

## Case Study: Happiness Is an Inside Job

*For the City of Dripping Springs Administration*

### **Project Summary**

The City of Dripping Springs is a city right outside Austin, Texas. It is one of the fastest growing cities in Texas with a population of close to 40,000 when the ETJ is included. With all their rapid growth and coming off COVID, the Dripping Springs administration wanted to create an Employee Development Workshop that would help their employees get to know each other, connect on a more personal level, and most of all bring purpose, resilience, and fun into their work lives.

We created a half-day event, based on the same concepts that Google and large companies use, and created a workshop that focused on the science of happiness, positive psychology, and emotional intelligence. We provided them with tools focusing on: building resilience & grit; tapping into empathy and compassion; the research on positivity and the science behind happiness; embracing their values & using their inner strengths; finding their purpose & meaning; and more.

All of this was to help employees:

- Improve relationships
- Enhance overall wellbeing
- Build resilience and strengthen their ability to overcome problems
- Become happier!

The goal of this was to help connect all the employees and bring into the workplace what they seek outside: purpose, connections and happiness. We also wanted to help them realize that happiness is not about “things”, but happiness is leading a full and fulfilling life – even working for the City - and to discover that happiness truly is an "inside" job.

### **Overview:**

The City of Dripping Springs is experiencing rapid growth. With all the new employees on top of the challenges and burnout that many had coming off two years of COVID, they needed something to connect and unite the employees. They wanted something different to lift their spirits and help with that burnout. They realized that now more than ever the importance of positive relationships, connections, and focusing on each employee's unique strengths.

We explained the research that showed happy employees are more engaged, productive, and effective and they contribute more to the success of organizations. They wanted a workshop that would lift spirits and create a happier working environment. So, we created a half-day workshop — kind of a "play"shop — for the city administration team (approximately 40 team members) that was filled with tools of positive psychology. It was designed to foster meaningful connection among the team, and help everyone feel empowered, authentic, and confident as they moved forward in the growth.

We met offsite for 4 hours. The workshop was very experiential, not just “teaching” but actually learning and practicing the tools of positive psychology. All the tools were designed to be a learning experience but also with a “fun” side, too. We emphasized throughout the session to not focus so much on what *ISN'T* working, but to focus on what *IS* working and build on those strengths. Some of the key tools shared included the following:

**Mindfulness:**

We taught them how to practice mindfulness and shared how to do 10 minutes of mindfulness each morning by focusing on breathing and focusing on the present moment in an open and non-judgmental way. We shared how focusing on the present moment (and not the past or worrying about the future) for just a few minutes a day helps relieve stress, increases creativity, builds self-esteem, lowers blood pressure, and improves overall mental health. We also shared how practicing mindfulness before a big meeting can also help that go more smoothly.

**Mindful Listening:**

We explained the importance of listening mindfully and did 15 minutes of mindful listening, sharing that mindful listening is a way of listening without judgment, criticism, or interruption, while being aware of internal thoughts and reactions that may get in the way of people communicating effectively. Too often people listen to respond, not to understand. This was a good tool for their employees to help them communicate with team members, deal with upset citizens, work with developers and more. We paired up each employee to practice mindful listening. This not only helped in learning how to listen effectively, but also helped people to learn more about each other and build relationships.

**Gratitude and Benefit Finding:**

We shared the research behind gratitude that showed those who do a practice of gratitude feel 25% happier and are more optimistic about the future. We also shared the practice of Benefit Finding: finding something good in something bad. Research shows that the more you appreciate what is good, the more “good” that you start noticing and you become happier, have less stress, and work atmosphere improves.

**Character Strengths – Superpowers:**

One of the most empowering tools shared was how to work with their “character” strengths, also known as inner strengths. Character strengths are the positive parts of our personality that impact how we think, feel, and behave. Applying strengths purposefully in our work increases our wellbeing and performance. Inner strengths give us energy when we focus on them. There are 24 character strengths and we each possess all 24 of the strengths, but in varying degrees, giving each of us a unique character profile. When employees focus on their five signature strengths — what we called their *superpowers* — they can:

- Boost Confidence
- Increase Happiness
- Strengthen Relationships
- Manage Problems
- Reduce Stress
- Accomplish Goals
- Build Meaning and Purpose
- Improve Work Performance

Workers who use four or more of their signature strengths at work have a more positive work experience and report their work is a calling in their life. We had everyone take an advance survey to find their signature strengths and then did strength spotting and strength appreciation of others. This helped everyone get to know each other on a different level, focusing on what their passions are, not just what their talents are in the workplace.

### **Power of Words:**

We shared power of words. Words are more than just a way to communicate. Words have energy. They hold a vibration, they have power, they give meaning, they inspire. Words have the power to impact us both negatively and positively, depending on the words you use. Powerful words can be used to describe our core values, too. We created groups and each group picked a word for the City to focus on over the next few months. The words they chose for the city are:

- Explore
- Neighborly
- Patience
- Sparkle
- Inspire
- Be a Unicorn

### **Goals Achieved:**

These were just some of the tools shared. By bringing in tools of positive psychology in a fun and unique way, the workshop accomplished the following goals:

- Helped build and enhance relationships.
- Helped all employees tap into their compassion and empathy by getting to know each other on a different level.
- It helped give their employees ways to cope and overcome challenges so they could manage problems more effectively, reduce their stress and create a more purposeful and fulfilling life for themselves.

Each employee and the entire organization benefited. It accomplished their goals by giving employees tools to use to deal with stress and challenges. And the biggest goal of connecting each other and getting to know each other in new ways was a home run. People expressed how amazing it was and how much they loved getting to know each other. One city council member who stopped by to "see what the workshop was all about" loved it and had glowing remarks regarding it.

The supplies and handouts that each employee was given included:

- Two card decks – a "FINDING YOUR SUPERPOWERS" card deck to help them focus on their strengths, and a "LIVE UP TO YOUR WORD" card deck to focus on empowering words each day.
- A gratitude journal/notepad
- A t-shirt with the empowering words: Today is the Best Day Ever
- Worksheets to help them long after the workshop was over
- A fun superhero mask
- A Character Strengths Workbook
- And more

By sharing the tools, we gave the employees ways to focus on creating happier lives not just in the moment, but to utilize the tools for ongoing wellness and happiness. The goal of the session was not to make them happy all the time (NO ONE is happy all the time), but to give them tools that they can use to become "happier" and to help them lead more fulfilled and fulling lives each and every day, not only at work but in their personal lives, too. It was a big success!

Contact: Lisa Sullivan, Owner, The Happiness Element, 512-944-8697, [info@happinesselement.com](mailto:info@happinesselement.com), [www.happinesselement.com](http://www.happinesselement.com).

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Some of the items that were handed out included a notepad, fliers and worksheets to use later. Each employee was given a card deck to help with their character strengths - (Finding Your Superpowers) and a card deck to help them use empowering words (Live UP to Your Word!).

**DRIPPING SPRINGS TEXAS**

TAKE IT EASY, ENJOY TODAY, YOU ARE LIMITED EDITION, BE YOURSELF, GOOD VIBES

My Notes!

Today I'm Grateful For:

My Superpower Is:

How I'll Use It Today:

My Word For Today is:

My To Do List!

- Be happier!
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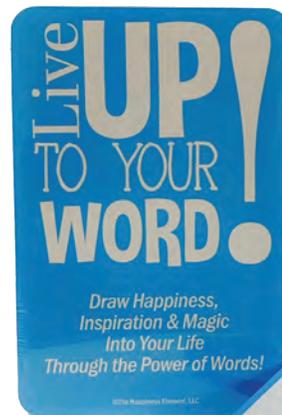
PRESS PAUSE

Notepad

Worksheets



Finding Your Superpowers Card Deck to Help Focus on Your Top Strengths



Live Up To Your Word Card Deck to Help Focus on Empowering Words



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Some photos of Strengths Spotting and Character Strengths. Each person placed a post-it on their top 5 signature strengths on posters, so everyone could see what each other's passions and inner strengths are, and also see what the City's strengths are as a whole.

## Showcasing Strengths

In a group of 3, each person pick one of your top 5 strengths and one of your lower strengths...

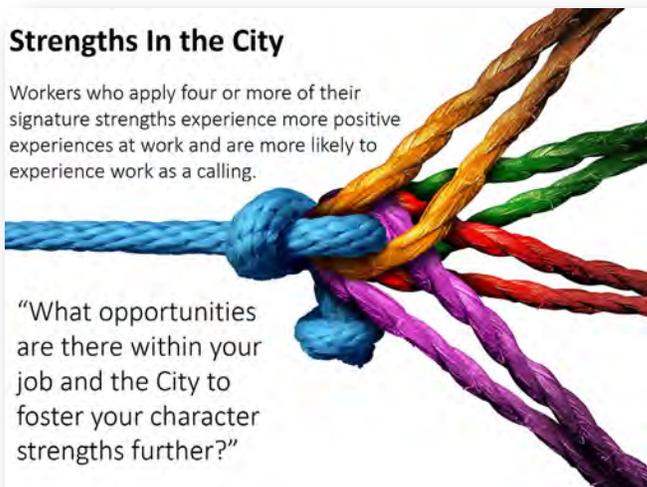
- Talk about why that top strength is important to you, what you love doing.
- *Strength Appreciation ... to those listening, what do you see in this person that exemplifies this strength?*
- What is one of your lesser strengths? How does this make you feel?
- How has COVID affected you when it comes to your top strengths?



## Strengths In the City

Workers who apply four or more of their signature strengths experience more positive experiences at work and are more likely to experience work as a calling.

“What opportunities are there within your job and the City to foster your character strengths further?”



What are our **SIGNATURE** strengths  
As a group?



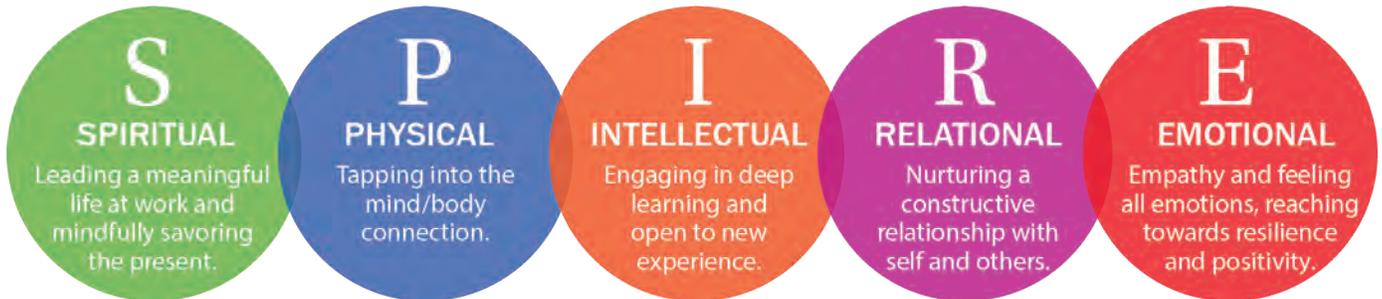
- |                   |                    |                    |  |  |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--|--|
| #1                | #2                 | #3                 |  |  |
| Strength of Heart | Strength of Spirit | Strength of Others |  |  |
|                   | Fairness           | #4                 |  |  |
|                   | Love               | #5                 |  |  |
|                   | Love of Learning   | #6                 |  |  |

# Happiness is an Inside Job

*The workshop focused on 5 tenets of positive psychology — it encompasses spiritual, physical, intellectual, relational, and emotional well-being. Each one is needed to lead a full and fulfilling life ... happiness!*

*The SPIRE perspective encourages you to know yourself—to understand and value that which is uniquely and wonderfully you. When you become grounded in who you are, it becomes a source of energy.*

*The word “spire” has another meaning: the highest point or summit of something, like the spire of the mountain. Through coming to know yourself better, and being in a like-minded, supportive community, you can tap into SPIRE to reach toward stretch goals and to realize aspirations for what you can accomplish and who you can become.*



*Each employee got a “Today is the Best Day Ever” City Branded T-shirt (you can see some wearing their superhero mask, too)*

