

## **People Smarts for Career Growth**

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### **Abstract**

It is a rare career in which success does not depend primarily on your ability to work with people. You may have to serve them, lead them, convince them, teach them, get their cooperation or at the very least sell yourself or your product to them. The more you understand about how people differ and what makes each of us tick (or in some cases, tock), the better choices you will make about career opportunities available to you, and the more productive you will be in the jobs you do undertake. This paper gives you concrete suggestions for understanding your own strengths and weaknesses and working with various types of people. Written by a career SAS programmer, it focuses in particular on situations people in SAS-related fields might encounter.

### **Scope of this Paper**

So much in-depth research has been done, and so many books and training materials are on the market pertaining to the subject of getting along with a variety of types of people, that one 10-page paper could never do more than brush the surface. The purpose here is to introduce the concept of personality type, acquaint you with some of the schemas that exist for describing different types, and give some reasons and some techniques for accommodating conflicting styles in the work environment.

### **Why Get People-Smart?**

You have or are looking for a job. You have career goals. At some point you will make a decision about your future. It's important to have a good understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses, and the dimensions that really matter in determining your success or failure in a given venture.

The secret to loving work is doing what you enjoy. To find the ideal opportunity, first you have to know about yourself. What motivates and energizes you? What saps your strength? What do you put off doing? To set yourself up for success, compare these preferences to the actual activities that make up a job. Top performers feel great about doing the work that is most critical to the goals and productivity of the job they do. They don't depend on fascinating diversions or irrelevancies for their fun.

And since there are very few jobs that exist in a human vacuum, one huge factor will be the people you will be working with and how effectively you interact with them. Once you understand yourself, and become aware of the differences that exist in the world of people, you can work more productively with less conflict with a diverse group of individuals. You will accept and anticipate compromise when conflict arises.

## **Conflict**

Conflict means more than disagreement. We use the term conflict when it seems like we can't agree, no matter what. Our goals, or the paths we choose to pursue them, are completely inconsistent.

If we are unaware of differences in style, we often attribute our conflicts with other people to intentions (she doesn't like me), abilities (he's stupid), character (she's rude, inconsiderate), our own failure (what's wrong with me?) or failure of relationship (we just can't communicate). Although Tom Lehrer said, "If a person can't communicate the very least he can do is to shut up," I am advocating better communication through improved understanding.

This improved understanding will not eliminate conflict. Real substantive differences have always existed and will continue to exist among people. And some people really mean they don't like you, and some people really are rude. Even paranoids have real enemies. But with improved understanding we can limit conflict to real issues and not compound it with imagined or misattributed slights.

## **A New Rule**

The old golden rule stated that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The problem with this is that people are different, and may not want or need the same things we want or need. If we only use ourselves as the ruler to measure our effect on others, we often accomplish the opposite of what we intend. What we need is a new rule, what Tony Alessandra calls the Platinum Rule, that tells us to understand other people well enough to give them, not what we would want, but whatever it takes to accomplish our goals.

The argument about whether a tree falling in a forest makes a sound when there's no one to hear it applies here. The falling tree certainly generates sound waves (and when we use language for self-expression we do say something) but whether it falls on an appropriate receptor (whether the listener is affected in the way we really want) determines whether the sound is heard (whether our communication is effective). If someone misunderstands you, you don't always get the opportunity to explain your original intent. Even when you do, some damage is done. The better you

get at communicating based on the listener's style, the more effective you will be at achieving your own goals.

This complicates the already difficult area of group communications (like this paper). To appeal to many people, you have to consider all the types you might encounter. With this understanding, you can try to be more inclusive and appropriate.

But how do we go about understanding other people? That's where research helps. The MBTI, the Platinum Rule, Emotional Intelligence, Deborah Tannen's work on sociolinguistics, and scores of other bodies of work available today attempt to describe, categorize and explain the various behaviors that occur. Armed with this understanding, we can jumpstart our own efforts to work more effectively with people.

## **The MBTI**

You may already be familiar with the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory. Many corporations and groups have used it to improve teamwork among their employees or members. The theory, based on Carl Jung's work, proposes 4 dichotomous dimensions, leading to 16 different personality types or styles. You fill out a multiple-choice questionnaire and a licensed psychologist interprets the results to decide what your label is. As a close approximation, you can take the Keirsey Temperament Sorter online at

<http://keirsey.com/>

The subtitles of the next sections describe the 4 dimensions of the MBTI. I use the "vs." advisedly. The extremes of the dimensions are often in direct conflict, and both types must accommodate the other with understanding and respect.

### **Extravert vs. Introvert**

This dimension describes how we interact with the environment.

An extravert would rather talk than listen, act rather than think, and change subjects rather than focus. An introvert, in contrast, offers the gift of depth and deliberate listening. Both types have their strengths and weaknesses. While extraverts are seen as wasting time talking too much, introverts may waste time by *not* talking enough.

Extraverts constitute 75% of the American population. It's not easy to be an introvert in a culture dominated by a high-energy, quick-changing style.

Awards programs at two companies I've worked with rely heavily on the perceived value of singling out the recipient in a huge presentation program. Introverts I have known who have won such awards have said they absolutely hated the experience. Given that the awards are intended to motivate excellent performance, they may backfire when it comes to introverts.

Extravert asks, "How do I affect this situation?" Introvert asks, "How does this situation affect me?" If you want to know what an extravert is thinking, just listen. If you want to know what an introvert is thinking, ask and WAIT. Extraverts often make the mistake of assuming that an introvert will speak up when he/she has something to say. Extraverts regard silence as an opportunity wasted. Introverts actually require silence to marshal their thoughts.

I worked with a group of programmers who got along very well together and enjoyed socializing as well as working as a group. One person clearly dominated all the conversations, though. After months of observation, we concluded that he had the lowest tolerance for silence so would fill it with whatever was on his mind, giving other people very narrow windows to jump in. He was clearly demonstrating classic Extravert behavior.

On a side note, cultures can affect style preferences. British people talk more slowly and expect longer pauses than Americans. A British speaker may have trouble getting a foothold in a fast-paced American conversation.

Advice to extraverts: understand the value of silence in giving other people time to organize their thoughts and feel comfortable "interrupting" you. Send out pre-meeting notes so attendees have the opportunity to prepare. Practice active listening to keep your need for action satisfied.

Advice to introverts: ask for the time you need to get ready to contribute. If you are interrupted and need to make sure you are heard, simply ask to be allowed to finish. Classic statement introverts make to extraverts, "Excuse me for talking while you were interrupting."

### **Sensing vs. Intuitive**

This dimension addresses what kind of information we naturally notice or are interested in. Sensing describes a preference for the real, here and now details while Intuitives have a preference for looking at possibilities. A Sensor excels at making a defined process work; an Intuitive likes to design the process. A Sensor remembers details, notices things, likes using existing skills and enjoys the here and now. An Intuitive remembers ideas, notices relationships and patterns, likes developing new skills and enjoys improving things.

Three quarters of the American population are Sensors.

I once knew an Intuitive who would get frustrated at what he perceived to be other people's negative reactions to his great ideas. For example, he would suggest a vacation destination to his wife and she would respond based on the cost and practicality of the idea. He knew that, based on facts, she was right. But he was disappointed that she didn't enjoy the dream. No doubt she was frustrated that he spent his time thinking of things they couldn't do rather than focusing on what they realistically could do.

Advice to Sensors: Understand that others' ideas may be farfetched. Try to talk them through without dismissing them.

Advice to Intuitives: Remember details. Understand that others will be practical and want you to be specific.

### Thinking vs. Feeling

This dimension addresses how we make decisions. The names of the two extremes of this dimension lead to the biggest misunderstandings in using the MBTI to help people get along. The term Thinking is meant to imply objective, analytical processing based on impersonal facts. Feelers focus on personal values and situations. But it is often interpreted to mean that only Thinkers are rational. Both types use rational processes, they just weight the inputs differently. Thinkers give high value to measurable, objective facts (like the law). Feelers believe that personal values and "soft" facts should dominate decisions.

This difference between a preference for the Thinking style and a preference for the Feeling style complicates situations involving conflict and gets in the way of swift and satisfying resolution. Feelers are so sensitive that they don't want to hurt other people's feelings, or be hurt themselves. They have difficulty telling the whole truth when they anticipate that others will be hurt. Conversely, when they hear truths that hurt them, they attribute intent to the speaker based on what they would have to feel to be driven to say such hurtful things to others.

Of the 4 MBTI dimensions, only this one correlates with gender. Two thirds of men are Thinkers, two thirds of women are Feelers. Because this one goes so close to values, it also causes the most resentment when two people differ. If you value other people's feelings and make your decisions based on that value, someone who insists on using objective facts will seem cold, blunt and unpleasant. If you value the measurable, analytical and objective (truth over tact), someone who insists on considering personal factors will seem irrational and inconsistent.

What both types need to realize is that there are times when the ability to ignore people's feelings and push through with a purely objective analysis saves the day; likewise, there are times when people's feelings are much more important than the purely objective facts.

In times of great danger, stress and emotional upheaval, a compassionate and empathetic person can be incapacitated or at least have her judgment clouded. Seeing a Thinker handle things during these times can increase her appreciation of his value. Conversely, a Feeler can breeze through a situation that has a Thinker stymied because he can't find measurable facts to base any decision on.

**Advice to Thinkers:** Understand that compassion and empathy are important and valid inputs to any decision process. Since almost any plan will ultimately involve and depend on people, it is only practical to consider how it will affect them and their participation.

**Advice to Feelers:** Understand that impersonal analysis based on measurable facts is a style not a judgment. Try to separate the person from the style. It is possible to be betrayed by a person who never confronts, and supported by a person who does. Approach any situation accepting that disagreement is OK, and some people will be upset sometimes. It's not the end of the world.

### **Judging vs. Perceiving**

Some people prefer structure, regulation and closure. They are punctual, organized and decisive. These Judging types don't particularly like surprises and seek to control life. On the other end of this dimension, Perceiving types enjoy keeping their options open. They seek to understand rather than control, and like the spontaneous and unexpected.

You can see how these types might have problems working on a project together. It starts with meeting schedules, and never lets up. Judgers are happy only when decisions are made, and therefore tend to jump to conclusions. Perceivers prefer never to make decisions at all. The tension between this combination actually makes a good project team. If they can work together respectfully, the compromise represents the best route through the project.

**Advice to Judgers:** Try to withhold judgment until everything is heard. Keep the long range in mind. Wait. Consider changing the goal midstream if that is justified by later developments.

**Advice to Perceivers:** Stick to something. Notice how being distracted by the latest stimulus affects your ability to achieve your own goals. Consider letting it go. Set short-term goals, and understand you don't have to respond to every request.

### **Using the MBTI**

"Truth arises from disagreements among friends." [David Hume (1711-1776)] No one person is right, no one style always wins, no one individual can be all things to all people. A corollary of accepting that different styles exist is that each has its strength, and strength taken to an extreme becomes a weakness. The Introvert's ability to focus in depth and commit to a single idea becomes stubbornness and inflexibility. The Judger's decisive action becomes blind impulse.

The ideal team, then, includes people with conflicting styles who can work together to compromise on a final product. Opposites stand to gain the most from each other, even though they have the most difficulty communicating with each other.

Using the MBTI to improve your effectiveness means generalizing to understand but not to stereotype or dismiss. Noticing that a certain person's behavior resembles the Extravert type, say "Does that help me understand where she's coming from?" rather than "Since she's an E she is biased toward solution x."

### **Which Type Wins?**

Half the American population are Extraverted Sensors (ES\_\_): action-oriented, pragmatic, and social. Only 4% are Introverted Intuitives (IN\_\_): thoughtful, introspective, complex and creative. If you are in the minority, you may begin to feel you are somehow less competent than the majority because they set the rules, and according to the rules of Extraverts, Introverts don't measure up.

This imbalance in style population creates a problem when groups are run democratically. Majority rule is just another form of might makes right. If the truth is somewhere in the middle of all the styles, it doesn't make sense to allow some styles to pull harder than others in determining the center point. Understanding of style can open people up to compromise instead of all-or-nothing votes.

### **Conversational Style**

Although conversational style might seem to be only a surface issue, it really creates some of the most significant interpersonal conflicts, because conversation is the primary means of communication. With the rise of phones and email, an ever-increasing percentage of work is done through informal communication.

When we participate in a conversation, we enter into certain rituals, routines of convenience based on our backgrounds. As long as both parties enter the same ritual, the result is efficient and appropriate communication. Confusion and conflict arise when people make different assumptions about the rituals, and worsen when they believe these ritual assumptions are natural rather than cultural.

As a simple illustration, consider the case of an American meeting a Japanese. The American offers to shake hands, the Japanese bows. What if each were unaware of the other's cultural differences and took offense at this "obvious rudeness"?

Deborah Tannen's work focuses on conversational style, and the very basic differences she has discovered between men and women in their approaches to it. She presents a model for understanding these differences as follows:

Men assume competition, and in conversation strive to demonstrate their superiority over the other participant. They avoid being "one-down" at almost all costs. In the classic case of not wanting to ask directions, they want to avoid allowing the other person to demonstrate superior knowledge.

Women seek connection, and in conversation strive to maintain an appearance of equality. They believe they should downplay their authority and avoid flexing muscle in an obvious way.

I had a quick conversation with a father at a soccer game about the competition our sons were engaged in. He said that the games were good preparation because "Competition is life." I disagreed, regretting that my son should be learning that winning always means someone else losing. To me, the real win is when no one gets hurt. He demonstrated the classic competition agenda; I took the connection role.

So what happens when a man and a woman communicate? There seems to be a mutual desire to underestimate a woman's competence and authority, and overestimate a man's. Men are seen as hostile and arrogant, women as incompetent and unconfident. Here's an example of an actual interchange:

A female manager needed to have her male employee make changes to a report he had done. To soften the blow she started out with some praise, then went on to identify unacceptable parts and needed changes. When he turned in the revision, he had not done what she asked. Next meeting he was incensed that she had misled him. She thought she had been diplomatic. He thought she had been dishonest.

Another example of the difference in approach is displayed in a conversation between a man and a woman about another female manager who had just gotten a promotion. The woman asserted that the manager would be likely to succeed because she had

spent time in various departments of the company and built up good relationships with them. The man agreed, saying that the manager "had clout." The woman tried again to explain that "clout" wasn't exactly what she was talking about. The ability to relate to the individuals and call on their good will would help this manager succeed in her new role. The man's rejoinder: "That's what I said. She has clout." The woman recognized the value of connection; the man called attention to the one-up, one-down nature of the manager's success.

## Negotiation

One common situation in which conversational styles often create problems is in negotiation. One style assumes that the correct way to negotiate is to have each party express what they want directly. Then conflicts are made obvious and addressed head on. Another style assumes that expressing what you want directly is tantamount to making a demand, so participants should talk about things relevant to the decision and gradually approach an agreement without making definite statements about what they want. If you're expecting the first and the other person is expecting the second, you will perceive them as having no opinion and offering you an invitation to decide. They will perceive you as grabbing and making demands.

What is the purpose of negotiation? Are we here to make the right decision? Or are we here to come to agreement on a decision? Clarifying this basic premise can help establish communication on the right foot.

## Evaluation

When making a presentation to a group, women will often come across as less confident than men. Two factors affect this: their own unwillingness to appear to flex muscle, and their desire for the audience to feel equal in knowledge. Women downplay their own certainty to maintain connection with others. They don't always lack confidence but they are reluctant to display the confidence they feel, especially if it would mean putting down another person.

As an example, I participated in SAS Bowl at NESUG. I found that when a man on the other team was on a streak, I was reluctant to ring in even on the questions I knew the answer to. I felt it would be stealing the limelight from him, and potentially making him feel bad.

Men, on the other hand, in order to maintain the one-up position, downplay their doubts and emphasize their confidence. They are comfortable with a competitive agenda. They often establish rapport with other men by some form of competition, such as racket ball or golf. Boys learn to state opinions strongly and see if they're wrong by others challenging them.

These differences often result in bosses getting the impression that women are less competent than they really are, and men more competent. But changing behaviors wouldn't necessarily pay off in more workplace success. Research shows that women who behave in styles more typical of men are not rewarded.

I have noticed that women in the workplace have a tendency to work quietly to make the right thing happen, regardless of the direction they get and certainly without calling attention to it. Afterward, they do resent not getting the recognition they feel they've earned through good results.

I have also watched men call attention to their efforts, so that even when results are mediocre they get recognition and credit for all the work they put in.

### **I'm Sorry**

There are two meanings to this well-worn phrase. "I regret that something happened." "I apologize for doing something wrong." Women use this phrase more often to grease conversational wheels. As you might expect from the agenda identified above, men are less likely to use it and thereby appear one-down to the listener.

If a situation arises in which the phrase might be used, there are two possible outcomes.

- 1) Each party accepts some blame, even if just to help the other save face. For example, "I'm sorry I spilled that coffee on you." "I'm sorry I ran into you."  
or
- 2) One party opens expecting #1, but the other party doesn't hold up their half and leaves the opener with 100% of the blame. "I'm sorry I spilled coffee on you."  
"You should look where you're going."

In work situations where a significant issue is at stake, be aware of this potential and adjust your behavior accordingly.

### **Indirectness**

"Please type this letter and mail it before you leave for lunch."

"This needs to be out today and I don't think I'll have time to handle it."

You may prefer the first, direct, approach. Others may say it makes them feel powerless. Or you may prefer the second, indirect, approach. Others may find that confusing—are you asking for volunteers or making a request?

You can see how different preferences on this question alone could cause recurring problems, between boss and employee or even between co-workers. If you are direct, you may need to soften your approach to avoid being seen as demanding. If you are indirect, you may need to become more explicit to get the cooperation you want from others in achieving your goals.

## **Compliments**

One area in which the social subtext can be very powerful is giving and receiving compliments. In one sense, giving repeated compliments can be very subordinate. The sycophants surrounding Don Imus illustrate this every morning. If you don't listen to the I-man, think of Ed McMahon to Johnny Carson.

In another sense, a compliment can set up the giver as capable of judging. I'll never forget the moment that one of my clients told me I was "a pretty good programmer." He was somewhat younger than I was, and he was not a programmer. I reacted to his lay praise somewhat differently than he probably intended. I felt he needed to be put in his place, as if judging my programming constituted a huge presumption on his part.

Similarly, saying a simple Thank You can have a complicated message. It sets up the thanker as having received something from the other. If the person being thanked actually thought he was part of the beneficiary group, being thanked is somewhat exclusionary. For example, if all the members of a club work together to fix up the clubhouse, then the leader stands up to thank them, it almost seems like he is claiming that they worked for his benefit rather than their own.

In a related situation, when wife thanks her husband for doing housework, it looks like he did her a favor rather than that they both participate equally on the team.

## **Management**

Differences in status compound style differences. Many people in superior positions are unaware of the impact of their status and power on subordinates. Introverted employees may be even less likely to speak up. Whole groups may adopt a boss's idiosyncrasies as required behavior.

If you are a boss, try to be more sensitive to your employees behavioral styles. Mitigate your own by moving toward the center of each dimension. Value the diversity of styles in your work group.

When you are the subordinate, challenge your own assumption that the boss knows she's speaking from a position of power. Use metacommunication to clarify (respectfully, of course) her intentions.

### **Which Style is Better?**

Once again, you may find you have a preference for one or the other of these styles. You may believe that people who are different from you should just change. But the fact is that these differences exist, and, further, they create problems only when people are unaware of them. As long as both parties play according to the same rules, there is no confusion or conflict.

Flexibility and understanding what other styles are available equip you to handle more situations successfully.

### **Workshop Time**

How can you use the information presented here (and the background materials if you look them up)? How can you improve your chances for career success? How can you get better at working with your stylistic opposite? Here are some suggestions for using these ideas.

First, understand yourself, your feelings and your preferences. Self-knowledge is the precursor to self-improvement. Accurate knowledge of your own strengths and limitations leads you to take on appropriate tough challenges, setting yourself up for success and growth. Star performers make mistakes and have limits, just like everyone else, but they are aware and can learn.

To become aware of your own feelings, the first step toward improving your decision-making and relationships with others, take time to silence the goal-oriented, thinking activities that currently occupy your entire day. Turn off the TV, the radio, the phone, don't read a book or a magazine, just focus on your internal voice. Meditate. You have to know what makes life worthwhile for you in order to pursue it.

Once you are aware of your feelings, you can practice management techniques. Exercise, systematic relaxation, even counting to 10 before acting can improve your ability to handle stress (and distress). Adding to your self-control serves your long-term interests. You will still feel anxiety, but will be able to handle it better.

To understand your personality preferences, take the Keirsey temperament sorter at the website given. Read through all the type descriptions here and in the sources given. As you read, notice your own reactions. Not only will you see some that you think typify you, but you will also see some that you clearly think are "better" than others. This is a dead giveaway that you not only behave in that style but regard it as having more value than its opposite. To improve your effectiveness, you should try to expand your understanding of that opposite's strength. Although it is difficult to budge from the belief that our preferences are natural and right, the ability to recognize your own weaknesses puts you head and shoulders above people who think they know it all. You have their number, they don't have yours.

After you discover and get comfortable with yourself—your feelings and preferences--accept that real change may be necessary to accomplish your goals. You may need to attend training, practice new behaviors, and/or listen harder to feedback from those around you. As they say in AA, you can't keep doing the same thing and expecting different results.

One of the values of reading about various types is to raise your awareness of ways of thinking that exist. What you take as a given may not even be on someone else's radar screen. To understand yourself in relationship with others, you should try to identify your ingrained assumptions. It's hard to know what to question when it's buried that deep inside you, but asking yourself "Why?" every time you find yourself reacting to another person's behavior may help, in light of knowledge of differing styles.

My first day in high school Latin, the teacher stood up and walked around the room repeating "Ambulo" over and over. No one got it. She explained that Ambulo is the first person singular of the Latin verb ambulare, to walk, so she was saying "I walk." How hard is that? But I didn't pick up on it without the explanation. I think the reason was that in my model of language (English and a little French at that point) it took 2 words to say, "I walk." So it just wasn't in my experience to consider saying "I walk" in one word.

I tell this story to illustrate the difficulty of understanding our limitations from within them. Learning about personality styles gives you more paradigms of behavior to work with. You can make different decisions about your own behavior because you know about more options and their implications, and you can accommodate to other people's behavior more easily from better understanding their motivations and intentions.

As you read about the strengths and weaknesses of various types, ask yourself, "Is this true of me? Did it keep me from getting something I wanted?" If you answer yes to both, you can try to expand your repertoire of behaviors.

Your less-preferred processes can represent blind spots that repeatedly cause you trouble. You may want to balance consciously with a person who is different from you. Often what your opposite says just doesn't sound right to you, doesn't ring true with your instincts. Rather than discounting it, try taking it on faith to tune into what you've possibly been missing. To increase your ability to identify with your opposite, you might consider the following:

To develop your Sensing ability (if you are an Intuitive):

Stop and smell the roses. Fill your life with moments, not plans. Save tomorrow for tomorrow, think about today instead. Take up a hobby that produces a concrete result, like cooking or carpentry, and focus on the pleasure of the here and now.

To develop your Intuitive ability (if you are a Sensor):

Try to see things with new eyes. Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. One man's trash is another man's treasure. Take up a hobby that involves imagination and focusing on the big picture, like art appreciation or creative writing. Try to understand and create metaphors.

To develop your Thinking ability (if you are a Feeler):

Look at fairness and equality instead of harmony. Trace through the causes and effects with critical evaluation. Take up strategy games, debating, or politics. Use objective, measurable standards to make decisions.

To developing your Feeling ability (if you are a Thinker):

Become aware of how actions affect people. Use human terms when you evaluate something. Walk a mile in my shoes. He ain't heavy, he's my brother. Express gratitude and praise others. Share personal experiences and feelings with others. Take up journal writing or volunteering.

All this advice notwithstanding, the goal is not to change you.

The strengths of your preferred style create your value. But it does help in dealing with other's styles (and strengths) to implement some specific strategies. In your attempts to improve relationships with others, you can discuss what's happening in terms of type, if that is useful, as long as you stay objective rather than personal. Point out the positive side before you try to suggest an alternative.

Dealing with Extraverts:

Let them talk. They think best by verbalizing. Treat their remarks as ideas, not instructions. After they talk, ask them to listen to you. Then speak your mind. Avoid long or slow activities, but if depth of focus is required, warn them. Understand that it is hard for them.

#### **Dealing with Introverts:**

Don't expect them to think on their feet. Send them pre-meeting notes so they can feel prepared to speak. Don't force them to talk about personal issues, and understand they dislike the limelight. Listen to them, and allow for silence. Stay on one topic at a time.

#### **Dealing with Sensors:**

Present facts accurately. Be real, concrete, explicit. Show plans step-by-step. Give the practical application of any new ideas, and be specific. Understand that their practical objections to your new ideas are not meant to be critical of the idea itself, they just wonder how it will be done. They have a low tolerance for exploring new ideas.

#### **Dealing with Intuitives:**

Avoid tedious details (that phrase is redundant to an Intuitive). Use analogies and metaphors to communicate. Understand that they have trouble following directions and keeping on task, but can be energized by involving creativity. Engage their imaginations, and let them dream of possibilities. As Mike Nichols of Tessera once remarked to me, "All we Sensors had to learn was not to take an Intuitive seriously until he said something 3 times."

#### **Dealing with Thinkers:**

Be organized and logical, but remind them to consider human implications (without a value judgment). Focus on consequences and results. Ask what they think, not how they feel. Don't repeat yourself. Understand that they may be blunt and unaware of hurting people's feelings.

#### **Dealing with Feelers:**

Encourage them to be assertive about their own needs. Establish a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Mention points of agreement before criticism. Show appreciation and recognize legitimacy of feelings. Start the meeting with points they agree on and they'll work to preserve harmony.

#### **Dealing with Judgers:**

Be organized, prepared and on time. Come to conclusions and resolutions. Be definite and efficient with their time. Point out the benefits of being flexible. If you are only speculating, say so explicitly to prevent them from thinking you are defining goals. Talk through the decision process. If others are late for a meeting, help Judges see that a few minutes either way is OK.

### **Dealing with Perceivers:**

Expect questions. Rein them in. Don't jump too quickly to decisions. Provide opportunity to discuss options. Allow time to process. Point out that decisions are not irrevocable. Some people think that the P stands for procrastinate. Help Perceivers by frequent contact and directions. Point out how punctuality is important to others.

### **Dealing with groups:**

What happens when the needs of different styles are in direct conflict? SJ's want a structure decided in advance by competent authorities. NJ's, on the other hand, want a hand in choosing their goal and developing the plan. SP's and NP's want spontaneity. They get energy from discovering as they go. If teams that involve opposites are stronger, how are we to arrange things so that everyone is happy?

One solution is compromise. In a good compromise, everyone gets what is most important to him. No one will be 100% happy, but no one will be totally alienated either. The more the group can understand their differences, the more likely they will tolerate the accommodations that have to be made to each style.

Another important strategy in dealing with a variety of other styles is to give and ask for explicit feedback. Use meta-communication (talk about talking). In the technique called active listening, you articulate to a speaker what you think you just heard, but in your own words, giving them the opportunity to point out where you might have misunderstood by reading in an intent or implication that wasn't there. If you are the speaker and a listener isn't providing you with that opportunity, ask for it.

### **Making Mistakes**

One common reaction to learning about people types and techniques for accommodating diversity is first "Aha, that explains why..." quickly followed by "Oooh, I guess I didn't handle that very well because I didn't know..." Even should you try to make changes resulting from your new knowledge, you will inevitably face situations in which you know you were wrong. Understand then that mistakes, your own or others', are treasures from which to learn. Fred Smith of Federal Express has said, "We have to make mistakes faster." Risking and failing leads to greater long-term success than clinging to old, non-productive ways.

## **Problem Solving**

One way to appreciate the balanced values of the different types is to examine the problem-solving process. Gordon Lawrence identifies 4 steps that involve both ends of the 2 central dimensions of the MBTI.

**Step 1: Clarify the problem.** This uses Sensing to gather facts and details and observe what is real.

**Step 2: Generate alternatives.** Intuitives excel at using their imaginations to brainstorm possible solutions.

**Step 3: Project consequences.** Here Thinkers shine, listing steps and charting consequences. They use their logical, objective thought processes to rate the alternatives on cost and likely success.

**Step 4: Evaluate in people terms.** Finally, Feelers must help everyone understand the potential effects on people of the proposed scenarios. Their consideration of values and their empathy can affect not just which solution is chosen, but how it can be implemented with the greatest chance of acceptance.

If you have a problem to solve, although you might prefer working with someone who shares your style, you would be better served to work with someone who has different strengths. The final decision will be stronger, and you will get practice dealing with others.

Social pressures toward consensus in a group combined with the natural tendency to remain quiet (introverts) or avoid rocking the boat (feelers) stifle healthy discussion. If your main purpose of a group meeting is to make sure decisions are reached based on the merit of the ideas rather than on personal styles, you might try the following strategies:

In a common Japanese approach, project leaders go around and solicit input in advance of a meeting. They can then assemble the group and present all ideas in a way that allows everyone to save face.

Another technique to make sure all viewpoints are examined is to put forth a dissent yourself, or support even the most tentative hint at one by another participant. Social pressure to conform or at least keep dissenting opinions private virtually disappears with only one other ally. You become that ally, and you help to surface all the issues so they can be examined.

## Conflict Resolution

Coexisting with problem-solving can be the separate but also important task of conflict resolution. Problem-solving focuses on the work-related obstacle. Conflict resolution refers to ironing out relationship friction. Knowledge of and respect for the diverse types in the world helps us identify the issues and discuss them more calmly. In *Type Talk at Work*, the following 4-step process for conflict resolution is suggested:

- 1) Define the issues. It is important to do this objectively without judging any one point of view.
- 2) Examine causes of conflict. Ask "Why" as many times as necessary to ferret out the most underlying causes
- 3) Have each person try to identify with his/her opponent's point of view. Active listening once again comes into play.
- 4) Seek compromise. Try to help each participant understand that compromise is necessary. Each must separate the vital from the important and be willing to give up something.

The Feeler-Thinker dimension of the MBTI describes the most crucial difference in conflict resolution. Thinkers are more likely to see conflict as creative tension. Feelers find the disharmony stressful. Thinkers discuss and strategize; feelers blame someone, mostly themselves, for the conflict.

Other dimensions have differences during conflict resolution. Introverts internalize the tension; extraverts deal with it by arguing. It's been said that introverts get ulcers; extraverts give them. The trouble is that while extraverts talk more while under stress, hoping to surface and resolve the issues, introverts retreat and participate less. The conflict then becomes about how each's attempt to resolve the conflict irritates the other.

On the Sensor-Intuitive dimension, conflict often arises or is exacerbated by a differing focus on details vs. generalities. An Intuitive will use words carelessly, because the point is to get the general idea across. A Sensor has to get concrete to participate, so if the details are missing from an Intuitive's statement, the Sensor will fill them in mentally, then assume that is what the Intuitive meant. A Sensor will hold an Intuitive to his/her exact words ["What you said was..."] while an Intuitive will expect the Sensor to understand the idea ["What I meant was..."]

Conflict occasionally arises between Judgers and Perceivers due to the Judger's tendency to react negatively to any kind of change or interruption. Judgers are famous for getting the wrong thing done very efficiently. A Perceiver may feel the

Judger doesn't like the new idea, not understanding that anything new catches a Judger off guard.

The combination of E and J can be difficult for others to deal with. EJ's already know the answer; the question is irrelevant. They are so action oriented and definite in their style, they can be perceived as angry when they are merely enthusiastic. They expect others to challenge them with as much energy as they assert themselves, but people of differing styles aren't comfortable with that form of debate.

The bottom line in conflict resolution is to respect the other person's approach as different rather than bad, and to say what you need very explicitly. "I can't concentrate on what you said if you continue to present your case. Can you give me a few minutes to digest what you've said so far?" "I feel like you don't agree with me but you're not telling me why. Can you help me understand what you're thinking?" Sometimes noticing the actual words of people you find effective at conflict resolution can provide you with tools for future situations.

### **Career Decisions**

Another way to apply your learnings about personality types and people skills is in making career choices: what you do and where you do it. Your own emotional intelligence strongly affects your success on the job.

Career fields like programming have a certain traditional intelligence hurdle to enter the field, but once you've passed that, emotional maturity matters more in determining your success. Out-of-control emotions can make smart people stupid.

The emotionally intelligent (mature) person scores high on the following skills

- self-control
- self-motivation
- empathy
- social adroitness

Self-control keeps you on task and punctual; self-motivation drives you to continually expand your knowledge base; empathy makes you an effective team member or leader; and social adroitness helps your employers or clients feel comfortable working with you.

Ernest O. Lawrence, the Nobel laureate who founded the labs at Berkeley, said, "In scientific work, excellence is not about technical competence, but character."

"In a study of knowledge workers (engineers, computer programmers, and auditors), the star performers made career choices that let them work with their own sense of meaning intact or enhanced, where they felt a sense of accomplishment and believed they made a contribution." Average workers were passive, accepting whatever was assigned. Superior performers made active choices. They knew what they did best and enjoyed, and what they did not. "Their performance excelled because they were able to make choices that kept them focused and energized." (Goleman, pg. 58)

The most powerful motivators are internal. When your career provides you with creative challenge and stimulation, the chance to keep learning, the pride of getting things done, and the opportunity to help or teach people on the job, you have the best conditions for success. Success is a by-product, not a goal.

Work environments have personality styles, driven and maintained by the personality styles of the top management. Styles do evolve as turnover takes place, but people are chosen and choose to stay at a given company based on compatibility with existing styles.

One key difference between workplaces can be how they handle conflict. Microsoft is reported to favor a contentious style, with conflicts out in the open and direct. For some people, the adrenaline rush that results from being challenged makes them more articulate, and they find the resolutions that are reached under those circumstances invigorating. Others simply can't do their best work in a contentious environment. Know your own style, and research that of any workplace you are considering.

It is also very important to make sure you and your prospective boss have compatible communication styles. One of the key features of this compatibility is on the directness/indirectness dimension. I have given some advice for understanding the dimension and a strategy for helping people work together. But I have noticed that the very reasons an indirect person uses that approach may prevent him/her from acknowledging a correct, direct interpretation of his/her words. It sounds so bald the way you say it. If this incompatibility exists between you and your boss, it's just a wreck waiting to happen. My suggestion is not to work for someone you have difficulty communicating clearly with, especially around the issues of what s/he expects from you.

Certain personality styles migrate to specific careers. For example, ESTJ's might predominate in Marketing. They run a tight ship, meet goals, are aggressive. An opportunity exists here for I\_FP's to help a marketing department be more responsive to internal and external customers.

INTJ's are more likely to choose research as a career. They love exploring and working with new ideas. The opportunity here is for an extravert to communicate back to the potential user base and relate the research plans and results to realistic goals.

In HR you are more likely to find \_NFP's. They are natural teachers, creative and enthusiastic. What they need is \_STJ's to help them be pragmatic and drive them to completion.

Accountants fit the description of ISTJ's: focused on details, buttoned up, executing a routine smoothly and accurately. A \_NFP would help improve the flexibility of an accounting department, and potentially focus some energy on creating better working relationships with the rest of the company.

Introverted thinkers tend to be drawn to computer work. These would be the ISTP and INTP types. The ISTP type enjoys setting up, maintaining and fixing systems. S/he attends to the accurate operation of existing systems. INTPs would rather design. They see patterns and relationships, like to learn new technologies or apply their existing skills in a new way. For an N, once it's planned it's done and they lose interest. It takes an S type to implement all the N's great ideas, and keep the N realistic while developing.

Programming is not some sort of uniform effort requiring a set of uniform talents. Suitability for one kind of work associated with programming may make you unsuitable for another kind. A system designer needs to keep the forest in mind; a debugger needs to see not just the trees but the leaves. The same talents that make a person an excellent ad hoc programmer may make him/her unsuited for systems work. Gerald Weinberg suggested that there are three types of programmers based on their motivation:

- 1) aggressive: goal is money and power
- 2) compliant: like to work with people and be helpful
- 3) detached: want to be left alone to be creative

A good hire will match the goals of the candidate with what the employer offers. The savvy candidate will assist in making the appropriate match by knowing him/herself and finding out about the prospective employer.

### **Gender in the Workplace**

This is a very sensitive topic, and in the interest of full disclosure I must admit that I have only personally experienced one perspective on it. Still, research has shown repeatedly that women as a group don't tend to demonstrate the qualities that lead to

promotion in the ways that men understand. I want to include a brief summary of Deborah Tannen's work because it is important for everyone to at least think about it.

Promotions to management are based on the perceived level of the following qualities in employees:

- Competence
- Decisiveness
- Ability to lead

Women have the following tendencies operating against them when these qualities are being judged:

- 1) Women's desire to achieve consensus rather than dictate terms leads them to ask others' opinions and facilitate discussions. These behaviors undermine others' perceptions of their real competence.
- 2) In conversation, women seek connection and equality, downplaying their own abilities and achievements and giving perhaps more credit than necessary to others.
- 3) Women lead more by example than by fiat. They are likely to make choices to get the right thing done rather than worry about who's getting credit or being seen as the manager. They say "we did this" rather than "I did this."
- 4) Women focus on helping those around them do their best rather than trying to stand out themselves.
- 5) Women are much more willing to ask questions (including directions), highlighting what they don't know rather than what they know.
- 6) Women prefer not to exhibit authority until it is recognized officially—a mantle they can wear but don't assume. They act as if they don't want or deserve it until it is given by others.

These documented behavior differences will strike people as "good" or "bad", leading almost immediately to discussions of character rather than personality or style. It is important to keep in mind that all styles have strengths and weaknesses, and that the goal of education is not to change people to have different styles but to help everyone understand the value of diversity.

Problems arise for individuals when their styles interfere with their goals. For example, if a woman behaves in a style prototypical of her gender as listed above, but has the goal of advancing in management, she will encounter difficulties. Although she shouldn't, and really can't, change her underlying style, she would be well-advised to understand that higher level managers do not have complete information. Their impressions are based on chance encounters and formal presentations. Rather than decrying that this is so (for who wouldn't prefer that decision-makers be all-knowing and judging), it is better to acknowledge and make use of the realities.

By understanding different ways of viewing and judging, people (not just women) can ensure that the impressions they make on others are as close as possible to the truth, and less tainted by misunderstandings based on style preferences.

## **Sexual Harassment**

There's a lot of discussion these days about what constitutes sexual harassment. The legal definition is out of scope for this paper. But I'd like to make a point about borderline situations, once again using the tree falling in the forest as my analogy. The focus of that argument is what constitutes sound. The trouble is, it doesn't make any difference. What's really important is that a tree fell down. Similarly, if a uncomfortable situation arises, it doesn't need a discussion about labels to resolve it. If you find yourself uncomfortable about the way a person behaves toward you, the most important thing is to say so. "I'm very embarrassed by that remark." "I'm uncomfortable when you touch me." Even if the discomfort is caused by a difference in styles, rather than by malicious intent, if you respect all styles, including your own, you can ask others to accommodate you without deciding whether a law applies. [Note once again that I am only trying to address questionable calls, not egregious crimes that require strong redress.]

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this paper was to provide you with information and motivation to understand diversity and work more effectively with people. The information contained in this paper might make a small difference in your professional life right away. I hope the motivation will lead to further observation and perhaps further learning, increasing not just the tolerance but the actual appreciation for diversity in the workplace.

Niels Bohr, the physicist, wrote: "You have to look at things from two points of view...to really understand [them]." Can we have a better endorsement for diversity in the workplace?

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