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## **Celebrating Differences—Part I** **By Kenneth A. Sprang**

*Find the person who will love you because of your differences  
and not in spite of them and you have found a lover for life.*

--Leo Buscaglia

Have you ever watched the work habits of a colleague and thought he or she must be from another planet given the radical difference in your respective work habits? Or have you ever wondered why your partner seems to thrive on being surrounded by people, while you crave a little quiet and solitude? Or perhaps have you found yourself pulling your hair out because your child or your partner refuses to put her dirty dishes in the dishwasher? If so, welcome to the wonderful world of type and temperament.

Many of you no doubt are familiar with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), an instrument which measures human personality. The instrument was developed by the mother-daughter team of Katherine Cook Briggs and Isabel Myers who were influenced by the work of psychologist Carl Jung. Isabel continued to perfect the instrument until her death in 1980. The MBTI has been translated into 16 languages and is now the most widely used and well respected personality inventory of all time.

The MBTI measures personality type and temperament, determining whether one is Extraverted (E) or Introverted (I), Intuitive (N) or Sensing (S), Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), and Perceiving (P) or Judging (J). One's personality type is then identified by the combination of the measures in each category. There are 16 types. For example, my wife Carol is an INFP while I am an ENFP. My daughter is an ENFJ and my son an INFP.

Extraverts are those who are energized by being with other people. Introverts, on the other hand, need quiet time and solitude to be recharged. The Intuitive/Sensing distinction measures how one gathers information. Sensors gather data that can be measured in the main by one's senses of sight, sound, touch, etc. Intuitives, on the other hand, often gather information based on a "hunch" or a "gut feel."

The Thinking and Feeling distinction reflects how we make decisions. Thinkers make decisions objectively based on data and logic, while Feelers' decisions are largely based upon their values and related feelings.

Finally, our Judging or Perceiving component reflects how we operate in the world. Judgers tend to be organized and good time managers. They like reaching decisions and closure. Perceivers, on the other hand, find time infinitely flexible and elastic. In fact they are sometimes reluctant to make decisions lest they close the door to some possibility.

In addition to the 16 types, certain combinations of characteristics reflect a temperament. For example, NF's generally engage the world in one way, while NT's or SJ's engage it quite differently.

The inventory is used a lot in business to help employees understand themselves better and to assist in forming diverse groups for problem solving, etc. An organization run solely by SJ's for example, may lack vision and a long term plan for the future, while one run solely by NF's would likely have great ideas but have difficulty tending to necessary details. An organization needs the gifts of different personality types.

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The MBTI is also helpful in making career decisions. For example, NF's abhor conflict. Consequently, NF lawyers are likely to find contentious litigation emotionally painful. At best it runs against their nature. An ENTJ might make a great litigator, while an INFJ is better suited to do estate planning, perhaps, or perhaps to avoid the law entirely.

The MBTI is also extraordinarily valuable in relationships. In fact, Isabel Myers writes that her 61-year marriage to Clarence "Chief" Myers was a fortuitous event that led to the development of the MBTI. Isabel was an INFP while Clarence was an ISTJ. When asked once how she came to create the MBTI, Isabel Myers replied, "Because I married Chief."

The differences between Isabel and Chief were clear to Isabel's mother and collaborator Katherine Briggs, as well. When Isabel brought Chief home to meet the family one Christmas vacation. Katharine Briggs observed that her prospective son-in-law was an "admirable young man," but "not at all like others in their family."

In relationships we can use the MBTI in two ways. First, when one understands the type and temperament of one's partner (or one's child or friend), it becomes clear that our partner does not do things in a particular way to intentionally aggravate us. An ENFP can no more act like an ISTJ than a right-handed person can clearly write left-handed. Although we can stretch to develop other parts of our personality, the underlying preference, once developed, is unlikely to change.

Second, once we understand the differences we can be sensitive to them and honor and respect them. For example, when my son, who is a strong Introvert, shies away from all day Italian family gatherings with 40 plus people, I understand and honor his need for some solitude and the emotional toll such a day might take.

In the next issue I'll write more about using the MBTI as a resource in your relationship. In the meantime, if you don't know your Myers-Briggs Type or have not taken the inventory for many years, consider taking it again. It is a really helpful tool—one more resource to help you find and sustain the right relationship, or to nurture and sustain the one you are in.

*Kenneth Sprang, MA, JD, and Carol Sprang, MA, RNC, LCPC direct Bethesda-Chevy Chase Counseling & Consulting in Bethesda, offering Imago Relationship Therapy, relationship and executive coaching, individual and couples coaching and counseling, and business consulting services. (301) 907-3377, ext. 93. [ken@bccounseling.com](mailto:ken@bccounseling.com). [www.bcccounseling.com](http://www.bcccounseling.com)*