

# Exercise: Reflected Best Self Exercise and Paper

The Reflected Best Self (RBS) Exercise and Paper is intended to help you develop greater self-knowledge about your distinctive capabilities as a leader, a potential leader and/or a follower. The instructions below will help you solicit the feedback needed for the assignment. The rationale behind this assignment is that “identifying people’s strengths (or what they do right) and then building on them creates more benefits than identifying their weaknesses (or what they do wrong) and trying to correct them.”<sup>i</sup>

## Step One: Solicit Feedback

- Identify 15-20 people who know you well and who you think will provide honest and meaningful feedback about your past experiences. These people may be family, friends, mentors, teachers, or anyone you have interacted with for an extended time. Aim for many different types of respondents (not just friends and family), and be sure to include people with whom you have had significant interactions.
- Email each person a request for feedback about your strengths using a format similar to the sample below. While requesting such feedback may seem awkward at first, people are usually more than willing to provide this information. After all, you are asking for positive testimonials about your past, not critical ones. You are required to have **useful responses from at least 10 different people** to complete this assignment. Generally, the more feedback you get, the better.

### Sample Request

I am taking a course that has an assignment that requires me to construct a profile of my unique strengths. To complete the assignment, I am required to seek input from a few people who know me well enough to share specific experiences from my past. I am inviting you to become part of this assignment.

*Here is what I need:* Please reflect on our past experiences and describe up to three situations where you saw me perform at my very best. It doesn’t matter how large or small these events were; the main requirement is that you see them as meaningful expressions of my personal strengths. In your feedback, describe these experiences in enough detail that I can understand the circumstances, what I did, and any relevant outcomes. An example is provided below, but consider this example *only* as a guide in terms of style and format.

Please email these responses back to me no later than \_\_\_\_\_ (**provide a specific date about two weeks after you send the request**). Thank you very much for helping me with this assignment.

#### **Example of a response**

**One of your strengths is:** Your ability to motivate people to work well together.

**For example, I think of the time...**

When we were falling behind schedule on the team project, the stress was building within the group, and the quality of our work was beginning to suffer. You noticed that we were not doing our best work and challenged the group to rethink our approach. You reminded us of what we were capable of doing if we worked together more effectively, and this caused all of us to pause. No one else would have thought to intervene like you did, and it made a real difference. In the end, we were all very proud of what we accomplished together, and you played a big part in us getting there.

## Step Two: Analyze the Email Feedback

Compile all the individual stories into one document and analyze them for insights into your natural talents, skills and personal values. You might want to create a table such as the one below where you can begin to identify categories related to your specific strengths along with supporting examples. In the “Insights” section, try to develop a deeper understanding of specific examples of strengths — what the strength is, where it came from (born or learned), what it means to you, why it is meaningful, how it might help you in the future, etc. Here is an example, using the feedback from above:

Talent, Skills, or Values	Example	Insights
Natural ability to keep calm when others are stressed.	Team project: We were all behind, and some in the group were stressing out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This seems to be a personality trait as I have always worked well under pressure.</li> <li>- As a leadership quality, this could help in crisis situations.</li> </ul>
A lack of fear in speaking up when others won't.	Team project: Someone needed to call everyone out on the sloppy work we were doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is a skill I've practiced and learned over time, especially in my debate team and at home.</li> <li>- I once read a paper on courage and will now learn more about it.</li> </ul>
I value good working relationships.	Team project: How I helped us come together when we were beginning to split apart.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I thrive when people are all getting along and working well together.</li> <li>- This seems to come naturally to me.</li> </ul>

## Step Three: Take the CliftonStrengths Assessment

Take the CliftonStrengths Top 5 assessment. You have two options:

- 1) You can buy a new copy of the book, “Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow” by Tom Rath and Barry Conchie. When you buy a new copy of the book, you will receive a code that will enable you to take the strengths-based inventory online. Note that when you buy a used copy of the book, the code has typically already been used.
- 2) You can pay about \$25 online to take the assessment using this [link](#).

***If you have already taken this inventory, you do not need to take it again.*** You will be able to download your “Strengths Insight Guide” from the [website](#).

## **Step Four: Write About Your Strengths and Enablers**

Draw on the results of your analysis of your RBS email feedback and the results of the CliftonStrengths assessment to identify and write about your distinctive strengths and enablers. Note that enablers are the contextual factors that tend to facilitate your ability to perform at your best. These insights should emerge from your analysis of the RBS feedback as well as from your own reflections on past achievements, failures or shortcomings. Specific issues to address in your paper include the following:

- What are your unique skills, talents and abilities that enable you to achieve your highest levels of performance and most valued achievements?
- How did you develop these abilities?
- What contextual enablers most positively impact your best performance? These can be related to people (friends, family, co-workers, mentors, etc.), organizations (work, school, church, clubs, etc.), living arrangements, finances, or any other factors associated with your life situation.
- What can you do to further develop these strengths?

## **Step Five: Analyze and Write About the Blockers of Your Best Self**

In this section, you will examine and write about the personal and contextual factors that tend to hinder your ability to perform at your best. Personal and contextual blockers are similar in source to enablers, but they have the opposite effect — they get in the way of, hinder or limit your ability to perform at your best. These may include personal factors such as bad habits, lack of motivation, overconfidence, bad manners, lack of discipline or focus, etc. They may also include contextual factors such as certain relationships, certain assignments or roles, finances, living circumstances, etc.

- What personal factors hinder your ability to perform at your best?
- What contextual factors hinder your ability to perform at your best?
- What are the developmental implications of your analysis in this section?

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<sup>1</sup> Whetten, David A., and Cameron, Kim S. (2020). “Developing Management Skills” (10th edition, pp. 457-458). Pearson Prentice Hall.