

StrongSuits

Play to your strengths



STARTER GUIDE

WELCOME TO STRONGSUITS

StrongSuits is an innovative strengths-based people and organisational development tool that will help you develop stronger teams.

StrongSuits uses playing cards and games to help teams have fun and feel energised whilst generating high-impact conversations about how people behave and how they can develop.

StrongSuits can be used to energise your team awayday, develop your people or to underpin your organisational change programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The starter guide gives you everything you need to kickstart StrongSuits inside your organisation or as a self development tool.

Information about more advanced uses of StrongSuits are available at the end of this guide and from our website.



STRONGSUITS

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THE SCIENCE BEHIND STRONGSUITS

StrongSuits is specifically designed for use with teams. The design of the cards is based on four main areas of modern scientific research.

Research on **positive psychology** shows us that people perform at their best when they focus on their strengths. If you are interested in learning more take a look at the work of Martin Seligman and research by the Gallup organisation on strengths in the workplace. This shows that people who play to their strengths are more productive and that employees whose managers understand their strengths feel more engaged and energised at work.

Research on **mindsets** shows us that how we perform is determined by our mindset, the stories we tell ourselves about how the world works. If you are interested in learning more take a look at the work of Carol Dweck. People with a positive mindset have been shown to have a stronger sense of ownership and engagement at work and are more likely to work well with colleagues. Understanding mindsets is vital for cultural change and is helpful in coaching where limiting mindsets can get in the way of personal growth.

Research on **Interaction styles** shows us that different people interact in different ways. This includes how they prefer to communicate and how they handle conflict and disagreement. If you are interested in learning more take a look at the work of Linda Berens. Understanding our preferred communication style is essential for effective team working. People who understand their own style and appreciate that other people may prefer a different style are likely to be more effective at communicating and have less conflict when working with others.

Research on **team diversity** shows us that diversity leads to greater team creativity, productivity and resilience. Numerous studies have shown this to be true for diversity of personality, gender, ethnicity and social background. If you are interested in learning more see the work of Meredith Belbin and McKinsey and co amongst others.

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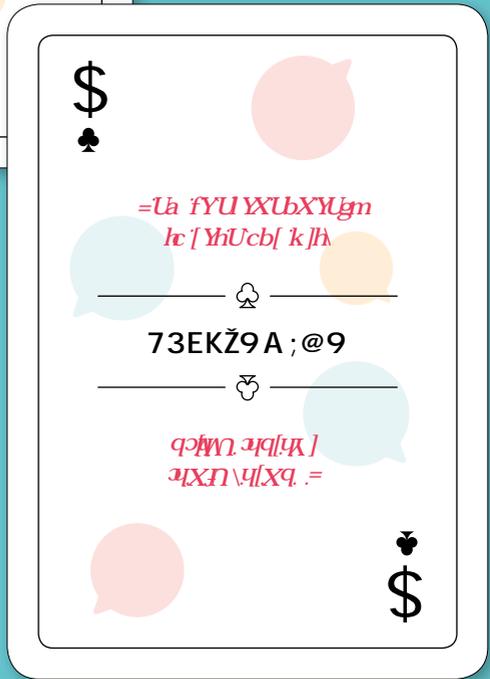
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THE FOUR USES OF STRONGSUITS

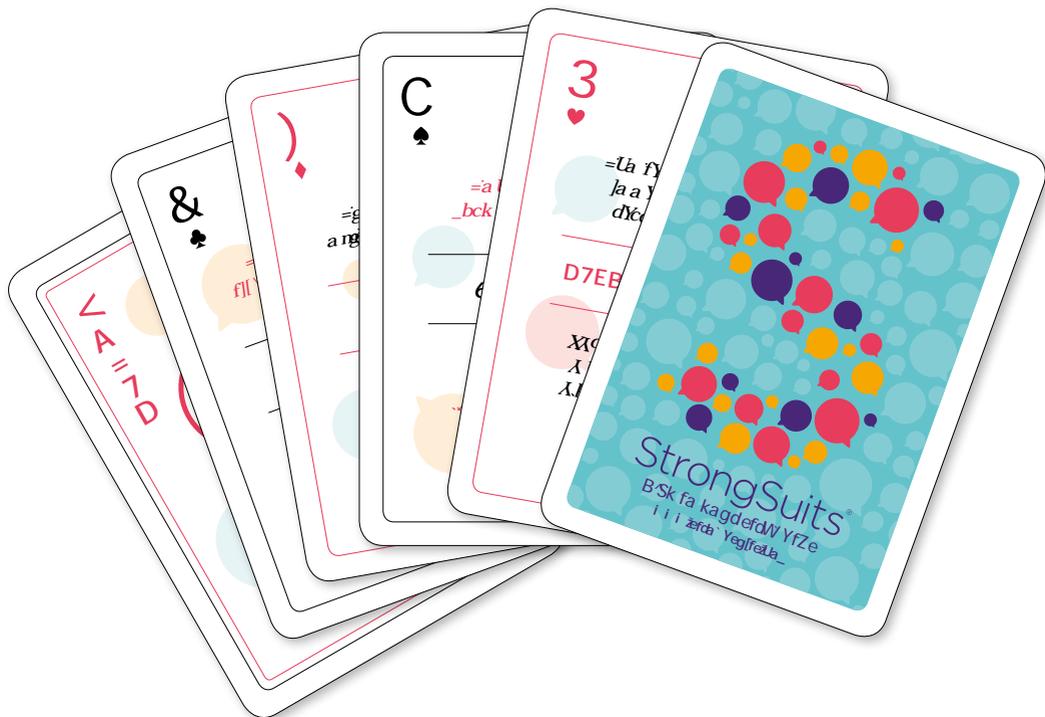
The StrongSuits cards contain four layers of information. These layers allow you to work with teams on the following aspects of team and individual performance.

- Identifying individual and team **strengths**. Each card displays a strength that is important in working in a team in a work setting.
- Exploring the **diversity** of qualities that make the team stronger as a whole. The cards are arranged in pairs of opposites so that the 2 of spades is the opposite strength to the 2 of clubs.
- Identifying team **communication** styles and mapping these using the team strengths map. The four suits represent the four main interaction styles that are important in understanding conflict and improving communication in teams.
- Working with **overplayed strengths** and limiting thoughts. The inverted card gives an example of what the strength on that card looks like when it is overplayed and becomes a limitation rather than a strength.



STRONGSUITS GAMES

This section introduces two games that you can play to get you started with the StrongSuits cards.



1. YOUR WINNING HAND

The purpose of this game is to help the team understand more about each other's strengths. It is best played with between 4 and 8 people. For larger groups split into smaller sub-groups working at separate tables. The game needs one pack per group.

- Shuffle the cards well.
- Deal the cards as you would if playing a game such as poker – 5 cards each.
- Lay your cards strengths way up and face up, there is no need to hide your cards as with normal card games
- Turn two or three cards from the remaining pack face up.
- Take turns starting with the person to the left of the dealer
- Consider your cards; do they describe your strengths? Swap one card with the face up card if that is a better description of your strengths.
- Explain why you are swapping that card.
- Place your discarded card face up and also turn another card from the pack face up.
- Keep going around one at a time
- Declare your winning hand when your cards are all a good description of your strengths and explain why.
- Once the first person has declared their hand turn all the remaining cards in the pack face up.
- Each person in turn gets to swap any remaining cards so that they have their winning hand and explain why.

Topics to discuss include:

- What were people surprised by?
- Have people chosen cards mainly from one suit?
- Who has got similar cards?
- Who has got different cards?
- Does anyone have the same card from opposite suits – spades vs clubs, hearts vs diamonds.

YOUR WINNING HAND CONT.

Below is an alternative version of the above game suitable for working with one person. This is useful when using the cards for coaching or if you are using the cards on your own.

- Shuffle the pack well
- Deal five cards and turn over one more card from the pack
- Lay out the five cards in front of you
- Ask yourself if the face up card is more descriptive of your strengths than any of the cards in your hand.
- If so, swap the cards
- Turn over another card from the pack
- Repeat the process until you have been through the whole pack
- The five cards in your hand should be your top five cards.

Things to watch out for

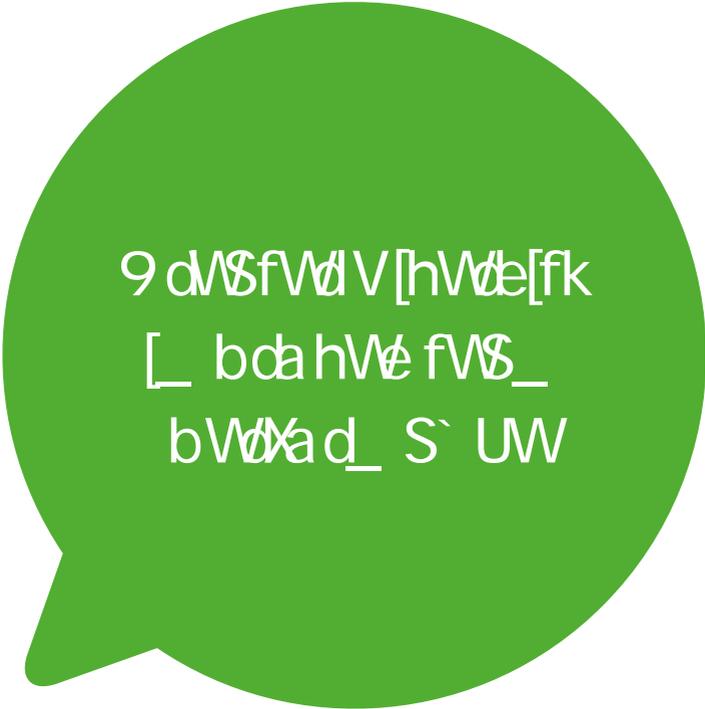
- A strength is something you love doing rather than something that you can do. Making this distinction can help people to identify their strengths.
- The cards are arranged in pairs of opposites so that the black cards mirror each other and the red cards mirror each other. It is unlikely that anyone would have opposites as strengths, but it is possible.

Variations

1. Play the same game but a colleague chooses your cards. How similar or different is what they chose from what you would choose for yourself?
2. Play the game but people choose the top five strengths that the team needs now rather than their individual strengths.

2. YOUR OPPOSITE NUMBER

The purpose of this game is help people understand the importance of diversity in teams. It is best played with larger groups although it can be adapted to work with two individuals, especially where they are rubbing each other up the wrong way.



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YOUR OPPOSITE NUMBER CONT.

First complete Your Winning Hand or a similar game so that people have chosen their top five strengths.

Ask people to find someone with a strength that is the opposite of their own. If nobody has an opposite strength they can look through the cards for a pair where they are opposite.

Discuss in pairs

- In what circumstances is your strength helpful and in what circumstances is it unhelpful? Ask for examples.
- In what circumstances is the opposite strength helpful and in what circumstances is it unhelpful?
- What are the advantages of having both strengths in the team?

THE OPPOSITE OF A STRENGTH IS NOT A WEAKNESS

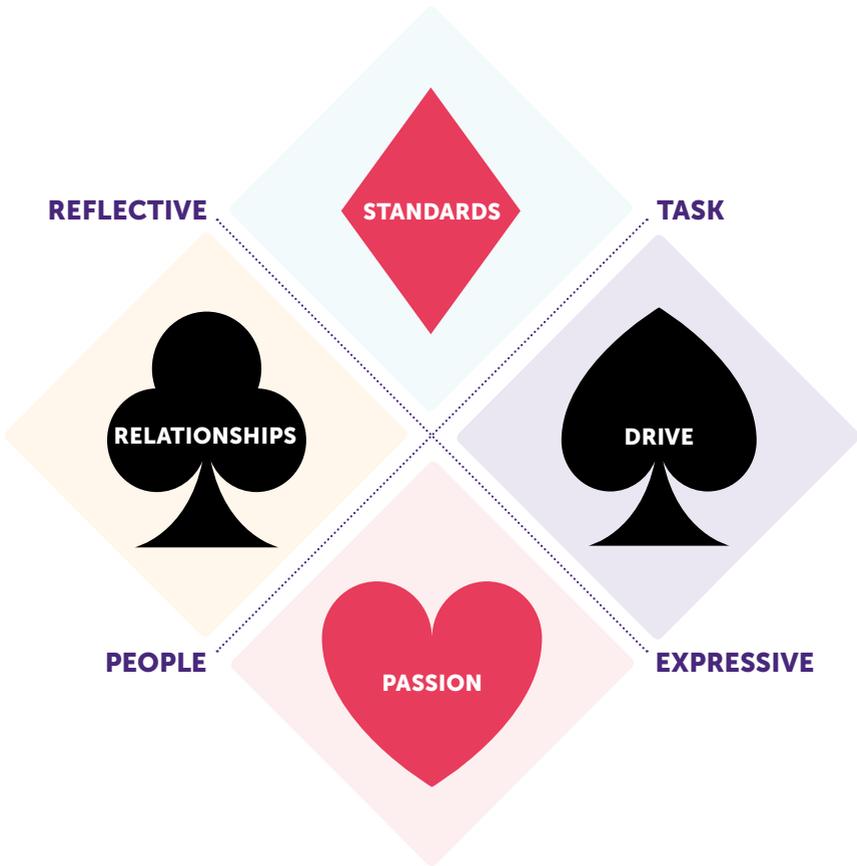
Take two of the cards that are opposites – the six of hearts and diamonds (Optimism and Caution) are a good pair to choose.

-
- In what circumstances is optimism helpful and in what circumstances is optimism unhelpful? Ask for examples.
 - In what circumstances is caution helpful and in what circumstances is caution unhelpful?
-

The qualities of optimism and caution are in themselves not good or bad but depend on the circumstances.

THE FOUR SUITS

The pack is made up of four suits that represent four communication styles. The communication styles are based on research into interaction styles which shows that people are either predominantly task focussed or people focussed and that they are either emotionally reserved or emotionally expressive. This gives the four communication styles reflected in the four suits as shown below.





FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Motivated by a sense of belonging and a need to get along with people, you are patient, agreeable and diplomatic. You enjoy creating harmony and togetherness amongst the people you work with. You are easy going and accepting. You may be quiet and need drawing into the conversation to contribute. You prefer face-to-face communication.

When working with others you seek to include different contributions and consult lots of people to make an informed decision. You aim to integrate various opinions and accommodate differing points of view. You appear quiet and calm to others and may not show any strong convictions. You typically have more patience than others and are willing to take time to gain support through consensus rather than create conflict.

When there is conflict you try to accommodate others and find it difficult to take up an opposing position especially if you feel it will upset people. In private you may vent your frustrations to others or engage in gossip.

You dislike holding others to account. You don't like saying no to other's requests and may be prone to saying yes without fully considering whether you can really take on a task.



COMMUNICATING WITH CLUBS

If you are strong in clubs

- Be aware that your need for harmony and avoiding conflict will be higher than for some other people
- Recognise your own tendency to want to say yes or to please people
- Be willing to offer more to the debate and discussion – especially where you disagree
- Don't see other people's conflict and disagreement as a bad thing, some kinds of conflict are important for creativity and help the team make progress.

Communicate effectively with clubs

- Don't mistake their silence for agreement
- Check their commitment if they agree to something – yes doesn't mean yes – they might just be avoiding saying no to you
- Make sure they feel involved – Invite their contribution and really listen
- Be patient – don't rush them



DIAMONDS

FOCUS ON STANDARDS

Motivated by high standards and a need to make sure things are done “right,” you are reliable, objective and thorough. You like things to be thought through, enjoy intellectual rigour and getting the details right. You may need time to reflect before making decisions. You prefer written communication.

When working with others you like to make sure people know what to do and stick to their commitments. You like to have predictability and order so you know what is likely to happen. You prefer to work with a plan and clear goals. You make informed and deliberate decisions based on analysis, conceptualising and predicting what needs to be done.

When there is conflict you can withdraw or retreat into formality and become unresponsive or unavailable to others. You use time to heal conflict rather than addressing it directly

You are very reliable and hold others to account but dislike having to do so. You like order and may appear inflexible and judgemental towards others especially when you are feeling things are running out of control. You feel that you must deliver on what you have agreed and others must do likewise.



DIAMONDS

COMMUNICATING WITH DIAMONDS

If you are strong in diamonds

- Be aware that your need for clarity and certainty is much higher than for some other people
- Recognise that for some people how they feel is as important as the facts
- Recognise the function that small talk serves in building rapport
- Be willing to own your own emotions

Communicate effectively with diamonds

- Be prepared to provide facts and data – not just ideas
- Don't get too personal or touchy feely
- Respect their need to be logical and rational rather than emotional
- Give them time to reflect – don't demand an answer straight away



FOCUSED ON DRIVE

Motivated by a sense of ambition and a need for achievement, you are determined, driven and assertive. You enjoy giving people a sense of direction and making things happen. You are direct and straightforward. You prefer straight talking and will freely offer your views even if they aren't popular.

When working with others you like to get things done. You are focused on results, and take action quickly. You often have a driving energy and step up to lead a group to deliver on a goal. You make decisions quickly to keep yourself and others on task, on target, and on time. You hate wasting time and having to go over old ground. You notice right away what is not working in a situation and quickly get to work on what needs to be fixed or corrected.

You like to address conflict quickly and head-on. You can come across to others as threatening or even aggressive when challenged. You can come across as insensitive and cold-hearted in your pursuit of a goal.

You like to get things done and are happy to take on tasks. You may be impulsive and take on more than is practical. You initiate change and hold people to account for what they have agreed. You don't mind making people feel uncomfortable if they fail to perform.



COMMUNICATING WITH SPADES

If you are strong in spades

- Recognise how dominant you can come across to other people
- Talk less and take more time to listen
- Have patience with people's fears and questions
- Be aware of your desire to drive things and make things happen. People may need more time and thought than you do to feel they can really commit to something.

Communicate effectively with spades

- Get to the point – don't waffle or ramble
- Be blunt – they won't necessarily get subtle hints
- Don't make a commitment you can't keep
- Don't take their bluntness or directness personally
 - tell them if you are hurt by what they say



FOCUSSED ON PASSION

Motivated by the passion to follow your ideas and a need to express yourself, you are energetic, enthusiastic and persuasive. You enjoy exploring new opportunities and creating a positive, fast-paced atmosphere. You are sociable and bring energy to any relationship. You like to talk but sometimes forget to listen. You will probably be a good networker, like to meet new people and explore interesting ideas.

When working with others you take on the role of persuading and involving others. You thrive in facilitator or catalyst roles and aim to inspire others to move to action. You focus on interaction with an expressive style which can be contagious. You like to get people exploring options and possibilities, making preparations, discovering new ideas, and sharing insights. You like decisions to be participative and enthusiastic, with everyone involved and engaged.

You don't like conflict and work to make people happy and positive. When there is conflict you may tend to gloss over it with humour. Sometimes your passion can lead you to say hurtful things in haste that you regret later.

You are happy to speak up about your convictions and passions but you don't like to hold others to account or do anything you see as creating a negative atmosphere, preferring to focus on successes and achievements.



COMMUNICATING WITH HEARTS

If you are strong in hearts

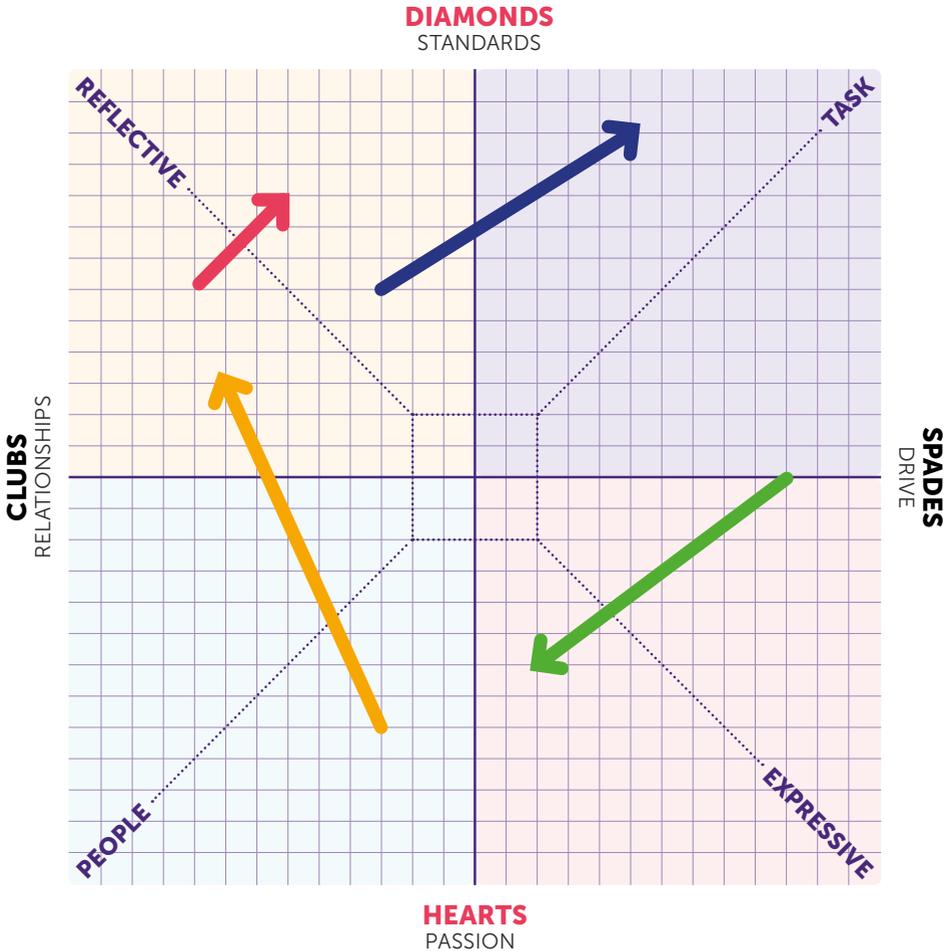
- Be aware that people may need more details than you do and not just the big picture
- Stick to the subject and the task at hand, be aware of your tendency to be distracted by new ideas and projects
- Slow down – not everyone moves as fast as you do
- Be aware of your tendency to want to move on from anything uncomfortable or unpleasant

Communicate effectively with hearts

- Help them keep on track when they go off topic
- Stay positive and upbeat – if you have a challenge make it fun
- Give them the big picture and invite them to expand it – Don't get too caught up in details
- Be warm and friendly

THE TEAM STRENGTHS MAP

The strengths map allows you to map team members' different communication styles so that you can create a greater understanding of the differences and similarities that lead to conflict or poor communication.



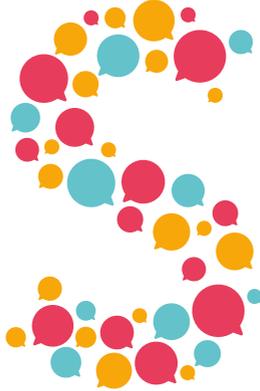
Individual StrongSuits together with their shadow strongsuit under stress can be plotted to show how individuals communicate normally and how they communicate under pressure.

NEXT STEPS

If playing the games in this **StrongSuits Starter Guide** has whetted your appetite for more, there are a number of options for what you can do next:

- Enrol in a **StrongSuits Online Self-paced Course** and join a community to build trust, improve communication, and create psychological safety in teams
- Book a **StrongSuits Team Building session** for your team or organisation's company day or staff conference
- Book a **1-day StrongSuits Team Insights™ workshop** to unlock the potential of your team or organisation
- Book a **2-day StrongSuits Facilitator Training** to take StrongSuits further, learn powerful advanced games and a great deal more about how to facilitate groups

Enrol or Book now at www.StrongSuits.com or contact us at info@StrongSuits.com



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