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Celebrating Differences—Part IV
Thinkers and Feelers
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

In this series I have sought to explore the fascinating world of personality types as measured through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Previous columns have explored the introverted and extraverted function (which describe how we gain emotional or psychological energy) and the sensing and intuitive function. (which describes how we gather information).

The MBTI measures how we make decisions based upon our preference for Thinking (T) or Feeling(F). For those of us who are primarily Thinkers, we make decisions based upon objective data. A Thinking lawyer can detach herself emotionally from a particular client, for example, allowing her to defend hardened criminals or represent persons whose points of view are different than her own. She deals with the data and information her decisions are guided by her reason, not her feelings or personal values.

A Feeler, on the other hand, makes decisions primarily upon his values. He cannot separate his feelings and values from the decision and make it a decision based solely on facts and reason. Consequently, the Feeler has difficulty if his work environment or some other component of his life runs contrary to his values.

There is an old story of a man whose wife asks him whether he loves her. He responds by saying something like “I told you I love you 25 years ago. If I change my mind I’ll let you know.” In his view, that of a Thinker, there is no need to repeat what he may perceive as obvious. But in her world, one of thinking and values, periodic verbalization and demonstration of his love is important.

Feelers are likely to be romantics and will make a special occasion of first anniversaries and similar important life events. The feeling is looking for *meaning* in these life events. She may be quite devastated when her partner, a Thinker, forgets an anniversary or sees no reason to make a special occasion of it. She may experience her partner’s response as one of rejection.

Or consider the story which Otto Krueger and Janet Thuesen relate in their book *TypeTalk*. A husband and wife plan to buy a car. He goes to the Internet and does exhaustive research on gas mileage, resale value, comparison of features, and other data. He, a Thinker, reaches a logical conclusion that the best care for the couple to buy is a particular make and model because, based on all of his empirical work, the car is the rational choice for the couple. Imagine his surprise when his wife responded to the announcement of his conclusion with distress.

His wife was a Feeler. She wanted to be involved in the decision making process. For her part of the decision was about how the car *felt*. For example, her decision about color would not be based on what color was easiest to clean or had the highest resale value, but rather how the color *felt* and how it expressed or complemented her personality.

It is not that either partner was right or wrong—they just have very different ways of making decisions. The key to making their relationship work is to be *conscious* of the differences and to address differences in a way that effectively uses their preferred function. For

June 24, 2004

example, the Thinker may not see the point in a quiet evening of candlelight and wine at the restaurant where he first proposed as a way to celebrate their anniversary. However, he now has information—objective data—that it is important to his partner. Therefore, he can proceed to make such arrangements of join his wife in them.

Similarly in the car example, it may make no sense at all to him that his wife cares about how color expresses her personality or that she wants to share the adventure of shopping with him, but he now has the data that these things are important to her. He can act on the data and include her in appropriate ways.

The Feeler, however, must accept the obligation first of recognizing that when her partner seems unromantic or detached, her partner is saying nothing at all about his love for her. Rather her partner is simply making decisions in a way that feels natural. By giving her partner information about what she really *wants*, the Feeler can allow her partner to make an informed thinking decision to try to give her what she wants. This “stretch” for the Thinker comes 1) out of his analysis of the simple data that x or y is important to his Feeling partner and 2) out of his love and commitment to and desire to care for his partner. In, short we each need to be clear in sharing with our partner the things that make us happy and the things that make us feel loved. If we leave our partners to mindreading, we will be disappointed—I guarantee it.

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