

Getting Personal

Understanding personality types for better communication

by Monice M. Kaczorowski and Holly Pinto

Communication plays an important role in our daily lives. The way we communicate is key to our success and personal interactions. In the workplace, effective communication is essential with colleagues, management, staff, and vendors.

Have you ever wondered why you communicate better with some people rather than others? Why will one employee take your work direction and run with it while another needs you to spend 25 minutes outlining exactly what you want him to do? Don't we all treasure the librarian-attorney reference interview that is swift and on point and results in the perfect research outcome? And let us not forget the ever important elevator conversation that allows us to get our library message across to a member of management before the elevator doors open.

Chances are what happens with these interactions has to do with our personalities and how we perceive and process what is being communicated.

Myers Briggs Test

The goal of every organization is improved productivity and performance; the legal industry is no exception. As librarians, we encounter a varied population of library users. Members of our organizations work under tight deadlines where multitasking is a way of life. We do not want to add more tension and conflict to this already stressful environment. One way to better understand ourselves and our colleagues is to look at the role personality plays in how we communicate with each other.

Many of us have heard of or even taken a test called the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). It has been around for more than 60 years and is used throughout the world by many industries. The test is based on theories developed by psychiatrist Carl Jung, who believed that each person has a distinct personality type and as a result approaches problem solving and life from a specific point of view.

Two American psychological

theorists, Katherine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, took Jung's theory further. This mother and daughter co-created the Myers Briggs test, which uses four scales that have two distinct variations of performing mental tasks. When you take the Myers Briggs test, your choices will be expressed as a four-letter code, which is termed your personality type (see "Myers Briggs Letter Codes" on page 19). There are 16 possible combinations of symbols to delineate personality type.

Facilitating the Test

Organizations that use the Myers Briggs test usually have a facilitator to administer the test and explain the results. This is exactly what occurred in our law firm last year when the Neal Gerber & Eisenberg Women's Program hosted an all-day seminar on personality types, team building, and client communication. It was open to all attorneys.

The facilitator administered the test and then broke the attorneys into groups

by type. Once the types were explained to all participants, the facilitator split the attorneys into teams with varying personality types to perform team-building exercises. Next the attorneys were broken up by varying types but this time to work through attorney/client scenarios. The facilitator stressed that there are no wrong or right answers to the Myers Briggs test, nor is one personality type better than another. Myers Briggs testing is a way to get the conversation going.

In speaking with the attorneys who participated in the program, I heard that having an outside-qualified Myers Briggs facilitator made all the difference. Many attorneys had previously taken the test but really did not understand how to use the results to improve communication skills and increase productivity.

Rather than try to change a person's personality type, the facilitator explained, you need to be aware of where a person is coming from and how he or she perceives reality. If you understand these points, you may have a better chance of influencing him or her. As librarians, we interact daily with attorneys through conducting reference interviews, teaching legal research, or trying to justify budgets and staffing. If we are to be successful, we need to step back and consider the personality type of the attorney.

The Lawyer/Law Student Personality

According to Larry Richard's study, "Law Practice: How Your Personality Affects Your Practice," published in the October 1993 issue of *ABA Journal*, the legal profession is strongly concentrated in four MBTI types: ISTJ, ESTJ, INTJ, and ENTP. In a 2004 study based on 40 years of empirical data of personality type, lawyers, and law students, the most prevalent trait was the thinker/judger combination, with a slight majority being extroverts.

Richard's study found that attorneys are analytical thinkers with a no-nonsense, logical bottom line approach. These are traits admired by clients who are paying for legal services



but can add stress to a librarian's day, Richard reports. How many times has an attorney returned from court on break with non-specific information about something the judge said and has hovered over you while waiting for an instant answer?

As a librarian in that situation, how many times have you gently suggested that the attorney go back to her office so that you can research and bring her the information before she has to go back to

Interacting with Lawyers and Law Students

We can start thinking about our interaction in terms of the Myers Briggs definition of the extrovert and introvert and the fact that we share the thinker/judger trait with lawyers and law students. Extroverts are outgoing, like to talk, and are comfortable thinking on their feet. They like to be the center of attention. They may throw out 10 ideas during an interaction because that is

have a record of what was said, and it will help you later as you problem solve and reflect on what is being asked.

Do not get caught up in the extrovert's persona. I have seen too much time and money wasted because young reference librarians let attorneys lead them down the wrong path with their enthusiasm.

Elevator Conversations—

If librarians are naturally introverts, then we need to be prepared to showcase

Myers Briggs Letter Codes

Your Preferred World or Attitude	E Extraversion Energized by interaction with others	I Introversion Energized by solitary activities
Mental Process—Perception Accessing/Gathering Information	S Sensing Concrete, experiential awareness	N iNtuiting Abstract, symbolic awareness
Mental Process—Judgment Organizing/Evaluating/Deciding	T Thinking Information/situations assessed objectively based on criteria	F Feeling Information/situations assessed subjectively based on worth/values
Orientation to the Outer World	J Judging Plan ahead and follow the plan	P Perception Keep options open to adapt

From 16types.com, accessed on November 19, 2008.

court? The attorney's pacing only serves as a distraction to the librarian trying to help her find the answer.

The Librarian Personality

So what is the MTBI profile for librarians? What personality type(s) are most commonly found in the librarian population? How do those personality types communicate and interact? According to numerous studies done since the early 1970s, most librarians are personality type ISTJ or INTJ. We, too, are thinker/judgers but much more introverted, and we are split between sensing and intuition.

The librarian is characterized as a critical thinker, process oriented, and introspective, according to Mary Jane Scherdin and Anne K. Beaubien in their July 1995 *Library Journal* article, "Shattering Our Stereotype: Librarians' New Image." As introverts, we learn best through reading, according to Scherdin and Beaubien. We can appear annoyed if someone interrupts our thought process; we do not like confrontation and tend to follow protocol rather than break with tradition; and we are good team builders but choose more traditional ways to manage, report Scherdin and Beaubien. Many ISTJ/INTF become librarians because they are service-oriented individuals and like intellectual stimulation.

the way they think. If colleagues are close by, they may pull them into the conversation so that even more ideas and thoughts are being tossed about.

Enter introverts, who are more comfortable dealing with one person at a time. They are reserved in how they interact with other people. Introverts' thought processes are structured and fact based. They like to spend time alone to concentrate on the task.

As thinkers and judgers, lawyers, law students, and librarians share a preference for problem-solving skills. We are logical in our approach and methodical in our decision making. Let's look at how law librarians can use what we know to our advantage when we deal with attorneys.

Reference Interview—I constantly remind my younger reference librarians that they need to take control of the reference interview. Attorneys are in the library because they do not have the answer. Enter the litigator who may throw out five places to look, and not one of them may be as good as the resources we know and use daily.

Litigators are used to being in front of an audience, and coming down to the library is no different. Do what an introvert does best—take the time to write down the reference interview and review it with the attorney. You now

our knowledge and skills as extroverts. There are situations when we must move outside of our comfort zones. Preparing for the elevator conversation is a perfect example of this.

Elevator conversations are short and to the point. They consist of three to five bullet points of important information to management. We practice them again and again so that when the opportunity to persuade presents itself, we are ready. We become the extrovert.

We think on our feet and are the center of attention. We deliver the message of our importance to an attorney who is used to dealing with similar personalities. The opportunities are short and intense, but we have prepared ourselves using our thinker/judger skills to get our message across. We leave a positive impression of what we can do for our organizations. We are perceived as equals.

Budget Meetings—The same approach is also important for the budget meeting and annual report to management. As mentioned before, attorneys are analytical thinkers with no-nonsense, logical bottom line approaches. Librarians need to become masters of the one-page memo.

The legal profession, driven by the billable hour, has little time to waste

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on non-productive meetings. Find out your audience and what it likes to see in terms of presentations. Is the audience into charts and graphs, or is it a number-cruncher crowd?

Practice your presentation and be prepared for the unexpected. Thinker/judgers like to avoid last-minute stresses. As an introvert, it may not be comfortable, but stand your ground on issues of importance to the library and be prepared with justifications rather than appearing difficult and stubborn.

Relating with Vendor Personalities

The MBTI is a great tool to use when negotiating with vendors. Effective communication will help you with contract negotiations and help you get the result that you want. Ideally, the relationship between the vendor and your organization has been established, and there is some sense of the process this negotiation will take. Using the MBTI, you can gain more insight about both sides of the negotiations that you might not have thought about.

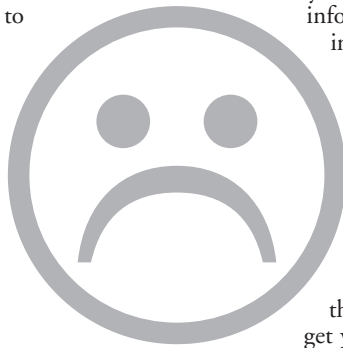
Is the vendor representative extroverted or introverted? Knowing this will help establish a working relationship. Next, take it one step further and give your rep a bigger picture of the future plans and goals for the library department as it relates to the overall organization. This will set up common goals for the negotiations.

Based on my experience, most vendor salespeople tend to be extroverts. This isn't a stretch—MBTI statistics reveal that there are more extroverts than introverts. This characteristic obviously helps give a sense of openness and enthusiasm to the process.

How does your personality type fit in the relationship? If you are an introvert, like most librarians are, interaction with others might be the most challenging part of this process. Make sure you take the time that you need in order to feel comfortable. Never be bullied into a decision.

On the other hand, an extrovert working with another extrovert also can pose some challenges, specifically in regards to attention seeking, not being heard, and being dismissive of each other.

What about the thinker/feeler trait? When you're in negotiations, how do you assess the information given to you? Do you maintain your objectivity? Do you make a list of pros and cons? Or do you assess based on worth or values? Do you let past history distort or influence your decision-making process?



Do you have all of the information to make an informed decision?

All of these types of factors play into the thinking and feeling scale of the MBTI. Knowing how you're assessing the data will help you keep perspective on the negotiations and get you to your end game.

Another trait that can affect your negotiations is judging/perception. The judging trait is more methodical than the perception trait. Do you start with a plan? Can you adapt to a situation no matter how much planning you have done? Most perceivers can think on their feet—is that a trait you have? Can you come up with alternative solutions on the fly? A good negotiator has both of these traits and knows when to switch between them.

How Personality Affects Research Training

Imagine you are planning a research training curriculum with the professional development team at your firm. How would you use the information from the MBTI types to make sure the curriculum works?

The MBTI can be helpful to determine learning styles based on personality type. We have all been told that people learn differently.

Some are more visual learners and others are book learners. Keeping in mind the four MBTI types for attorneys—ISTJ, ESTJ, INTJ, and ENTP—will help you tailor your training to make it more successful. Of the four areas of the MBTI, two areas work well with determining learning styles: sensors/intuitives and judges/perceivers.

Sensors are very detail oriented. This is the categorizing and organizing trait. They like structure and outcomes. A more formal classroom-type setting works well for them. Assignments, tests, and clear instructions are key elements to their learning style. Intuitives are more big thinkers. They like to extrapolate and run with ideas, jump around to fill in their theories, participate in

free-form discussions, and debate pros and cons. Hands-on training works well with this type.

Judgers are very structured. They need deadlines, syllabi, and defined learning outcomes. A typical classroom setting would work for them. Perceivers are flexible and adapting. They are freer flowing and learn on the fly. A more unstructured learning environment will benefit their learning styles.

As you can see, the sensor/judgers adapt well to classroom-type instruction. The others are less structured in their learning styles. This type of information helps you to offer different types of training based on people's preferences and hopefully encourages more attendance and participation. There are many different types of training options open to us: WebEx, classroom training, phone training, hands-on training, and one-on-one training. Picking the right instruction type should be easier with all the alternatives available and the MBTI information.

In conclusion, using the MBTI can help your organization create better relationships, both internally and externally. Having a basic understanding of the four scales in the MBTI and

how they interact with each other gives law librarians the knowledge they need to communicate better and the tools to recognize different styles.

Whether you are working with your staff, talking with upper management, or creating a training program, the MBTI can contribute to the success of your goals. But also keep

in mind that there is a likelihood that your personality type could evolve and change over time. This is a dynamic process. ■

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