefer immediate sensation and intuitive individuals are more interested in possibilities rather than facts. “Thinkers” are analytically oriented and problem solve critically whereas their counter part the “feeling” type are more attuned to values of others and connect with people to form networks. The final category is judgment and perception and their differences lie in decision making. The “judgers” make decisions rather quickly and the “perceivers” are more curious and explorative (Healy & Woodward, 1998, pp. 2-3).

**Strengths Finder**

“What are your weaknesses?” This is a typical question at a job interview. Interviewees are often coached on how to answer this particular question. Sometimes an interviewer might ask the question, “What are your greatest strengths?” This question holds a pot of gold because it engages a person in positive thinking. “One cannot build on weakness. To achieve results, one has to use all the available strengths…These strengths are the true opportunities” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p.37).

The recent Strengths Finder 2.0 developed by Donald Clifton is utilized in many markets ranging from the work place to the living room of any person for their own personal knowledge. He developed his assessment based off the positive psychology research of Martin Seligman and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi. In his article Seligman says;

Positive psychology at the subjective level is about positive subjective experience: well-being and satisfaction (past); flow, joy, the sensual pleasures, and happiness (present), and constructive cognitions about the future – optimism, hope, and faith. At the individual level it is about positive personal traits-the capacity for love and vocation,
courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level it is about civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals towards better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (Seligman, 2001, p. 3).

Understanding our personality from a strengths foundation also comes from the theories of Karen Horney and Carl Rogers. Rogers believed “human beings are organismically motivated toward developing to their full potential, and are striving to become all they can be” (Asplund, Lopez, Hodges & Harter, 2007, p. 7). Horney believed “the self is forward moving and growth oriented” (DeRobertis, 2006, p. 184). Both Rogers and Horney agreed that the self is always working and moving towards “self-actualization.” These theories by Rogers and Horney show up when Clifton asked the question “what would happen if we studied what is right with people?” He argued that it was how an individual used their strengths that made the difference and that our strengths are not affected by our mood.

There are many other definitions of strengths throughout literature. “Strengths are produced through the refinement of talents with knowledge and skill” and are considered “a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 39). More often than not, humans want to work with what they are good at, rather than what they are not. “Human beings have a natural tendency to want to develop their capacities, to exploit their natural potential, to become all that they can be” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 40). It is important to keep all of these factors in mind when taking the Strengths Finder assessment.
The Strength Finder is similar to other assessments and questionnaires because it is based upon themes. After taking the assessment an individual will be given five main strengths and these are divided into four categories and they are: relating, impacting, striving, and thinking. The relating theme includes working with people, the impacting theme involves influencing people, the striving theme relates to working hard and the thinking theme involves working smarter (Asplund, et al., 2007, p. 7).

**Summary**

This writer has found immeasurable value in learning about the individualized MBTI and Strengths Finder assessment. It allowed the writer to understand why certain decisions are made the way they are, why the writer interacts with others, how the writer gains energy in life, and put the writer at ease knowing the uniqueness of her personality. It was especially helpful for the writer at work because it identified why some strategies of business development were not working and why other alternative strategies needed to be executed. Before identifying the MBTI for work purposes, the writer felt very ashamed, embarrassed, and angry because the routine strategies were not working. “Individuals have a preference for one of each of four preferences and will be most comfortable and energized when they can approach life and work using these parts of themselves” (Passmore et al., 2010, p. 2). The Myers-Briggs assessment can be valuable when used to understand why an individual does what they do and where they are most comfortable.

Some argue that individuals have signature strength, “a signature strength conveys a sense of ownership and authenticity (that is the real me), a sense of yearning to act in accordance with the strength, and a feeling of inevitability in doing so; and there is a powerful intrinsic motivation to use the strength” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 41). Once an individual knows
their five unique strengths from the Strengths Finder assessment, it becomes imperative to know where they come from and how to utilize them.

### Adlerian Life Tasks

Alfred Adler is known for his work with the life tasks and he believed they are interconnected. Can the three tasks of life be solved separately? Adler insisted, “none of these problems can be solved separately.” “The individual must always answer these problems because they are always questioning the person.” Working on one task will also involve work on the other because Adler believed “the three ties in which human beings are bound, set the three problems of life…each of them demands a successful approach to the other two” (Mansager & Gold, 2000, p. 164). The three tasks are work, love, and social. “For Adler, all problems stem from the tasks and necessities of living together. The satisfaction of all conceivable human needs depends on a sense of community and collaboration to fulfill the tasks of work, love, and friendship. Every individual has to face these life tasks and to resolve them successfully” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 18). It is clear that to understand an individual, one must look at all the life tasks and when thinking about life satisfaction, an individual must do the same. “Any part of the person could only be understood by understanding the unified, indivisible whole” (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991, p. 527).

### Work

The first task that comes to mind when thinking of the three tasks of life is often work. Especially in the United States, when introducing ourselves and meeting a new person, one of the first things we ask is “what do you do for work?” It is engrained as such a crucial and vital part of our life. Adler believed that the work task would be fulfilled “when what we do for work is meaningful and satisfying” (Carlson et al., 2005, p. 13). To determine whether the task is
fulfilled, questions can be asked such as “Why did you choose that occupation? How do you get along with bosses, coworkers, and subordinates? If you could change anything about your work, what would it be?” For those who do not work, the question “If you do not work, what do you do with your free time?” (Carlson et al., 2005, p. 109). In the world we live in many women and men stay home and raise children and when asked what they do, they often say, “I just stay home with the children.” When working with someone who raises children, it is crucial to help them bring confidence and satisfaction to that role in their life. A broader definition of the work task is “broadly encompasses everything we do to sustain ourselves and contribute to the sustenance of others. This includes not only gainful employment but childrearing, homemaking, volunteer services, educational endeavors, and innumerable other activities which engage individuals in activities meaningful to them and/or others” (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991, p. 534). It is also important to examine if the work task is overriding the other tasks of life. Has it become the number one priority? How is it connected to the other tasks?

Love

An intimate relationship with another person is the overall definition of the love task. But it is also important to note, “When we learn to love ourselves as well as another” (Carlson et al., 2005, p. 13). Sweeney and Witmer (1991) found “trust, intimacy, caring, companionship, compassion and similar qualities of a loving relationship promote good health” (p. 537). The writer identified the question earlier of “what do you do for work? This is often the first question asked when meeting someone. The second question is often “are you married?” If an individual is not married, can their love task be fulfilled? The above-mentioned research of Sweeney and Witmer (1991) identified many descriptions of the love tasks that have nothing to do with marital
status. Can an individual have trust, intimacy, caring, and compassion towards others in their family or community?

Social

Another vital component of Adlerian theory is social interest and it falls into the social life task. “Social interest is a feeling of belonging to others and not being ‘outside’” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 19). The overall social task involves “satisfying relationships with others” (Carlson et al., 2005, p. 13). Without interaction with others, the social task is often left unfulfilled and a huge hole. When determining if the task is at a satisfactory level, the answers to these questions are important: “What do you do for fun? Who is your closest friend? Why? How do you relate to your community? If you could change anything about your social life, what would you change?” (Carlson et al., 2005, p. 109).

Summary

“Adler believed all behavior is goal directed. People continue to strive for the future and what they believe is important or significant. If we can understand an individual’s goals, then it becomes possible to predict his or her behavior and responses to situations” (Carlson, 1985, p. 13). Our behavior is based on our striving to improve on our tasks of life.

“Despite the myriad of different values each life-influencing variable may assume, all people must find a way to meet the inescapable requirements of life to develop a career or vocational path, to relate intimately with a spouse or partner, and to interface meaningfully and productively with others in a variety of social contexts.” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 169)

The life tasks give insight into a person’s world and also areas that can or could be worked on. If an individual feels inferior, there is often a life task that needs to be addressed.
“If an individual can be a good friend to all others, and contribute to them by useful work, by a happy marriage, he will never feel inferior to others or defeated by them” (Mansager & Gold, 2000, p. 165).

Communication

Social Style

As previously mentioned humans are social beings and are constantly interacting with each other. The social style assessment was based off of research around behavioral psychology, patterns of behavior, interpersonal functioning, and social relationships. This research was done in the early 1960’s and was continued and revised in 2001-2003 (Mulqueen, 2012, p. 4). The difference between the social style inventory and other assessments is the social style is based on the perception of how others see the individual instead of how the individual views him/herself. Each individual has a unique “social style” and after taking the assessment, the results are broken down into four different types: driving (strong willed and more emotionally controlled), expressive (outgoing and more dramatic), amiable (easy going and supportive), and analytical (serious and more exacting). A more generalized description is: “thought person” (analytical), “action person” (driver), “people person” (amiable), and the “front person” (expressive) (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, p. 37).

When utilizing this self-assessment it is important to truly understand each type and to remember that everyone has a “dominant” type but flexes in and out of the others at any given time. A quick glance at this assessment breaks it down into two categories: more or less assertive and more or less responsive. The “driver” style is a more than average assertiveness level and less than average responsiveness and they are described as “fast-paced, speak rapidly, walk swiftly, decide quickly, and work efficiently. They are get-it-done people. They do not
agonize over decisions. They are the most results-focused of all the styles” (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, pp. 44-45).

The “expressive” style is more than average assertiveness and more than average responsiveness. Expressives “tend to be visionaries, they push people to look beyond the mere mundane and practical in order to undertake bold and imaginative goals, they can be impulsive, feelings play a great role, and they are very animated with their body language when they speak” (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, pp. 48-51).

The “amiable” style is less than average assertiveness and more than average responsiveness. These people are “very people-oriented, friendly, easy-going, and their relationships are more personal. They are especially sensitive to other people’s feelings. Amiables like to work with others and are very generous with their time. Because they are so opposed to conflict, they will often say what others want to hear just to avoid conflict” (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, pp. 54-58).

The “analytical” style is less than average assertiveness and less than average responsiveness. They are “the most perfectionistic, value exactness, prefer quality over quantity, want things to be right. They are often very hard on themselves and others and do not act impulsively. The analyticals are the most introverted and are private people and do not show their emotions. During conflict, analyticals are detached and try to use a rational approach” (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, pp. 59-62).

**Summary**

It can be very important to know social style, especially in the work place because in a survey about social style, results indicated that having differences in style can result in negative results; 88% of respondents reported communication breakdowns, 76% had difficult
relationships, 62% low morale and 58% had negative performance (Mulqueen, 2012, p. 24). As with any personality, strength, or social style assessment it is vital to remember that each one is not the only component of a person.

When a person’s style is accurately identified, it provides a surprising amount of useful information about constructive ways of relating to him. Nevertheless, it’s important to remember that style only pertains to certain aspects of a person’s life. Each of us is far more than our style. Thus, while the identification of a person’s style sheds light on many important characteristics of that person, it is just one useful step of what can be a long and exciting journey of understanding and appreciation of another person. (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, pp. 115-116).

Summary, Conclusion, Recommendation

With twenty-four hours in a day, an average person who works a forty-hour per week job will spend approximately one third of their working life at their job. This could also include raising a family as mentioned in the work task. But why do two million Americans quit every month? A study recently indicated that 31% of people who quit do so because of a lack of empowerment and 43% quit because of a lack of recognition (Hall, “I Quit,” para. 2). What would happen in a world where a job was based on strengths and personality? What would the interview process look like? How would an employee feel? What would their engagement level be? How would they be managed? What would happen to their self-esteem, self-concept, and self-ideal? These are all interesting work related questions that tie into the research discussed above. What happens to the self when attention is paid to individuality? The writer encourages any employer and employee to spend time considering the impact these assessments and items could have. The goal of this paper was to explore how personality, strengths, and social
interactions with others can influence the self and how they relate to the life tasks. How does this play out in a real life scenario? The writer is going to follow “Joe” as he interviews for a teaching position and what happens when he starts working. The first scenario is one where personality, strengths, and social style are not addressed and in the second one they are. Joe applies for a job as a teacher and during the interview, the interviewer asks him about his weaknesses and how those will affect his performance. Joe starts to question his self-esteem and creates different self-concept statements such as “I should be a more outgoing teacher” or “I am not going to be the popular one.” The interviewer keeps pressing him on his experience with challenging children and what Joe is going to do about it if he has these weaknesses. Joe leaves the interview with lower self-esteem and an altered self-concept even though he still has the self-ideal to be a teacher. To his astonishment, Joe got the job.

Joe starts his job and right away he feels very isolated. The principal (who was the interviewer) shows him to his classroom, gives him the standard curriculum, shows him where the bathrooms, kitchen, staff break room, and library are located. He does not come back to check on him that day or for many days and weeks to come. Then he calls a meeting. This meeting is to discuss Joe’s progress and what he has been doing. During the entire meeting Joe starts to slump more in his chair and feel even more dejected. The principal spent the entire meeting discussing items Joe had missed, mistakes he had made, and he demanded to know on the spot why he did not fix them. The principal does not understand why Joe spends an hour after school with his door shut. He also does not know why Joe is so picky about all the details of his classroom and the students. Because Joe was feeling very attacked, he did not respond. He had a hard time understanding because he communicates with the other teachers effectively and his students are happy, but the principal does not seem to understand him at all. This cycle
continues and by the end of his first year, Joe has quit. Alfred Adler would ask: how could this scenario be different?

What if the principal had asked Joe about his strengths or personality style during the interview process? What if they had discussed how those strengths could be an asset to the school and the children? What if the principal took time to learn and understand Joe’s personality type? Even if all of these questions are skipped during an interview but addressed early on, the story may go a little differently and look something like this. During the interview Joe is asked about his personality Myers Briggs type. He responds that he is an ISFJ. The principal asks him to elaborate on how that will affect his teaching style. Joe explains that because he is an introvert by the end of the day he will often need some quiet time to regroup and refocus. Sometimes this can happen at school, but it will often happen at home. Joe mentions that it does not mean he’s shy or non-social. It simply means that after a day of interacting with children, parents, and co-workers, he needs some alone time to recharge his energy. One big advantage Joe mentions is by being an “S” for sensing he is very attentive to details and he focuses on the present moment and the matters at hand. The “F” for feeling is important for being a teacher. Joe stresses how vital it is to him that he pay close attention to how the students feel and their personal issues. He is often one of the first to notice if something is wrong but he is also one of the first to notice and point out when the students do something great. Joe explains that during his student teaching he learned that he really likes to have an organized and neat classroom. He needs to have his lesson plans written out in advance and he is always prepared. These personality traits are because of his “J” for judgment. From the MBTI, the principal learned that Joe is a responsible, thoughtful, personable organizer who has everyone’s best interest as his main focus. All of these could be seen as assets to a teacher.
Now that the principal knows a little more about Joe’s personality and is starting to understand him on a deeper level, he also wants to know Joe’s strengths. Joe has taken the Strengths Finder assessment and has discovered his strengths are: Harmony, Empathy, Woo, Developer, and Responsibility. Joe displays his harmony strength by “looking for areas of agreement” (Rath, 2007, p. 109). Joe explains that he has seen this strength in play in his classroom when the students have a problem and want to discuss it with him. He is able to listen to both sides and seek harmony for everyone. Joe also has the strength of empathy, which ties in well with harmony. “You can sense the emotions of those around you. You can feel what they are feeling as though their feelings are your own. Intuitively, you are able to see the world through their eyes and share their perspective” (Rath, 2007, p. 97). The principal acknowledged this was a huge strength that he would be utilizing in the future for staff development and relationship building. Joe’s third strength is woo and it is a great strength for a teacher to have. “Woo stands for winning others over. You enjoy the challenge of meeting new people and getting them to like you” (Rath, 2007, p. 169). Every new teacher and every new student is a challenge for Joe that he readily accepts. He looks forward to a new school year and has an easy-going persona with the students. It is only natural that Joe has the developer strength. “You see the potential in others. When you interact with others, your goal is to help them experience success. You look for ways to challenge them. You devise interesting experiences that can stretch them and help them grow” (Rath, 2007, p. 89). Combined with his other strengths, developer is a huge asset because Joe has an internal burning desire to challenge students and bring them up to their maximum potential. He sees opportunities with other staff members and is open and willing to share ideas and help them grow and develop. Joe’s fifth strength is responsibility, which really ties his strengths together. “Your responsibility theme
forces you to take psychological ownership for anything you commit to, and whether large or
small, you feel emotionally bound to follow it through to completion” (Rath, 2007, p. 149).
Joe’s principal is shocked at how much he has learned about Joe. He also starts to think about
how he could really utilize Joe and his strengths. Because Joe has “woo” and “developer” as
strengths, the principal decides to use him as a staff developer during their meetings. He wants
him to present different teaching methods he utilizes and how he creates his lesson plans. The
principal decides that it is vital for him to learn the personality and strengths of his other teachers
and staff.

After meeting with the principal and going over his personality and strengths, Joe’s self-
esteeem is rising. He feels great about their conversation and he feels the principal acknowledged
what is unique about Joe. From the time he was a small child, Joe knew he wanted to be a
teacher and had that self-ideal and now his self-concept matches his ideal. He thinks to himself
“I am a great teacher with strengths that will help me make a difference.” Joe is feeling great
about his job and his relationships with the principal and also the other teachers. However he has
started to notice that he is avoiding conflict and does not want to be a part of it. Anytime there is
an issue to discuss where there is disagreement, he retreats. Joe decides to dive into learning
about his social style and how it is affecting his communication. What he finds out is that he is
an “Amiable” style and his strengths with that style are “diplomatic, cautious, supportive, and
people-oriented” (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, p. 68). However, all of these strengths and traits can
be overused and turn into a negative. He realizes that his diplomatic strength can actually turn
into being a conflict avoider and supportive can turn into being permissive. Joe now understands
what is happening and is ready to tackle it. He also learns that every style has a backup style and
because he is an “amiable” type his backup social style is “acquiescing” and this means he often
puts on a front and says everything is fine when it really is not (Bolton & Bolton, 2009, p. 78).

Armed with this knowledge, Joe can recognize when he is in backup mode and when he is really utilizing his strengths. His communication and interactions with others has improved and he notices when his social style starts to flex.

What is most remarkable to Joe is how his improved self-esteem and self-concept at work have impacted his whole life. His relationship with his wife and children has dramatically improved because he comes home from work in a great state of mind and is ready to interact with them. He has started volunteering with his community organization, which fulfills his desire for social interest. Joe has always been a hard worker and much of his self-esteem has been derived from his feedback at his job. Because he is feeling empowered and successful at his job, that flows over to all the other life tasks.

Joe’s story is a powerful one that represents the importance of both an employer and an employee understanding what a person is comprised of. In the first example, Joe gets very down on himself and his self-esteem decreases and he eventually quits his job. Judge (2001) states “individuals with high self-esteem choose occupations consistent with their interests, which would lead to greater levels of job satisfaction” (p. 81). This research implies that individuals need to be supported to keep or raise their self-esteem to a high level so they can do the jobs that interest them and keep them at a high level of satisfaction.

Research done by Rogers focused on the tendency of humans to actualize their inherent potentialities, which could involve pursuits within many domains of activity. People will pursue at least some measure of their growth and development in relationships with others. That is, what people can do with their talents in conjunction with their needs to receive approval, affirmation, and validation with others. The need for approval implies
the needs to assume a meaningful role relative to others so that the successful portrayal of that role garners approval and validation of others (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 132).

Humans want to use their own strengths and talents to do the job they were set out to do and to lead a satisfying life outside of work in the other life tasks. “People most prefer a job congruent to their signature strengths” (Harzer & Ruch, 2012, p. 362).

Research done by Clifton & Harter (2003) supports the above statements:

Top performing managers have an approach to management that focuses on developing the strengths of the individuals they manage. In a sense, top high-performing managers have been ahead of their time in doing what is psychologically most efficient: they effect engagement and productivity by understanding and positioning individual differences in their employees (p. 7).

Job satisfaction seems to increase based on several factors and how they are intertwined. An individual needs to be understood from a personal point of view including personality, strengths, and social style. If this is supported, the individual will likely have an increase in self-esteem, a supported and improved self-concept and a realized self-ideal.

All people have particular sets of strengths and competencies which are of potential benefit to the world around them. If those gifts are matched to the demands of their work environment, their chances of bringing about positive change and experience self-satisfaction are greatly increased. (Shybut, 1993, p. 116)

It is in the best interest of the individual, their work environment, and those around them to be utilizing their gifts and talents. They will then be more likely to have satisfaction in their other life tasks of love and work and feel a sense of belonging and contribution to the world around them.
References


