

Solving the Mystery of Personality Types

By Peter DeArmond

The concept of different personality types isn't a new idea. It dates back to the time of the ancient Greeks, when Hippocrates incorporated the four "temperaments" into his medical theories. Fast-forward to the 19th and 20th centuries, and you find serious academic attempts to understand personality theory at a deeper level.

The theories of the Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung (1875-1961) probably were the most influential in the exploration of personality types. Based largely on Jung's work, in the 1940s and 1950s, Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs developed a personality assessment tool, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). In the 1950s, David Keirsey, Ph.D., developed his theory of temperament also based on the work of Jung.

Those who have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment know there are 16 combinations of four basic types or preferences. MBTI can be a great way to understand your own personality better, but it can be very difficult to apply when trying to figure out personalities of others. Why is this so important? When you want to improve communication at work or at home, being able to identify the particular personality type you're talking to — and listening to — is crucial. This is why the opening animation on our website says, "Speak in the language of the listener, and listen in the language of the speaker."

How do we do that? The system I've found to be most effective is called Real Colors, and it's based on the work of Jung, Myers-Briggs, and Keirsey. It focuses on the four basic components instead of the 16 Myers-Briggs Type Indicators. Instead of using words to label these types, it uses the colors Blue, Gold, Green, and Orange. For most people, one color is dominant, or primary. Everyone has at least some of each color, but one is almost always preferred. Because we all have all four colors in us, we can learn to tap into them -- a vital concept when it comes to improving interpersonal communication. Please see my article on [Why I Use the Real Colors System](#).

Critics of personality assessments point out that we're all different, and it doesn't make sense to classify human personality into categories. After all, there are just too many different kinds of personalities, right? I agree, up to a point, because the term "personality" really is too broad.

I like to refer people to an excellent book by Dr. Keirsey, *Please Understand Me*. Dr. Keirsey explains there are two sides to personality, one of which is temperament and the other character. "Temperament is a configuration of inclinations, while character is a configuration of habits," he writes. "Character is disposition, temperament pre-disposition... Put another way, our brain is a sort of computer which has temperament for its hardware and character for its software. The hardware is the physical base from which character emerges, placing an identifiable fingerprint on each individual's attitudes and actions. This underlying consistency can be observed from a very early age -- some features earlier than others -- long before individual experience or social context (one's particular software) has had time or occasion to

imprint the person. Thus temperament is the inborn form of human nature; character, the emergent form, which develops through the interaction of temperament and environment."

I think that too many "personality" tools try to incorporate both temperament and character in their assessment systems. That's one reason why you see several different assessments, some of which include more than the four basic types. I think it also may explain why there's so much criticism of personality "tests," a word I never use in my training sessions. I've found that focusing on temperament, which is the consistent factor, is the most reliable way to begin communications training.