

Teaching the module: Gaining self-awareness

This module is based on two premises: 1) that “self-awareness lies at the heart of the ability to master oneself and therefore to lead and manage others”¹ and 2) that people are more likely to be successful by developing their strengths than by shoring up their weaknesses.

CliftonStrengths Top 5

One way to begin the module is to assign students to take the [CliftonStrengths Top 5 assessment](#) before class. An important dimension of this assessment is that no one gets bad news. All the talents or strengths identified by the assessment are good news, and the absence of a talent or strength does not necessarily constitute a weakness. Ask students to bring to class the printout of their CliftonStrengths Top 5 report, which they can download after taking the assessment, and ask them to fill out a one-page form listing their five strengths and their numerical order under the headings of the CliftonStrengths domains in which they fall (see the “Understanding Your Strengths” PowerPoint for details). When students arrive in class, have them tape their forms to the classroom wall and walk around the room to look at the forms and note anything that they see of interest. For example, do they see anyone with their same strengths, and if they do, is the order of their strengths the same? As noted in the PowerPoint presentation, a person has a 1 in 275,000 chance of meeting someone with the same top five talents or strengths and a 1 in 33 million chance of meeting someone with the same top five talents or strengths in the same order as theirs. Students typically are impressed with the wide diversity of talents or strengths in the class. The PowerPoint presentation is self-explanatory and has content that the instructor can guide the students through to make points related to the importance of developing one’s talents into strengths. For example, students are asked to write their names with their dominant and nondominant hands to illustrate the idea of playing to their strengths vs. trying to shore up their weaknesses. As another example, the PowerPoint presentation provides an overview of a case study in which average and gifted readers were enrolled in the same speedreading class. After completing the class, average readers had increased their reading speed by 66%, while gifted readers had increased their reading speed by 828%. The session typically motivates students to think about and plan to develop their strengths in a more premeditated manner.

Reflected Best Self Exercise and Paper

The Reflected Best Self (RBS) Exercise and Paper can be used in conjunction with the CliftonStrengths Top 5 assessment. Several weeks before the beginning of this module, students can be assigned to send out emails requesting that 15 to 20 people who know them well write about one to three times when they saw them at their best and email their responses back to them during the following two weeks. Students will need at least 10 usable responses so they can analyze their responses to derive themes about their strengths following the approach suggested in the RBS instructions. They can then write a paper about their strengths drawing on three sources of data: 1) their analysis of the emails, 2) the results of the CliftonStrengths Top 5, and 3) their own observations about their behavior. Students should be asked to focus on the developmental implications of their findings regarding their talents and strengths. That is, what can they do to develop their strengths further? Students can also be assigned to think about, analyze, and write about the blockers of their best behavior — such as procrastination, lack of discipline, overuse of social media, or spending too much time on social activities.

Values Exercise

The Values Exercise blends nicely with the Reflected Best Self Exercise and Paper because the feedback from the emails as well as their own reflections can help students discover and articulate the values and principles that they actually live by. Students can be asked to reflect on and/or write about questions such as the following:

- What are my personal values, and why and how are they core to who I am?
- What can I do to strengthen my values?
- What do I stand for? What am I willing to fight or make major sacrifices for? What do I care passionately about?
- What legacy would I like to leave? What do I want to be remembered for? One method for addressing these questions is imagining your own funeral as Stephen Covey describes in his book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.”² It involves a thought experiment where you attend your own funeral and watch people from various parts of your life deliver eulogies to honor you. These may include members of your family (immediate and extended), your

friends, your co-workers, your teachers, your neighbors, your faith community, or someone else. What would you like for them to say about you, the life you led, your character, and your lasting legacies?

Note that the Values Exercise pairs nicely with Chapter 1, “Developing Self Awareness,” in “Developing Management Skills” by Whetten and Cameron.³

Managing Stress

Stress that is not managed well can have a devastating and costly effect on journalists, newsroom leaders and news organizations. Instructors can assign students to watch the video by Dan Harris, a former ABC journalist who anchored “Nightline” and co-anchored the weekend edition of “Good Morning America,” or they can show it in class. Harris addresses how journalists can proactively address stress through getting adequate sleep, exercising regularly, giving attention to nutrition, appreciating nature, building positive relationships, and practicing mindfulness and meditation. Instructors could ask students to address and reflect on questions such as the following:

- What do you see as the primary factors currently creating stress in your life?
- How do you tend to react and cope in stressful situations? Draw on specific examples from your past — both examples that resulted in positive growth and examples that resulted in more negative outcomes.
- What kinds of stressors have you encountered, and how have you managed them? In a future situation, what specific practices can you adopt to better manage these sources of stress?
- What can you do to strengthen your physical, psychological and social resiliency?

Students can learn more about the topic by reading [“Trauma & Journalism: A Guide for Journalists, Editors & Managers.”](#)⁴ Note that the video pairs nicely with Chapter 2, “Managing Stress and Wellbeing,” in the textbook “Developing Management Skills” by Whetten and Cameron.⁵

Exercise on Understanding and Communicating About Group Identities and Differences

This exercise helps students become aware of their own multiple identities and how being in the minority or majority in a particular context can affect their own perceptions, assumptions, experiences and behaviors. See the teaching note for a description of the in-class small group exercise and the large group discussion that follows.

¹Whetten, David A., and Cameron, Kim S. (2020). “Developing Management Skills” (10th edition, p. 37). Pearson Prentice Hall.

² Covey, Stephen R. (1990). “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic.” Fireside Books.

³Whetten and Cameron (2020), 10th edition, pp. 37-82.

⁴ Brayne, Mark (2007). [“Trauma & Journalism: A Guide for Journalists, Editors & Managers.”](#)

⁵ Whetten and Cameron (2020), 10th edition, pp. 83-130.