

Valuing different skills and personalities

Frances Cheyne

Business facilitator and coach, 45 Fitzroy Avenue, Hamilton

We are all different and indeed our choice of career paths often has something to do with our personality preferences.

For example: stability or creativity? Earn lots of money or be of service to others? What drove you to select the job and career that you're now in?

Playing to people's strengths as individuals usually gets the best out of them, especially when those same individuals are given the opportunity to learn from those around them and are taught to value others' expertise and aptitudes, and when people are supported in their efforts to build upon and maximise their strengths and talents. A leader's job is to recognise and foster those different strengths in their individual team members.

As a coach of a sports team, if you went to the pre-season muster, you would be looking out for talent in:

- Scoring goals
- Goal keeping – stopping the other team from scoring goals
- Speed of attack
- Level-headed in defence

Few players have the talents required to play all those positions and the team would be less competitive if individual players attempted to do so.

So, in business, do we truly value and utilise the individual strengths that people bring to the various roles in the organisation and how do we show that we value the contribution of each of our team members? Furthermore, what difference does it make when we do make our people feel valued?

Using the theory of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator™ there are four scales on which we may have different preferences.

The first of these is about how we recharge our energy.

Are you energised by being around people? Can you understand life only when you've lived it? Do you often only realise what you were thinking once you've said it out loud? These are traits of an **Extravert**.

Or:

Do you prefer the inner world of reflection and find you want to understand life before you live it? Do you frequently find that your best contribution to a discussion happens after a meeting? These are the traits of an **Introvert**.

Both Extraverts and Introverts make significant, but different, contributions to the workplace.

The second scale looks at our perception; how we gather information and, interestingly, Isabel Briggs Myers said that on this scale we even define intelligence in two ways. Sensing people, who depend on their five senses to take in what is actually happening, trust their own experience and notice and remember specifics and facts. Intuitives, on the other hand, are focused on the possibilities of life and look to create and imagine how things could be. **Sensing** people tend to define intelligence as 'soundness of understanding', whereas **intuitives** tend to define intelligence as 'quickness of understanding'. How often do we subconsciously notice this and label someone as a consequence?

The third scale is all about how we make decisions, and while both preferences are reasonable, the primary goal may seem to be at odds. Thinking preferences tackle decisions objectively, searching for the truth, and may sound critical to others. Feeling types' first concern is how the decision may affect people. They desire harmony and look to empathise with others. Both of these approaches to decision-making add value and as a business we need both. In some cases, however, these two perspectives on a problem, if not appreciated for their differences, may unintentionally cause conflict in a team.

The fourth and final dichotomy involves how we deal with the world. Judging types live according to plans and like to have matters settled and decided so that they can prepare for what will happen. Perceiving types are spontaneous and curious, starting projects and tasks and happily leaving them unfinished when another new one comes along. So what happens in your practise or organisation when planned structure meets the flexible, open-ended approach? Frustration? Name-calling? Both of these outcomes would be common, but a more desirable outcome would be respect and accommodation of both type preferences and the benefits that each brings.

Most of us want to feel valued for who we are and what we contribute, but do we know how to do that on a regular basis and is it working? When was the last time you consciously made someone in your workplace feel that they mattered or that you had noticed when they weren't there? Have you helped someone to know that they're competent, or have you just told them off when they made a mistake? In climate surveys people are often asked if they have a friend at work. People want to feel that they are likeable, and having a friend in their team helps this. Are friendships flourishing and encouraged at your clinic, or do you operate in cliques? Whether we are conscious of it or not, how we feel affects how we behave and when we feel good about ourselves, we are more productive and the business benefits.

It is quite natural and normal to side with those who think/feel or perceive the world as we do, but we'd do well to value those who have different, complimentary gifts to ours. Our special gifts and skills may be ones which make us a great vet for example, but they may be different to those which make the best practice manager or receptionist. As we move forward let's see how we can show that we value all the collective gifts in our business and reap the rewards of encouraging different perspectives and approaches.