



Effective Communication: Understanding Personality Types

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Identify four basic personality types and their characteristics.
2. Discuss how knowledge of personality types is helpful in the workplace.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), personality can be defined as a characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling and behaving that is consistent over time and situations. Personality develops as a result of genetic factors, as well as learned behaviors in the childhood environment, such as from parents and other early role models. It is believed that genetic factors and environment each contribute approximately 50% to the development of personality.



This newsletter will discuss selected personality types and their typical characteristics. Implications for the workplace will also be covered.

Personality Types

Since ancient times, attempts have been made to categorize the different personality types commonly exhibited by people. The ancient Greek and Roman philosophers believed that there were four basic personality types, tied to an imbalance of body fluids, or "humors." The sanguine (blood) personality was sociable and optimistic; the choleric (yellow bile) type was goal-oriented and hard-driving; the melancholic (black bile) type was withdrawn, cynical and moody; the phlegmatic (mucous) type was easy-going, calm and kind.

Over the years, psychologists and behaviorists have developed similar categories to describe common

personality traits. The four ancient temperaments are described here, along with more recent interpretation of these types:

- **Sanguine**- also called *Interactive, Expressive, Idealist, Spirited, Popular*: Sanguines tend to be talkative, charismatic, optimistic, impulsive, fun-loving, affectionate, persuasive, and have many friends. They are good at energizing and motivating others, but may be emotional, disorganized and flighty. They have great energy and ideas, and are often good at starting things. But, they may have difficulty finishing tasks, and may not follow through on promises they've made. It may also be difficult for sanguines to arrive on time, and they may become quickly bored with an activity or person that doesn't hold their interest.

Interactions with others are a definite strength of people in this group. Their enthusiasm and charisma is balanced by co-workers who have good organizing skills and can see tasks through to completion.

- **Choleric**- also called *Directive, Dominant, Driver, Self-Propelled, Powerful*: Choleric are natural leaders, self-confident, out-going, stubborn, productive, independent, organized, results-oriented and opinionated. They tend to be visionaries, with a "big-picture" orientation and great ideas that they successfully see



through to the end. Their ability to achieve results is usually more important than pleasing people, so choleric may come across as unsympathetic, blunt or uncaring. They can be easily annoyed by others who block the achievement of their goals, and may have little patience with those who act more slowly or do not share their hard-driving approach.

Achievement is a major strength of people in this group. Their visionary ideas and desire to charge ahead are balanced by co-workers who can focus on the details, find possible problems and interact effectively with others.

- **Melancholic**— also called *Corrective, Realist, Analytic, Systematic, Perfect*: These individuals tend to be introverted, quiet, intelligent, logical, orderly, detail-oriented, sensitive and perfectionistic. They look for problems, often playing the “devil’s advocate,” and may be perceived as pessimistic or critical. Decisions are made based on facts, rather than emotion. Melancholics may have difficulty reaching a decision, as they continue to search for more and more factual data on which to base it (analysis paralysis). They prefer working alone, as they tend to be independent and self-reliant. They may also be cautious in relationships, and make friends slowly. Melancholics may be reluctant to accept change, and are not comfortable taking risks.

Analyzing and “doing it right” are the strengths of the melancholics. They are balanced by others who see the big picture and are willing to take risks.

- **Phlegmatic**— also called *Supportive, Amiable, Nurturer, Solid, Peaceful*: Phlegmatics tend to be kind, friendly, cooperative, patient, compassionate, relaxed and organized. They are good listeners, and others usually describe them as “nice” people. They will reliably get the job done and keep promises, and generally prefer being told what to do. Their work is accurate and complete, although they may work slowly. Decision-making may be a slow or difficult process, and they may prefer that someone else makes the decisions. Security and a predictable routine are highly valued, and they may have difficulty adapting to change. These individuals value peace and harmony, and dislike conflict and arguments. They will often “go along to get along,” agreeing in order to keep the peace.



Being a supportive and steadying influence is the strength of people in this group. They are balanced by others who promote change.

Which One is Best? Implications for the Workplace

Despite the advantages and limitations of each personality type, there is no one “best” type. Groups of

all kinds, whether workplaces, families, organizations or communities, function best when people with a variety of personality types are involved. Each type helps to balance the others, and brings strengths to the group that may be lacking. The people with great ideas who like to create change help to make progress, those with attention to detail and organization keep things on track, and those with great interpersonal skills help to make connections with others to build success.



Also, even though various personality types have certain strengths, a person’s personality type(s) does not necessarily determine the kind of work in which he or she will find enjoyment or success. People of all personality types can be successful leaders and employees in a variety of settings and occupations.

While some generalizations can be made about the various personality types, it is very important not to label or pigeon-hole people as a certain type, based on observations about them. Such assumptions should never be made, as these are unfair and often inaccurate. Also, most people are a combination of several personality types— rarely is anyone a true sanguine or choleric, for example. While personality traits are fairly stable over life, they can be altered by certain circumstances. For example, if two people working together both have a tendency toward indecision and disorganization, one of them may, out of necessity, improve his or her ability to make decisions and organize tasks, in order to get the job done. Also, one spouse may have a “take-charge” approach at work, but not at home, where the other spouse makes most of the decisions.

So, how does having an awareness of personality types help in communicating and working with others? It provides an understanding that people can approach the same situation from very different perspectives, and that these approaches are not “wrong,” even if they differ from what you would do. It helps us to be more open-minded and less judgmental, by understanding that some people may need to work quickly or may resist change. In some cases, it is not the differences, but the similarities, that may create conflict, such as when two people both want to be the primary decision-maker. And, being familiar with the various personality traits helps us to become more aware of some tendencies within ourselves, such as the need to keep collecting more data before a decision can be made. This awareness can help us to modify some of our behaviors, such as realizing that the best data has already been collected, and proceeding with a decision.

Having an ability to appreciate and work with the similarities and differences in us all promotes a more effective and enjoyable work environment.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____ UNIT: _____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- ____1. Personality is defined by the American Psychological Association as:
 - A. the way in which a person interacts with others
 - B. a pattern of thinking, feeling and behaving
 - C. a measure of self-esteem
 - D. a mechanism developed by early humans to promote survival

- ____2. Personality develops as a result of genetic and environmental factors.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- ____3. The early Greek and Roman philosophers believed personality traits were based on an imbalance of:
 - A. hormones
 - B. essential nutrients
 - C. brain chemicals
 - D. body fluids

- ____4. The personality type best described as an “achiever” is the:
 - A. melancholic
 - B. sanguine
 - C. choleric
 - D. phlegmatic

- ____5. The phlegmatic personality type is known for being:
 - A. the life of the party
 - B. relaxed and easy-going
 - C. moody and precise
 - D. hard-driving and successful

- ___6. Having a high need for social interaction is characteristic of:
- A. sanguines
 - B. choleric
 - C. melancholics
 - D. all of the above
- ___7. The choleric personality type is likely to have the most difficulty with:
- A. making decisions
 - B. hurting someone's feelings
 - C. attending to small details
 - D. seeing a job through to the end
- ___8. Which of the following personality types is most likely to experience "analysis paralysis?"
- A. choleric
 - B. phlegmatic
 - C. sanguine
 - D. melancholic
- ___9. People with any of the personality types can be effective leaders.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ___10. It is only the differences in personality type that create conflict— people with similar personality types always get along well.
- A. True
 - B. False

