Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: It's a new year, actually a new decade. Do you have a resolution, or do you have something you really hope to change or build upon this year in your life? If you've ever struggled to make a substantial life change, it might be because you're too focused on correcting your weaknesses rather than investing in your strengths. That's according to Clifton Strengths. I'm Nicki Donnelson today on the Missouri State Journal, I have Nora Cox, Missouri State University Communication faculty member and certified StrengthsFinder coach. She's here to explain how to reframe your thinking and encourage you to get to know yourself better.

Nora Cox: I think the deeper our awareness of ourselves is the more productive we can be at whatever it is we want to do. And it's a fundamental aspect of Clifton Strengths that we should understand our unique combination of talents. Our combination of talents gives us power and edge to do whatever it is we decide we need or want to do. And that is a great first step, no matter what your goal is. A few years ago, I wanted to learn how to knit. I had never done that successfully and I had taken the Strengths assessment a few years before, and I decided I'm going to experiment with this, and I'm going to see how my talents can productively be applied to this goal, that I have to learn how to knit. And so six years later I've knitted dozens of hats, a lot of scarves. I'm not a great knitter. It doesn't always come out perfectly, but because I understood some of the tools that I had, and some of the potential areas of weakness that I needed to manage, then I was able to accomplish that goal of learning how to knit.

Nicki Donnelson: The Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment is built on robust research over many years. Once completed, you will learn your top five themes that speak to how you view and interact with the world.

Nora Cox: Four out of five of my themes are in the strategic thinking area, but those themes helped me access something like knitting in a way that wasn't only about what I needed to do with my hands, or what I wanted to produce. I learned about the history of knitting. I learned things that I had never known before, and that was exciting to me, and then it fueled my goal of learning how to do the thing that I was studying. So for me that was all a totally rewarding process. From a different perspective, can make me a real pain as a passenger in a car, because it's not really that important for us to get to our destination extremely fast, but it's hard for me to dial that back. And so my awareness of my talents helps me in situations where I'm applying them productively and when maybe I need to just relax on that a little bit.

Nicki Donnelson: There are 34 strengths identified by the 177-question assessment, which is available online, along with many other resources. The 34 strengths are divided among four domains of team strength: executing, influencing, relationship building, and strategic thinking. She tells us more.

Nora Cox: All of us have all of these talents, they appear. We have top five, and so those are the ones that we're really feeling all the time. And so we can look to those themes and invest in those to accomplish the goals that we have in mind. So relationship building themes are powerful in, what you would expect, our relationships. But just because people are strong in that area doesn't mean that they don't also get things done. It means that they get there through another direction. Dr. Clifton talked about the importance of knowing our weaknesses so that we can manage them, but he said that we'll never be successful unless we invest in the areas where we're talented.

Nicki Donnelson: Learning about the tools in your toolbox, she says, saves you a lot of anxiety. But it also helps you understand those who you spend the most time with at work and at home.

Nora Cox: The deficit model that unfortunately is pervasive in our society says, "We need to look at what we're really bad at and really try to correct that." Dr Clifton said, "No. It's going to be powerful if we look at what we're good at doing, that that gives us unique power, unique edge." And in terms of these themes, it's a really respectful, and productive, and positive way for us to engage with our differences. Because I as a person who is strong in strategic thinking, really rely on people with strong relationship building skills. If we're on a team together, we're more powerful together.

Nicki Donnelson: If you have questions about Clifton Strengths, contact Cox at noracox@missouristate.edu I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.