Strengths Confirmed

After completing the “Gallup” Strengths Finder Test, I was unclear on several of my strengths and how they have presented themselves in my life. When evaluating my strengths, I was confident in Belief, Achiever, and Positivity, but struggled to find examples of how I portrayed the Includer and Learner strengths. I found through the affirmation process though, I was able to obtain a stronger understanding of how I have put these strengths into action. In addition, these affirmations provided me with a gateway to a better understandingofhow I can develop these strengths in the future.

Throughout my life, I have consistently placed importance in including others. I find a moral obligation in my life to ensure that others feel equal and apart of something. When examining “Includer” as a strength, I was able to find surface-level examples, as mentioned above, but had trouble uncovering stronger cases that gave it the significance of a strength. After receiving my affirmations, I quickly realized I was incorrect and that including others has always been a strong part of my life. I began to better understand many of my actions that are fostered through my includer strength are natural, not through conscious effort. As my mother, Christie Bybee, said in her affirmation of my includer strength, “He is a friend to the jocks, the nerds, the special need kids, the outcast, the popular.” I enjoy constantly meeting others, but never have felt pressured to meet someone in an effort to include them. It became very interesting that through basic activity I enjoyed, I was making an impact on others by including them. My mother goes on to say in her affirmation that my includer strength was specifically evident “especially when he spent time with Marisa Uribe, who is a special needs student at Westlake High School.” My mother went on to say in her affirmation about my includer strength that through my “effort to talk to Marisa as a "normal" student and treat her like his other friends at Westlake…Marissa felt a million dollars.” I went through my friendship with Marissa without ever feeling like I had to make her feel like a normal student. Through my mother’s affirmation, I was able to realize that my includer strength is not one that I am always trying to accomplish, but rather one that comes by the nature of my character. In an affirmation about my includer strength, Diane Carter, an assistant principal at Westlake High School, touched on a dance I helped organize for special-needs students, specifically on how “at the dance, [I] was all over the place being sure all participants were having a great time.” She went on to say that “the best part is that all these actions are genuinely "who he is" rather than an act that he simply thinks is good.” This short statement strongly solidifies my idea that my includer strength is one that I do not consciously make an effort towards, but rather comes naturally through whom I am and what I enjoy to do. By looking deeper into how I include others, I realized that most, if not all strengths occur without much thought. Strengths come organically, in ways that we are not always completely aware of. Not only did I learn how I have shown examples of how I include others, but I also realized the great thing about strengths is that they are apart of our human nature and will occur if we simply do what we enjoy and think is right. These affirmations helped guide me to realize that my includer strength is one that is easy to accomplish, and, now that I am conscious of it, very easy to develop. I feel confident that through the discovery of where my includer strength roots from, I will successfully be able to cultivate it into a strong part of my life.

In addition to “includer,” I also struggled to understand “learner” as a strength. During high school I was an above average student that did not necessarily go above and beyond in the classroom. I found interest in various subjects, such as history and math, but rarely took the initiative to look outside of the classroom in an effort to garner additional information. After reading the affirmations on my learning strength, I have found a much clearer idea of how I portray “learner” as a strength, and how I can continue to develop that strength.In an affirmation regarding my strength as a learner, Melissa Dupre, the Westlake Student Council sponsor during all four of my years in high school, explains how she has “seen [me] voluntarily take on many endeavors, and in each one (successful or otherwise), [I have] clearly been open to learning.” She goes on to say that through my experiences mentoring younger students, opening a snow-cone stand, and learning from my mistake after a group of students and I broke an organizational rule, I am a strong example of a learner. After reading through this affirmation, it is much clearer on why I am a defined in this strength category. I typically take on new challenges or adventures, constantly learning from those experiences. For example, last summer, two friends and I put together a mobile marine snow cone stand that operated out of Lake Austin. Although we were profitable at the end of the summer, I was pleased most with the amount of knowledge I was coming away from the summer with. Whether it was knowledge about plumbing, working well with others, working with government agencies, pitching a business idea to potential investors, or interacting with customers, I was confident that through my experience I learned information that will better help me in the future. Through the affirmation process, I know that experiences are my source of learning. To truly begin to develop myself personally, experiences will need to be the main area of focus that I have. In addition, I have never truly been confident in myself as a learner. As I mentioned above, I have always thought of learning as process related to school classes, such as history or English. This affirmation process has not only helped provide me with a better understanding of how I present myself as a learner, but also has provided me with confidence that I am learning on a regular basis, simply through a different channel than I thought before.

Strengths are typically used in positive ways, but can occasionally present themselves as negatives in certain situations. Belief, a strength that takes powerful hold in my life, has at times become so strong that I become close-minded and lose respect for others’ opinions and values. For example, during a trip to China several years ago, I participated in a number of tours that focused on the Chinese religion and beliefs. Although the history was fascinating, I found myself focusing solely on how incorrect the beliefs of the Chinese people were in my eyes and how ignorant they were to believe what they did. Later, when I realized my close-mindedness, I was shocked that my strength in belief could have such a negative effect on my view of others, ultimately hindering other strengths such as includer and learner. In that moment I realized strengths can become some of my greatest allies in accomplishing tasks, but also some of the greatest obstacles holding me back. By taking a step back and analyzing how each strength presents itself as a weakness, I was able to better understand the amount of importance each strength can have in my life without overruling other strengths or undermining the values of others.