



Nuh-uh.

You did not just ask me that!

By Margaret Mulligan, Frederick, MD

Strengths Articulation saw its beginnings over 60 years ago, in 1945. Military personnel returning from World War II were the early beneficiaries of this amazing process. They learned how to take the best of who they were prior to their military lives, incorporate it with the best of what they experienced during their service years, and then meld everything together to build a successful career in the civilian world that matched their full set of strengths and interests.

Fast forward to 2009, to a conference room with veterans of more recent conflicts and wars. Some did not even know why they were there, other than it was part of the employment program in which they were participating. Each was experiencing some form of barrier to employment, such as homelessness, prior convictions, a history of substance abuse, having a physical or psychiatric disability. As facilitators, we did not know which veteran was experiencing what barrier. That didn't matter to us. What mattered was that we were there to help each one discover the freedom that comes from knowing who you are at your best.

With each workshop, I try not to not think about who the participants *might be*. I try to form no pre-conceived notions based on their personalities or what I know of their life experiences. That way, I can enjoy the ride of getting to discover each unique person as his or her story unfolds. I broke my own rule a bit with this particular group. I went in with the expectation that they would be “tough cookies.” On the first day of the workshop, as expected, I felt they were a bit reluctant, hesitant to share with three women who had no military experience. But, on the last day, boy, what a difference! Smiling, laughing, whistling, talking, joking. What happened in between?

The enlightenment that is Dependable Strengths happened. The joy, the satisfaction, the newly discovered (or newly recovered) confidence and self-esteem that opens up to each participant. Let me give you an example of a hard working guy, who learns quickly, is self-motivated, and reliable. While attending the workshop, he was also carrying out his job search and setting up interviews for the days we were not in session. We met on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. He scheduled a job interview for that Thursday.

The timing was perfect. By the day of his interview, he had seen two job interview role plays that demonstrated strength-based answers to interview questions. He had narrowed down his possible Dependable Strengths by completing the Biographical Questionnaire, the strengths chart, and the reality test, and he had confirmed his Dependable Strengths through Pair & Prove and the Partnership of Excellence. So, you can bet we were anxious to chat with him on Friday!

When we asked about the interview, he told us something we were not expecting. Not only did he have to face an interview panel, it was also a group interview, with a dozen other guys interviewing for the same job—*all at the same time!*

I asked him what he did to make himself stand out. With a great big grin on his face, he said, “They asked all of us to answer one question.”

“And, the question was?”

“Tell me about yourself.”

He told us, “I immediately thought to myself: Nuh uh. You did not just ask me that!”

How perfect was that? What better way to stand out in a crowd than to be able to articulate your strengths and talk about how you would be valuable to the employer? This self-motivated, reliable, quick learner aced the interview. His fellow workshop participants were in awe—as were his workshop facilitators! Who ever heard of such an interview? None of us had, that’s for sure.

This story has made for some great discussion in subsequent workshops when we talk about the necessity of standing out and being remembered. Facilitating the Dependable Strengths Process is so rewarding. To see the happiness, self-confidence, and motivation in participants at the end of each workshop is just pure enjoyment for me. I was especially touched at the end of this workshop, when one of the participants, after sharing his drawing and how he felt about it, asked what it was like for us. I told him for me it is unbelievably rewarding and satisfying, and just too much fun. As always, I left with my cheeks hurting from smiling so much!