

Building a Strengths-Based Community of Flourishing at TBJ

Our Vision:

At TBJ our strengths-based curriculum builds an enduring culture of flourishing, well-being and confidence through dynamic and enduring experiences that connect the wisdom of Jewish tradition, the strength of our community and the best in ourselves to impact the world.

Our Purpose:

We intend to connect everything we do with the goal of helping every willing member of our community flourish - to find renewed meaning, purpose and wellbeing.

Our Impact:

We are seeking to create an entirely new paradigm for Jewish life by making our synagogue a center for human flourishing. To that end, we will ensure that learners at TBJ find authentic joy, meaning and well-being by doubling down on the characteristics that make us strong and relying on the Jewish wisdom that we know can help bring clarity and balance to a world that feels off-killter.

Our Plan:

What are we doing?

- Reviewing, enhancing and rewriting our pre-k and religious school curriculum to marry the worlds of spirituality and positive psychology (see the FAQs on the back side of this document for more information).
- Evolving our culture so that a strengths-based approach is embedded in all that we do.

How will we do it?

- Working with external consultants and leveraging the best in research to create and implement plans and tools that will deliver effective implementation of this vision.
- Leveraging training and support to build the capacity of our leadership and staff members to take a strengths-based approach in their work.
- Work with all parts of our community to lift up what's best in us and to integrate strengths into our fabric.

When will this happen?

- While the full implementation of this plan will take place over the coming three years, we've been engaging in this work with our congregation for nearly a year and a half, starting with CLAL in Fall 2016.

Who is involved?

- All senior staff and our board members are engaged in the implementation of this plan on a regular basis.
- All faculty in the ECC and our religious school are engaged in training and implementation of a strengths-based approach in their classrooms. Parents are also engaged in these efforts as they work with their children using this new approach and curriculum.
- Our lay leadership, including the vision task force, VPS of education, parent association and youth engagement committee, play key roles in successful implementation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive psychology is the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work and play.

What are character strengths?

The 24 VIA character strengths is a “common language” of personality traits that reflect our personal identity, produce positive outcomes for ourselves and others, and contribute to the collective good. Each person has all 24 strengths within them, with the top strengths qualifying as a person’s unique combination of “signature strengths” that describe who they are when they are at their best. In short, the strengths describe what is best in human beings.

Where did character strengths come from?

In 2000, Dr. Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson set out to accelerate the science of character. Dr. Seligman was president of the American Psychological Association and was considering an alternative to traditional deficit-based psychology, which focuses on all of the things that can go wrong with people. An international character strengths research team of 55 scientists led by Peterson and Seligman identified the 24 character strengths as the core components of what is best in people that are universal and cut across cultures and history. This work was supported by what became the VIA Institute on Character, which today is an international thought-leader in the application of strengths.

How are strengths different from skills and talents?

Character strengths describe who we are at our core. This is different from skills and talents, which describe things we are good at doing. Furthermore, character strengths contrast with other “strengths” assessments because each individual possesses all 24 strengths in different quantities and can call upon any and all strengths (vs. possessing a finite number of strengths).

How can I learn about my own character strengths?

The VIA character strengths survey is free and available online at www.viacharacter.org. Nearly 4 million people worldwide have taken the survey, and it’s offered in 34 languages.

What is the positive impact of strengths with children? Adults?

We have a problem with disengagement in our society – in organizations, in our relationships and at home. In fact, research has found that less than 25% of the US population is flourishing (Keyes, 2003). Furthermore, studies have found that two-thirds of people are unaware of their strengths (though most of us can quickly point out the things we need to work on). People who are aware of their strengths and use them are 18 times more likely to be flourishing than those who do not use their strengths (Hone et al., 2015). Furthermore, workers who are highly aware of their strengths and have the opportunity to use them in their work are significantly more likely to be engaged at work. This research holds true for children – awareness and use of character strengths in children increases motivation, engagement learning and performance and can positively impact all dimensions of social and emotional learning.

Who are we working with to ensure success?

Our partner in this work is Mayerson Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio, the exclusive education partner of the VIA Institute on Character. For 25 years, Mayerson Academy has been deeply committed to inspiring successful outcomes for learners of all ages through creative, customized services and learning experiences. They have made it their mission to celebrate strengths and inspire people to reach their greatest potential—one organization, one team and one person at a time.