

Enjoy these sample activities from:

Unleash Your Epic Self

**THE GUIDE TO CRUSHING IT
AT SCHOOL, WORK AND LIFE**

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Spot Positive Emotion

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Are you hoping that the dog will eat your homework? That it will be a snow day? That no one will notice that you got glasses? The truth is that only about 10% of our happiness is the result of our life circumstances. Despite research that shows how important it is to learn and use well-being-builder activities, many people count on random positive events to get them through the day. Why depend on others for your flourishing? Close to half of your well-being can be affected by intentional activities—ones you choose. Wish you had more control over your own life, to set goals, make choices, increase self-regulation? You have the potential right now to **UNLEASH YOUR EPIC SELF**.

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You have the greatest potential for **UNLEASHING YOUR EPIC SELF** when you learn skills to impact your own life. Some examples of intentional activities include:

- Focusing on what is going well (even when some things aren't)
- Choosing flexible approaches when dealing with challenges
- Spotting and using your strengths
- Connecting with friends and loved ones
- Choosing activities that give you meaning and purpose
- Challenging yourself with goals and taking action toward them
- Engaging in regular exercise, healthy diet, and quality sleep

“Wellbeing is the fertilizer for your flourishing.”

JOHN RATEY

Tell New Stories

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Most people think that optimism is about expecting good things to happen in the future. While that is partly true, what's more important is that optimistic people imagine that they can positively influence the future. Before you get to imagining your future though, you need to be aware of the stories you tell yourself. Those stories contain your explanations about why you think events, both good and bad, happen to you. Who or what caused them? How long will they be a problem? What things in your life are affected by the problem? What if you want to change things?

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Your thoughts and explanations can strengthen the emotions you feel – both positive and negative. Say you are angry after an argument when you did not get your way. You may think about all of the reasons why you are right and the other person is wrong, and keep replaying that story, and those thoughts, in your head. You might tell the story to someone else so that they confirm for you that the explanation is right, and your situation is unjust.

Together optimism and resilience are about managing those thoughts. They are a learned set of skills for dealing with times when you face negative thoughts, the kind that drag you down and keep you from positive action. These skills help you deal with:

- momentary negative emotions
- accumulated daily difficulties
- bigger setbacks

“It isn’t what you have, or who you are, or where you are, or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about it.”

DALE CARNEGIE

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Thinking About Setbacks

Write about something that did not go well for your epic self recently. :- (Take yourself back to the moment, and explain the thoughts and emotions you were having then. Go ahead, be brutally honest!

What happened was:

It happened because:

The result of this was:

reflect

Learning how to notice and manage your thoughts, both negative and positive, is an important part of building and regulating your epic self. When you think you are being brutally honest with the truth, you are usually giving your interpretation of the event rather than the facts. Go back to your “It happened because...” and come up with another reason for what happened. Write it here:

Manage Strengths Buttons

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It can be hard to work against your strengths. They are automatic and feel right. So honest people may find it hard to tell a white lie, and forgiving people may let others hurt them over and over. These are examples of overdoing it with a strength. The reverse, underusing a strength, can also happen.

For instance, you may struggle to complete tasks. Some perseverance strength would help, but maybe it is hard for you. You have “strengths buttons.” Remember that strengths are connected to your values and identity, so sometimes you’ll have a strong reaction when your strengths are challenged or violated by someone else.

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Strengths buttons get pushed when other people’s strengths are either different from or in conflict with your own. Imagine that you observe someone who shows ungrateful behavior. This could happen if gratitude comes easily to you. Because you might automatically expect them to show the thanks that you would in a similar situation, you may feel a strong judger reaction toward the person.

After the button for your well-developed strength is pushed, you may react with strong feelings and behaviors, too. Since your relationships with others depend on balancing your needs and wants with those of the other person, knowing how to manage these moments when your strengths buttons have been pushed can make a big difference. You can prevent overreacting by observing the times when you are having a strengths moment. Feeling disgusted? Angry? Afraid? Any time you react with a strong negative emotion and judger thoughts, it is worth asking yourself if a strengths button has been pushed.



“There are uses to adversity, and they don't reveal themselves until tested. Whether it's serious illness, financial hardship, or the simple constraint of parents who speak limited English, difficulty can tap unexpected strengths.”

SONIA SOTOMAYOR

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Having A Moment

Do you keep track of daily hassles and aggravation? Instead of feeling angry, worried, or sad, analyze them through a strengths lens. Any strength, even ones that are not as easy for you, can be developed and managed. When you use strengths patterns that are already in place, you can build on them to get results.

Look at your [VIA Survey](#) results. What were the strengths that you **did not** connect to your automatic actions? They have higher numbers and will be toward the end of your list of strengths. Which of these would make it easier for you to succeed?

Now think of an example of a time in the past few days when you felt like someone else really aggravated you. Did it feel as if the other person was annoying you on purpose? Remember: the bigger the super power, the bigger the strengths button moment. What are your **super power strengths buttons**? Start with the three most automatic ones.

Practice Self-Compassion

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No matter how good you are at something, someone else is probably going to be able to do it better. That's one reason that you compare yourself to others. It gives you a reference point and can also help you see how to improve your own performance. Of course comparing yourself to others can also leave you feeling as if you don't measure up. This can make it hard to connect positively to other people. Fortunately, you can learn to treat yourself with the same combination of honest care and encouragement that you would use with a friend.

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Everyone fails sometimes. You'll remember from your journal weeks about optimism and resilience that when you actively search for and believe in potential solutions to challenging situations, you can bounce back and keep trying. What would you say to a friend who worried about how they measured up while working toward a performance goal? First of all, you would comfort them. Then you would help them to see what went well. You'd steer them away from comparing themselves to others. Then you would help them to think of failures as learning experiences. Finally, you would help them take the next step toward success.

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”

HELEN KELLER



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Self-compassion Exercise

Showing compassion and empathy are marks of a good friend. Self-compassion is a way to offer yourself the same care, understanding and encouragement you would offer others. When you think both accurate and kind thoughts about yourself, you are giving yourself permission to be imperfect. However, this doesn't mean that you will stop striving to be your very best. Instead it means you can face failures with acceptance, responsibility, and new direction, but without shaming criticism.

When you use your kindness “strengths powers” for good, what do you say and do to help encourage a friend who is struggling?

What does your inner voice (mind chatter) say to you, when you are struggling?

Be Your Own Boss

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Back in the section on Optimism and Resilience, Week 2, you learned that we have many thinking biases. Here are four of them:

- 1. Negativity:**
Bad is stronger than good.
- 2. Confirmation:**
You see the evidence you are looking for.
- 3. Jumping to Conclusions:**
You ignore evidence that disagrees with your thought.
- 4. Catastrophizing:**
You expect the worst.

If you were the boss, your workers would need reassurance to keep moving when they feel overwhelmed, angry or fearful. The boss (you!) may be capable of logical thought, but can also get stuck in thinking traps. (See Optimism and Resilience to refresh your epic self.) When this happens, what seems like logic may instead be a step off the learner path into the judger swamp.

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Remember that the pathway you travel is bounded by your values. To be the boss of you, you need to know what these are. Another way of thinking about values is that they are what you believe is the right action to take. In the section on Strengths, you identified your Values In Action (VIA). You can know and use your strengths to keep the pathway clear and your direction in view. This helps you remain calm and happy so you can imagine the future and act on your plans. Bosses have workers, so being the boss of you means you are also a worker.

Reward Small Wins Regularly

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Dana Torres swam in five Olympic Games and won twelve Olympic medals. Yet she did not even swim in her first race until she was fourteen years old! Whether you have been training for something for your whole life or are just getting started, you can set goals that will help you improve your current performance. These small wins are ingredients for your future big successes. Small wins add to your positive emotion bank account. Remember from the Positivity section that happier people focus on what's going well, expect more positive outcomes in the future, and use this to keep moving forward.

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The best performers in sports practice by gradually refining particular aspects of their individual performances. This discipline is necessary to get to expert levels. If you are on a team, it also matters to spend extensive time practicing mindfully and getting regular, immediate feedback from top coaches or teachers who encourage performance refinement. This helps you set personal strategic goals. Specific individual practice leads to the small wins that everyone needs to succeed. Whether you are an athlete or not, it helps to have passion for the activity that builds your commitment so you desire continual improvement. Choose an activity that you love!

“There is always a step small enough from where we are to get us to where we want to be. If we take that small step, there’s always another we can take, and eventually a goal thought to be too far to reach becomes achievable.”

ELLEN LANGER



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Rewarding Small Wins

Success requires the willingness to push yourself beyond your comfort zone; participate in training activities with an expert skilled in developing particular abilities; incorporate many kinds of feedback to identify areas for refinement; and engage in deliberate practice focused on improvement.

What steps did you take this week toward achieving your goal?

What feedback did you receive, and how did you use it?

How did you celebrate your small wins?

reflect

Read this week’s quotation aloud. Every step in the right direction is still moving you ahead toward your goal. What is a surprisingly small step you have taken that turned out to be more valuable than expected?

Move: It's Good Medicine

learn

In places in the world where humans live the longest and healthiest lives, people share some important lifestyle similarities. One of these is that they have days full of natural movement, including walking, bicycle riding, and hiking. People who live in these places around the world, called Blue Zones, are not just physically healthier. They are also emotionally healthier and have stronger cognitive (thinking) health even as they age into their 90's and beyond. Scientists have found that movement like this is not only good for your physical health and sport performance, it's essential for your well-being.

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You probably know that regular aerobic exercise, the kind that increases your heart rate, is an essential part of your conditioning workout. Cardio exercise before learning, like in the morning before school or work, also helps you have better memory and learning skills, as well as be more focused and effective. Exercising brains send out chemicals telling your body to grow new brain cells and to make the new brain connections you'll need to make good use of those cells. The parts of your brain responsible for focused attention are also made more active by exercise. People who exercise are also less likely to be depressed.

“At every level, from the microcellular to the psychological, exercise not only wards off the ill effects of chronic stress; it can also reverse them...When you say you feel less stressed out after you go for a swim, or even a fast walk, you are.”

JOHN RATEY

Unleashing My Epic Self

positivity (P)

Notice what's good.
Collect more positive than negative.

optimism and resilience (O)

Expect what's good.
Reframe what isn't.

strengths (S)

Get more of what's good about you.
Develop new strengths.

emotional intelligence (E)

Develop solid relationships.
Be grateful, forgiving and kind.

decision making and change (D)

Desire what's good.
Manage obstacles to success.

goal setting, grit and growth mindset (G)

Plan for and stick with what's good.
Unleash the power of YET.

engagement and exercise (E)

Apply strengths and mindfulness.
Invest in shared experiences.



Sherri Fisher began her professional career working with bright adolescents who struggled with learning, attention, and organization. When these students learned to magnify and leverage their strengths and identify their success patterns, they flourished in spite of their challenges. Her clients have gone on to attend elite colleges, launch successful companies, and build flourishing relationships, careers, and businesses. As the world's first learning specialist to earn the University of Pennsylvania's Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) degree, Sherri has had the privilege to learn and train with the top researchers and practitioners in the field.

Sherri's work leads people to find success in learning and in life through discovering, redirecting, and engaging strengths; developing optimism and resilience; and improving the key relationships necessary to support academic, personal, and professional growth. Her model for improving well-being, the POS-EDGE®, is inspired by Martin Seligman's PERMA theory of well-being. Sherri is co-author of the popular positive education book *SMART Strengths: Building Character, Resilience and Relationships in Youth*; she has written over 50 articles for *Positive Psychology News*; and contributed to three edited collections including *Character Strengths Matter*.

Sherri is inspired by human potential and the systems that develop it, and maintains close connections with an accomplished, international network of educators, professionals, Positive Psychology researchers, and practitioners. She has grown children and and three big, friendly dogs.

Find out more at www.sherrifisher.com and www.learnandflourish.com.