# Happtivist Episode 5 – Strength Spotting

**Narelle:** So, hello and welcome to the Happtivist podcast for Action for Happiness Australia. We want to inspire action for a compassionate and connected society, and to do this we use and share the science of well-being, but in a way that you connect with, understand and apply immediately. So, in this podcast we promote individual and collective action. We want to empower you with your wellbeing, provide ideas, make connexions and inspire you. So, who are we? Well, hello, I'm Narelle Lemon. I'm the chair of Action for Happiness Australia. I'm also an educator, coach and researcher. I'm passionate about self-care and translating this into the everyday.

**Linda:** Hello. I'm Linda, Secretary of Action to Happiness Australia. I'm also a facilitator, coach and trainer. I'm passionate about wellbeing at work and the restorative power of walking in nature. It's benefits to our body, brain and mind.

**Narelle:** So, in this episode, we'll be talking about strength spotting during a time of change. So, what is it? Well, put simply, strengths are something you are good at and enjoy doing. If we put it academically, strengths are the characteristics of a person that allow them to perform well or at their personal best. So, let's connect with what strengths do. Strengths energise us, strengths allow us to be gentler to ourselves and others. Strengths offer us a way to experience the situation. They are one major resource for our toolbox, for self-care resources. They change and develop over time and strengths when embodied, are a way to explore and connect and be with some of those core aspects important for flourishing. So, I often explain strengths as our superpowers. We perform them well; they energise us, and we love using them. And when we're at our best, we use them a lot and actually we are at our best when we do use them. So, with my coaching clients, I explain that knowing strengths is knowing your greatest natural talents and they represent potential. I often say they make us jump out of bed in the morning. We can't wait to use them because we feel our best. We're energised, we're excited, and we can't wait to put them to use.

**Linda:** I love that Narelle, the sense of having superpowers, because the great thing is that we all have strengths and when we use our strengths, we're happier, more confident, and we have a glow about us that's often infectious. And, you know, as with most things, balance is important, right? So, strengths can be underused, which can leave us feeling a bit ho hum. Like we're not really kind of tuning in to the best of ourselves. Or on the flip side, if we use them too much, it can that can backfire. We can become rigid in our behaviour or the activity can kind of lose its shine. But when we tune in to what's right for us and dig deep into thinking about ourselves through a strong strengths based lens, we can hit that sweet spot and things around us change. Our strengths can help us to gain perspective and clarity, do well, feel a sense of effortlessness as well as that sense of energy, that jumping out of bed. And there are a number of different tools that can help us to identify our strengths. So, one of the most popular is the VIA or the Values in Action character strengths. So, the VIA is freely accessible. So, you can Google it and access it online. And it has 240 items or statements which you respond to. And once you complete the VIA, it lists the 24 strengths ranked in order of priority for you from your highest or signature strengths. So, the ones that are most developed for you through to your lesser strengths, the VIA is commonly used in schools and workplaces, so it's applicable across a range of contexts and there's access to the free survey.

**Linda:** It's also available in adult and a youth version, so anyone from the age of ten upwards can complete it and learn about their strengths, which is what I love. We can start early and identify our strengths in children as well. So, the BIA framework suggests that each and every one of us possess all of those 24 strengths. Our top ranking strengths are, as I mentioned, the signature strengths and the ones that rate low are strengths that we may not yet have had a chance to develop or use. So you can find the tool online via [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org) and we will of course include the link in the show notes as well. So, these 24 strengths, how did they come about? So, Chris Petersen and Martin Seligman developed the tool based on several criteria. So, for those of you who don't know Chris Petersen and Martin Seligman, they were both fathers, if you like, or are eminent researchers in positive psychology. So, they identified six virtues that demonstrate how the strengths are the root through which we achieve the virtues in our life. So, let me give you some examples. The six virtues are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. So, each of the 24 strengths sit under one of those six virtues. So, wisdom, for example, the virtue of wisdom has the strength of creativity, curiosity, judgement, love of learning and perspective. The virtue of temperance has forgiveness, humility, prudence and self-regulation. So, each of these virtues has a range of strengths within its category. So, let's think about strengths to help us during moments of change.

**Narelle:** Nice. So, Linda and I in this episode are going to connect with the practise of strength spotting. And this is a particular strategy that we think will be really great during times of change and strength. Spotting allows you to become aware of what is happening around you, to spot in others strengths, providing the opportunity to connect with others and to sometimes reconsider situations. You can strength spot during conversations and when spotting strengths. In the moment, you really connect with a way that can be incredibly valuable. So, you can also strength spot in yourself. So it's a great strategy for working with others, but also working with yourself as well and knowing what makes you feel invigorated, excited and motivated and allows you to flourish and focus on what is good in life or a situation and that can help you. Things approach change and shift through that as well. So, you can think about key moments daily to Strength Spot. And some of the ways that you can do this is to think about some questions like during the day of what task or action am I performing? How do I feel? What am I thinking? Do I feel motivated, engaged and energised? And if yes, what strengths am I using? If no? What strengths are you perhaps not engaging with or under? Using or overusing that it doesn't feel like a strength? And then some things about strength spotting at the end of the day. You can ask yourself questions like, How did I feel energised today? When did I most feel energised? When was I performing at my best? What was I doing at that time? And what strengths was I using? So Okay, Linda, let's talk about strengths spotting and the impact on your life.

**Linda:** I love those questions, Narelle, because I think what they point to is not only when are we using our strengths, but in what context. So, in 2009 I was lucky enough to jet over to the US to do Marcus Buckingham simply strength training course. And look, it totally changed the way I looked at myself and my strengths and what and where I could best contribute. So, this has actually seen me through many a good time and it's what I come back to during the challenging times as well. So, my top VIA strengths are creativity, bravery, wisdom, love of learning and perspective. And we know that kind of what each of these strengths look like is different for each and every person. For me, creativity is about how I link different things together and then kind of wrap them up in a package. So, it might be about taking a specific practise from one context and applying it to another to get a new or kind of novel outcome. And of course, bravery also comes into play here too, because it doesn't always turn out the way I expect that, you know, a love of learning is also a really big one for me. And if I'm facing challenges or going through a stressful period, I deliberately seek out opportunities to learn something new. So, an example of this is just a couple of months ago during lockdown, I completed the MT Q licence user training. So, for me that gave me something positive to focus on and get excited about.

**Linda:** And I also found it really energising. So, it provided me with an opportunity to combine kind of a few strengths. So, wisdom, perspective, love of learning, which was just great. And you know, I've really struggled with face to face workshops being postponed and my dance card suddenly empty. So, you know, tuning into a focus on developing new offerings has been really important to me as well, because, of course, that again enables me to combine my love of learning. So, researching different elements and also creativity in terms of bringing it all together. I think my strength of perspective has also really helped me out during COVID because it's been able it's enabled me to take that step back and see the big picture, which has come in really, really handy when you know you're in the thick of things at home. And interestingly, I've also found developing one of my lesser strengths. So, appreciation of beauty is a lesser strength for me. But I noticed that one thing that relaxes me is looking at beautiful things. So that sense of kind of, you know, visually, aesthetically appealing. So, at the end of a workshop, I might walk past windows of arty type shops. And given that, I obviously can't do that at the moment, the courses have been online, so I've actually taken my appreciation of beauty online as well. So, I've now become an online window shopper.

**Narelle:** I love it.

**Linda:** And, and I also I really love Christmas. So, my, my thing to look forward to at the moment is just being able to look at all the Christmas displays. That's something I'm really looking forward to.

**Narelle:** Gorgeous. Gorgeous. I love it. Yes. I think your appreciation of beauty strength will definitely be growing and developing. I like those alternatives. That online window shopper. That's very cool. That's very cool. So, I'm starting to think about, you know, COVID lockdown in Melbourne. It feels like it's been 20 months of restrictions that at times where the days of just blurred in, it feels so much longer. But you know, a major change for all of us has been that acknowledgement of ups and downs. And I think what COVID has enabled us to do is to really verbalise it, appreciate it and acknowledge it that it occurs in all of us. So, it's that common humanity that comes through part of that self-compassion. And so, strength spotting during this time has been a really critical thing, and it's helped me in a number of ways. So, with work, I've used strengths spotting with my colleagues as they innovate in new ways during COVID. And I've really taken a proactive action in terms of saying it to them and asking them about what they've been doing. And that's been really key for myself and to enact appreciation, but also acknowledgement in my colleagues as well. And so, zest paired with curiosity. Ian love of learning have been what I've put into place to support my self-strength body in others, but also support a dialogue that places more of a proactive learning from each other lens in conversations. And this has been really key to shift that challenge for all of us as we've worked through COVID and changes in workload, how we work, all those sorts of expectations.

**Narelle:** So, strength spotting has been a wonderful way to really change those feelings. Personal and professional boundaries have been totally blurred as well, so my routines have been totally thrown out the window during COVID, but everything absolutely has changed. And so, I had to shift through using my strengths and spotting in myself a forgiveness and humanity. And they've been really critical for me as I've moved through trying to work in the same ways pre-COVID and getting frustrated that I couldn't and then throwing my hands up in the air. And I had to shift from staying in that moment to actually finding new ways and embracing new ways of working as well and being a little bit kinder to myself. So, and I know I'm not the only one that's had to do this. So, there's a little bit of self-compassion and common humanity coming into play there with my self-talk, and I'm sure you've noticed that in yourself as well. And one big aspect has been the strength of gratitude. So, a personal gratitude practise has been key during moments of change, and it's helped me really navigate stress. And what's been really interesting is that you can't be stressed and grateful at the same time. And so, putting into practise a gratitude practise has been quite significant. Whether I say it, I write it down, I tweet it, but actually engaging in that strength of gratitude and then noticing in myself what happens. So that's like the double edged strength spotting as well. It's made a significant change in how I think about things and how I feel.

**Linda:** Nice.

**Narelle:** So, let's end this episode with a quick piece of advice to help us put everything into action. So, the American positive psychology guru, Sonia Lyubomirsky, in her book, A Practical Guide to Getting the Life You Want: The How of Happiness. She looked at the how and why strategies worked in relation to our engagement with them. She identified five critical mechanisms for action, positive emotion, time, social support, motivation, effort and commitment and habit. So, let's have a look at these and what they mean as we move forward with strength spotting so positive emotion. I'm going to think about this as spotting in yourself the use of a strength when you are feeling out of your comfort zone or pushed in a way that ignites fear, resistance or anger. Linda, what about you?

**Linda:** I love that Narelle. Using a strength is energising, and you can call them to the fore when you're feeling challenged so that you can reset. I think positive emotion is also the key when we're strength spotting in others. So, don't assume that because someone is good at something, whether it's taking minutes or organising events or motivating others and getting them on board, don't assume that just because they're good at that, it actually lights them up or energises them. It might be just a learnt behaviour. So, a strength is not only what you're good at, but it's also what you find energising. So, look for that positive emotion both in yourself as well as in others.

**Narelle:** Super ace point. I really love that. Just because you're good at it doesn't mean it's a strength. Really nice. Number two time investing in time during the day to spot strengths in others and articulate it is really important. And I would also say making sure you invest time in strength spotting in yourself.

**Linda:** I agree Narelle. So important and I think going even beyond maybe identifying your strengths and noticing the context. So, in what situations do you use them and who with? For instance, is there a specific group of people, whether it's clients or friends or work colleagues, that enables you to really sparkle with that strength?

**Narelle:** Hmm. Nice. Okay. Number three is social support in Sonya's tips. And so, I'm going to think about what happens when you talk about strengths rather than problems or what hasn't been done with others. So, I think about the impact on relationships and social connexion. There will be a change. It might not happen immediately, but what will be interesting to notice is verbalising things from previously, not verbalising them, and how that shifts over time to develop a language where you can talk about strengths as well. So, I'm going to encourage you to think about talking about strengths rather than the deficit or the negative or the problem as you engage with others.

**Linda:** Absolutely. I think that's key, Narelle. And I remember a workshop with Tal Ben SHAHAR many years ago and I remember he put up on the screen for maths equations and he asked us to name what we saw. So, to call it out. Now three of the maths equations were correct and one of the equations was wrong. So, everyone noticed and commented verbalised on the one that was incorrect. So, I think really what you're saying here is be the person that that sees, that identifies and also names the three that are correct coming from a strengths based approach rather than that deficit approach that you spoke about.

**Narelle:** So important. So important. I'm having shudders in terms of being in work meetings where people are told, you made that mistake in the presentation rather than, Oh, I really enjoyed X, Y and Z ideas and focussing on what that brings. Yeah, really nice. Okay. Number four, motivation, effort and commitment. It takes effort to shift through change. And not only do we have to grapple with our thoughts and different aspects that are coming through as we are processing change, but we also have to be really aware of how we're easily influenced by negativity around us. So, I think that negative bias we talked about in episode one of this podcast, so let's put the effort into flip situations.

**Linda:** Absolutely. I agree. And I think the great thing with strength spotting here and strengths in general is that because they're energising, they become self-propelling in terms of motivation and effort. We're motivated to use our strengths because they feel good for us.

**Narelle:** Totally, totally. We get that contagion, a positive contagion, rather than the negative bias. Okay. Number five is habits repeating small X over time become a habit. So, with strength spotting in yourself or others, this is so true. So, start small, pick a regular routine and adding strength spotting. It could be a trip to the supermarket, the drop off of your children at school. Now that we can do it. Yay! The morning stand up reading interaction with family members or colleagues who challenge you. So think about how can you think through a specific task or engagement or interaction where you can flip it and create that habit that you start to think about from a strength perspective, or you start spotting strengths in others and just noticing what happens. First of all, to yourself and your thoughts and your mind's, your feeling in your body and setting that challenge for you to create a habit where that starts to become a part of your practise.

**Linda:** I agree. I love that. Narelle I think just start off noticing one thing, just a small thing, but get curious about it and you might find that with deliberate focus it then grows.

**Narelle:** Totally, totally. Okay. So, we're going to end the episode with one practical tip strategy or practise. Linda, what have you got for us?

**Linda:** Yeah. So, I think a key enabler, and this continues what you were just saying, Narelle a key enabler here I think is mindfulness or single tasking. So, it's difficult to notice strengths either in yourself or in others if you're distracted or if you're busy doing multiple things at once. So, strength spotting for me really involves tuning in. So, tuning in to how you're feeling, what you're looking forward to in your day, what comes effortlessly to you, and what that leaves you with a buzz. You only notice these things if you create space for them. And I think the questions that you went through earlier on, Narelle, really help that kind of sense of mindfulness around tuning in to how you're feeling, because we know that if we're feeling stressed or stretched or overwhelmed, it dampens our ability to notice the positive impact that perhaps using our strengths bring. And I think that's true also. So, if we're tuning into others as well. So notice when they start speeding up in their speech or they start sitting forward in the chair and you can notice these things even virtually over Zoom or whatever platform you're using, because when they're doing this, they're often connecting with their passion. So, notice the words and phrases they use. So, what do they love it when you know and ask about it? You know, it sounds like you really get a buzz from that. I can see it light you up. Tell me more. What specifically do you enjoy about it? So, I guess my practical tip or strategy is mindfulness and single tasking so that you can tune in and spot those strengths both in yourself as well as others.

**Narelle:** Top, top, top tip. I really like that. I really like it indeed. Okay, so we've love connecting with you and sharing ideas and insights into strength spotting during the time of change and in our show notes, we'll have lots of links that can support you as well. So, we want to know what you think, what's inspired you, and perhaps any questions that you'd like answered as well. So, leave a review on Apple because reviews help us be found and help us help others. And of course, if you share as well, that's an action to help others as well. And you may also like to leave a comment or a question via our Instagram, Facebook or LinkedIn accounts so you can find us at www.actionforhappinessaustralia.org And we're on Facebook and LinkedIn as Action for Happiness Australia and on Instagram we are at #Happtivist. So, we look forward to connecting with you shortly and we also look forward to you joining us next time. Thanks, Linda. Thanks.