



## **Finding Flow With Your Best-of-Self Traits: Unleash Your Strengths**

Deirdre Danahar, MSW, MPH, LICSW, ACC  
Interview on Life Potentials With Diantha Harris  
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## **Deirdre Danahar Feb 27 2014 Interview on Life Potentials**

Eleyne-Mari: Coming up next on Within Radio: Life Potentials with Diantha Harris. Within Radio. Your self-transformational channel. Go within to find the answers you seek.

Diantha Harris: Hello. And welcome to Life Potentials, where we seek to encourage and inspire, uplift and empower. I'm your host, Diantha Harris, color expert, Akashic records reader, and curious explorer. You can find out all about me by visiting my website [lifepotentials.net](http://lifepotentials.net). Thank you for joining us tonight on Within Radio as we explore another aspect of expanding consciousness on our show, Life Potentials.

Tonight we welcome as our guest Deirdre Danahar, coach, consultant, speaker, and writer who helps people with complex busy lives master the art of doing their best work without the guilt, strain, and emptiness of compromising their careers. What I love about Deirdre is her focus on helping us work our lives from the core of who we truly are. She encourages us to find that core and those things that make us, us. And then she helps us figure out how to incorporate those gifts of who we are into our work and daily lives.

Deirdre's website is [inmotioncc.com](http://inmotioncc.com), and her email is [deirdre@inmotioncc.com](mailto:deirdre@inmotioncc.com). If you sign up for her newsletter, she offers a free gift and is now also offering a special on finding your core strengths. Let's join the interview now.

Diantha Harris: Welcome, Deirdre. We're glad to have you with us.

Deirdre Danahar: And I'm delighted to be with you.

Diantha Harris: We don't often get to talk with people who do coaching, and I'm excited about some of the practical things that you're going to be sharing with us tonight. I know you work with a lot of different kinds of people and businesses. And you told me before we began that two prominent threads in your work are best-of-self strengths and work-life flow. I'd like to begin the interview with the best-of-self strengths. Don't most people know their strengths, or at least their key strengths? Because it seems that people who want to make improvements in their professional or personal lives usually identify and work on their weaker areas.

Deirdre Danahar: It's true. I think that most people assume they know what their strengths are because they define them as the skills or competencies that they've developed over time, either through work or education. So, those would be things like a project management or team building or, frankly, even your ability to type if you're old-fashioned like me and still occasionally use a typewriter.

What I have developed as a specialty within my business is helping individuals, whether they're on their own or within an organization connect what I refer to as their best-of-self traits to their purpose or how they express themselves in the world, and possibility - - the

growth they want to see for themselves as a professional and in their personal lives.

So, in this regard, what I'm focusing on are character traits, things like kindness and social intelligence, appreciation of beauty and excellence, honesty, amongst others. And these are sometimes considered soft skills or potentially undervalued in our world. But they are foundational character strengths that we are born with versus skills that we've learned over time.

That's how I differentiate them for folks. And once people can step back and say, "Oh. What feels innate to me actually is a strength, and I may not be considering it as a strength in my professional life." It creates a new window for us to look through and say, how can you leverage these in the way in which you spend your time or the way in which you really want to spend your time.

Diantha Harris: Wow. Well, I love that, because I do agree that so many of us look at our gifts as just kind of ho-hum. Because they're so natural to us, we maybe don't give them the value that we should.

Deirdre Danahar: Precisely.

Diantha Harris: I love that you are looking at those qualities as strengths. I love that. What do a person's top strengths mean or say about the individual? What insights do they hold for us in our personal and our professional growth?

Deirdre Danahar: Well, let me set a little bit of context and background about what the depth of knowledge of these strengths comes from, and I think that will help respond to your question. There is an enormous amount of literature that's grown out of the field of positive psychology in particular that said, how do we look at what's working with people and what they do well already and acknowledge that in a way that people can shift their attention from weaknesses to top strengths and the strengths that sort of fall out below those.

There are 24 of these character strengths that are pretty ubiquitous across the world. And the top ones are the three to five that we use so innately and so effortlessly that we can sometimes take them for granted, right? They're our go-to traits. When people say, "Well, how will I know if the survey results actually true about me and not just a reflection of my mood at the time?" I suggest people answer that question, by first to taking the survey, which I conduct with my clients. And then, also ask a number of people from different sectors of their lives - their family, their friends, their business associates, people in their community - to name the adjectives they would use to describe them as personalities. And almost always, there's a correlation.

So, somebody may have a top trait that's social intelligence and inevitably, that person hears that from at least three people in that pool of five folks they talk to who say, "You seem to always know

how to connect with other folks." So, here's the scientific language: social intelligence, and here's the real-world example: You connect with people. You make everybody feel comfortable.

Diantha Harris: And what happens when we take that survey with you, if we're your clients then, we find out what our top strengths are, but what about middle strengths? And, what kind of insights do they hold?

Deirdre Danahar: Our middle strengths are those that we can easily and reliably tap into in a given situation. Perhaps it would be helpful if I gave you an example. I have a client who's a successful entrepreneur. She owns a beautiful store that specializes in American craft. And her top strength is appreciation of beauty and excellence, which is great. It's part of what drives her business. And some of her middle strengths are love, the capacity to both receive love and to give love, and forgiveness.

For her to continue to really operate well as an entrepreneur, because we're all bound to run into roadblocks, we're all bound to make mistakes, we're all bound to get frustrated, tapping into those middle strengths makes it easier for her to keep doing the work she needs to do to grow this business that's grounded in her top strength. They balance out the top strengths.

Diantha Harris: Ahh. So, they sort of feed into them.

Deirdre Danahar: Yes. Absolutely. It's the extra ingredients that we reach for when we need to adjust our recipe.

Diantha Harris: Ahh. Yeah, I love that. Well, what about the lower level strengths?

Deirdre Danahar: Sometimes people say, "Well, these must be character weaknesses." And they're not. These -- if we were talking about the world of plants -- and I know that you have a love of gardening and I have a love of gardening -- these would be the more delicate perennials. They'll grow but they need a little more precise situation. These are the strengths that we call on least often and often take the most effort for us to do so. But we can tap into them. We just have to be more intentional about that.

To give you another example, I have another client who, really needed to reach into her strength of zest. And that's an incredible strength. There's actually a fair amount of data that shows that the more zest you have in your life, the better you perform professionally. Who would think that? It's not something that we normally associate with work.

Here's why this is important for my client, and other entrepreneur. Her one of her top strengths is prudence. She moves along very cautiously, which is terrific, except when you move along so cautiously you don't jump on opportunities. So, by her tapping into this sense of, "I'm going to be whole-hearted and take a risk here

and go for it," or zest, she's been able to move her business forward in some exciting new directions.

Diantha Harris: That's really cool. You mentioned that we have 24 strengths. And, do we have all 24 in one of these levels, like top, middle, and lower? Or, what if we're missing some? What do we do then?

Deirdre Danahar: Fabulous question. Yes, we all have these 24 character strengths. Again, the data that this grows out of is the field of positive psychology. And two of the founders (Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson) of that field did an exhaustive study of philosophies and religions and sort of guidance documents from virtually all over the world, 200 of these from the Western Hemisphere, from the Eastern Hemisphere, north, south, you name it. And what they found is there are these 24 character traits and that they're ubiquitous. All people have them in varying degrees.

The trick is how are we using them. Are we using them in the right sort of golden balance where we hit that sweet spot? Or are we overusing some? Are we underusing some? So, it's not that they're absent. We just may not be drawing on them in the way that really serves us well.

Diantha Harris: Okay. Okay. And do the lower level strengths ever show up as people's inner critic.

Deirdre Danahar: Oh yes. Absolutely.

Diantha Harris: Can you give us an example?

Deirdre Danahar: Sure, -- and here's the funny thing. Lower level strengths can show up as somebody's inner critic, and so can your top-level strengths.

Diantha Harris: Oh really?

Deirdre Danahar: Yeah. Here is an example, sometimes the folks who have love as a lower strength, it's not as if they don't want love or don't feel love or don't express love for folks. What I find is they often find it very difficult to accept love themselves. And, usually the narrative that's going on -- that's being delivered by their inner critic is, "You're not worthy," or something along those lines. Well, of course we're all worthy of giving and receiving love in the world. We're human beings.

Diantha Harris: Right.

Deirdre Danahar: Here's how one of your top strengths can show up as a weakness: Kindness. Recently, I've been working with a lot of professionals for whom kindness is in their top three to five strengths. For some folks it's their number one strength and they overuse it. They become the boss who's far too nice and lets people get away with things because a) that's what you're supposed to do to try to make things okay for folks, where, in fact, kindness may be holding people accountable, because you believe in their abilities, and b) if

you're in a professional situation, you have certain responsibilities. And you need to live up to them.

And so, switching people's definition of how they view kindness and how they can operate as a kind person can shift that narrative from, "Here's how I should be as a nice person," to "Here's how I can be as a kind person," which means doing and saying the hard things as well as doing and saying the easy things.

Diantha Harris: Oh, you know, I couldn't agree with you more, and that's sort of a new concept to me. I'm glad that you brought that up about kindness. And it's often kind when you do hold people responsible. So, thanks for bringing that up. And, could you give us some strategies for turning things around? Say if kindness is a key strength for a person and she doesn't use it correctly?

Deirdre Danahar: Sure. The first thing I would ask people to do is to honestly reflect about how do I think I'm being kind, and what are the results I'm getting from that? To give an example, I was working with a client recently, and he was, in fact, this kind of boss who just let people bend the rules to the breaking point and would try to be really nice by buying lunch and that kind of stuff for people. What he realized happened as a consequence is people didn't follow through in the way that they needed to, and he would get so frustrated he would blow up at them.

What he needed to do was to step back and to say, "How do I want to operate as a professional? And, if I want to use my kindness, what is the most compassionate thing I could do here as a boss?" And he had to be very deliberate by stepping back and asking "How is this showing up in my life now? How would I like for it to show up? And what's the part that scares me about it?" Once you can narrow in on the part that scares you about it, that usually tells you what you need to be doing.

Diantha Harris: Ahh. Boy, that makes sense. Wow. Wow. That's pretty powerful.

Deirdre Danahar: It's good stuff.

Diantha Harris: It is really good stuff.

Deirdre Danahar: And it's so exciting to see people do that because you really do have to dig in and say, "All right, if I'm going to move forward, I have to take this risk." And that requires a lot of courage in people. And I love being part of people's journey that way.

Diantha Harris: Yeah, because we just become better people. Better, stronger people. More empowered, too.

Deirdre Danahar: Exactly.

Diantha Harris: And you know, holding people accountable helps them become better people. So, it is kind.

Deirdre Danahar: Yeah. It's the gift that keeps on giving.

Diantha Harris: Right. Well, maybe you could give us a few examples of ways that we can bring our best-of-self strengths forward, if you would please?

Deirdre Danahar: Sure. Maybe what would be most helpful if I named a couple of strengths that people might have, and then a specific strategy they could use.

Diantha Harris: Okay.

Deirdre Danahar: If somebody is very, very curious, right - they love to learn, they're always needing to know more - I find a great tool for them to use is to say, "Pick a really favorite topic. Because you can be curious about everything in the world, you're never going to learn everything in the world. So, what if you pick a favorite topic and make a list of unknowns about that topic. Then start researching those unknowns." You continue to be curious and you feed that part of yourself in a very driven, focused way.

Diantha Harris: Okay.

Deirdre Danahar: If people want to bring more zest into their life, and they're in a job and maybe it's not the most dynamic job for them or it's kind of a low point in the job, a wonderful strategy to use is to think about an

assignment that you have, and then to brainstorm as many exciting or novel ways that you could approach it before you undertake it, and then choose one of those.

And then prudence. Here's this great quality - you want to be very careful about making decisions, terrific to have. But, often, prudence can hold people back. So, what I like to offer people as a way to make the most of that strength is to evaluate the quality, the wisdom, and the efficiency of their next three projects, and write down specific methods of improvement. And then, commit to one project and one way that they're going to improve it and drive that forward.

Diantha Harris: That's cool.

Deirdre Danahar: Those are just a few ways that you can bring your best-of-self strengths forward in a really practical way.

Diantha Harris: Can you take those best-of-self strengths and help people figure out what kind of work they should be doing or what niche they should be in or match them with their best work?

Deirdre Danahar: I think there is a way to do that. And it isn't always; "Here's a specific career for you." I think it's more important for people to look at "What are these characteristics that I hold so dearly and that I embody, and where do those line up with an organization's values and its mission?" Because when there's synergy between those

three, you are much more likely to be engaged with what you're doing at work. In fact, Gallup released a poll of American workforce engagement in 2013 and found that people who did have good alignment between their strengths and the mission and vision and values of an organization are six times more likely to be engaged with what they're doing.

Diantha Harris: Oh my gosh. That's amazing.

Deirdre Danahar: It's pretty powerful. If you can get who you are as a person, those character traits, the skills and competencies that you've developed, all neatly packed, and find the right environment, fantastic.

Diantha Harris: Definitely.

Deirdre Danahar: Hand in glove, as they say. Perfect.

Diantha Harris: Yes. So, it would really behoove employers to look for people with the strengths that they're looking for an not necessarily things like they're a good accountant, or they're good in sales. But, to have -- look more into their character.

Deirdre Danahar: Yes, you need a bit of both, skill sets and character strengths.

Diantha Harris: Mm-hmm. Oh, sure you do. I mean, you have to have some practical things going on, too, for you, but before we run out of time, I want to address the other thread in your work, which is

work-life flow. And you wrote about that in my newsletter last month, and you have written another article for my February newsletter. I encourage everybody to go to my website and look at those two newsletters that you've written about. But, let's talk a little bit about work-life flow. Tell us a little bit about that part of your work.

Deirdre Danahar: A lot of people talk about work-life balance, and I don't believe you're going to get balance. Because balance suggests that it has to be a perfect number of hours, the same number of hours spent on each sector of your life. I've never met a person who can do that. I am much more interested in thinking about how people move through the various dimensions in their lives, and whether they are doing that in a way that feels like it really taps into who they are at their core and what matters most to them.

Their characters straits are the core of who they are as individuals and how they spend their time hopefully is aligned with that. Whether it's in their work or it's in their personal life.

Diantha Harris: How does focusing on that flow impact our professional life, then?

Deirdre Danahar; Somehow we've lived in this world where we got to a point that if you were busier, more stressed out, had more things on your plate, you won. I've never understood this, because if you're always busy, if you're always on the go, if you don't have time to step back, you don't have time to recharge yourself, which means, in the long run,

you're not going to be effective and focused at work. You're just not.

I think it's so important that we invest in these other parts of our lives and we really step back and say, "What is it that I need in my life to feed what matters to me most? Am I getting those things? And if I'm not, are there things that I need to let go of in order to allow space for those things?" For me -- work-life balance isn't tied to necessarily working fewer hours. It's more related to "What are you doing with your time overall and how are you approaching it?"

Diantha Harris: Yes. And so do the best-of-self traits then play a role in this work-life flow?

Deirdre Danahar: I think they do. I think when you step back and you examine your life overall, you can say, "Am I able to use these traits in the other parts of my life?" Let me give you a concrete example. A few weeks ago I had a character strengths focused coaching session with a woman who's an evaluator by trade. There were two themes that came up for her: How does she continue moving forward in her profession in a way that feels really good to her? And, she wants to complete a book that she's writing personally. What came out of her session is the very things that drive her to do well as an evaluator, helping individuals in community-based organizations tell their story, is what supports her ability to write the novel that she's working on.

Diantha Harris: Mmm. Yeah.

Deirdre Danahar: Ultimately, her way and her sense of purpose in the world is finding the language for people to do that and for herself to do that.

Diantha Harris: Aww. That's so nice when it works out.

Deirdre Danahar: It's really nice. I got a wonderful email from her literally this morning saying that she has started going back to her book again in a more focused way by "Looking at how other people write, the people that I really admire write, and what was their process, and start applying that to my own." And that she was able to push a few things aside professionally that really weren't interesting to her people were reaching out to her about so we can focus on what is engaging for her.

Diantha Harris: Oh, that's nice.

Deirdre Danahar: Yes.

Diantha Harris: Well, what I love about your use of the word *flow* as opposed to *balance* is that it feeds also into what I learned when I studied feng shui, and that is so many people say feng shui is about creating balance. Well, it really isn't, because if you have balance, you don't really do anything. Do you know what I mean? You need a little tension in certain different situations so that you can move forward. Does that make sense?

Deirdre Danahar: It does make sense. Absolutely.

Diantha Harris: Because if everything is in balance, then you just stay where you are. But if something is not in balance, you need to create the flow in that area, so, its just part of the human condition. That was the first time I'd ever really thought, "Yeah, we don't need balance. We aren't looking for balance. We'd love to have balance, but that's not what we're here for."

Deirdre Danahar: In some ways, it sounds to me maybe what we're both talking about, your experience through feng shui and what I'm talking about here, is the way in which we communicate with the world? A good conversation always has some tension. It has give and take and back and forth and something interesting. And, that sounds like what you achieve through feng shui. I hadn't thought about that either. Well, thank you for giving me something to chew on.

Diantha Harris: Sure. The back and forth of the conversation. Well, where do you find that people frequently get stuck in this process of finding their best work-life flow? And, could you maybe give us an example for how our best-of-self traits could be used to move us through those blockages?

Deirdre Danahar: Sure. Where I think people get stuck in work-life flow is first being able to just step back and name what's most important to them, because we're having to make choices. And often when we're

talking about work-life flow for folks, they somehow got themselves overextended and now they have to disappoint someone or do a lesser job on something. Getting past the sense of "I have to step back. I have to say no. I may disappoint somebody." is really, really hard.

And, again, this is where I think tapping into a strength like kindness, "Am I really going to serve things well if I'm resenting the time I'm spending there?" is a very useful strategy for folks. Or, if a significant strength for somebody is perspective, is to tap into that strength and assess are you getting the type of support and time you need. If you discover you need to create more, contemplative time for yourself to have a better sense of flow between the different parts of your life, to adopt the mental perspective you need to give yourself permission to make that decision to set aside contemplative time- - even a little as 5 or 10 minutes day. And then, stick with that decision.

The other place where people get stuck is the long haul. Because when the work that I do with folks is often about making changes, and habits don't form overnight. Changes don't last immediately. If they happen immediately, they're usually kind of catastrophic and that's not the way we'd want to operate in the world. So, how do we introduce something and give it good roots?

And that's where having support is so important, whether that's through a friend, a network, a mentor, a coach, a spiritual advisor,

whoever you need to bring into your space to give you the support to move forward in the way that's really going to feel rich to you. How's that for a long answer?

Diantha Harris: No, it's great. It's perfect. A perfect way to end. And we so appreciate all your wisdom and guidance that you've shared with us. Again, I encourage all of our listeners to go to my website and take a look at the articles that Deirdre has written for my newsletter. They're all archived on my website. So, thank you so much, Deirdre, for being with us today. And you sound like a wonderful coach and a great resource for anybody who is looking for this kind of guidance. So, thank you.

Deirdre Danahar: Well, thank you for having me. I really appreciate it. And I would just like to invite your listeners, if they have any questions, to feel free to contact me. I know my contact information is available through your newsletter, and to also let you all know that I have a brand new really simple service that I'm offering for folks around this assessing your best-of-self strengths and then developing some strategies for implementing them. And I would be more than welcome to offer that to your listeners at my introductory level.

Diantha Harris: Great. Oh, that's wonderful news. Thanks for sharing that.

Deirdre Danahar: Thank you.

Diantha Harris: Okay. Well, many blessings to you, Deirdre, and thank you again for all your wonderful work.

Diantha Harris: Thank you so much for joining us for tonight's show featuring Deirdre Danahar. Her website again is [inmotioncc.com](http://inmotioncc.com). I hope you will join us again next month for another conversation to help expand our consciousness. Meanwhile, please go to my website, [lifepotentials.net](http://lifepotentials.net) to register for my free newsletter and explore all the things waiting for you there. You can now receive a free color report download. Meanwhile, I wish you peace, health, and blessings. Until next time, may you follow your life's potential. Namaste.

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