

The Practice Menagerie

HOW CAN YOUR GROUP LEVERAGE A VARIETY OF PERSONALITIES, INCLUDING YOURS, TO GET AHEAD?

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Imagine you're holding the phone to your ear, calling a referring physician. As you listen to the phone ring, waiting for the sound of a voice, what are you thinking about?

The answer to this question may say something about your personality type. Personality types exert great influence over the way we view the world, our work, and our interactions with others — from family and friends to colleagues and patients. In a typical day, radiologists may be called upon to work alone for long stretches of time, interact with patients, deliver complex information to referring physicians, or participate in a tense board meeting. In each of these scenarios, personality type will influence the way they approach the task and respond to the situation.



Which Are You?

While there are as many ways to describe personality as there are individual personalities, one of the most common is in terms of introverts and extroverts. For many experts, the distinction between the two comes down to a single word: energy. Where does your energy come from? If you recharge through quiet time spent alone, chances are you're more of an introvert. If you feel energized by interacting with others, you are probably more extroverted.

Another, more anecdotal, method of ascertaining your personality type goes back to that phone call. (It's still ringing.) If you're an introvert, you may be planning out a script for the moment the call is picked up. If you're an extrovert, you probably expect to figure out the words as you go.

Of course, personality is far too dynamic and complex to be defined in

black-and-white terms. Carl Jung, who popularized the words *introvert* and *extrovert* in his 1921 book *Psychology Types*, cautioned, "There is no such thing as a pure extrovert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be a lunatic in an asylum." So while the average person possesses traits of both introverts and extroverts, most people identify more strongly with one personality type than the other.

Although it may seem that our success in various facets of our careers hinges on our personality type alone, many believe that success is based more on how well we know ourselves. From there, we can adapt our approaches and tactics for dealing with events as they come, all while taking into account our personality types. For radiologists, understanding personality type as it relates to day-to-day challenges can enhance patient care and add to overall career satisfaction.

Know Yourself

If the first step is taking note of how our personality type affects the way we respond to the world, the second step is understanding how to adapt to changing situations within the context of our needs. Alexander M. Norbash, MD, FACR, professor and chair of radiology at Boston University and radiologist-in-chief at Boston Medical Center, sees opportunities within a radiology career to make choices about what will bring the most happiness in the long run. "There's not just one personality type in radiology, but there's



enough of a variation that personalities tend to migrate to the part of the specialty where they can express themselves most effectively," he says.

Elements in the career-satisfaction equation include choice of subspecialty, day-to-day responsibilities, and work environment — all of which are influenced by individual personality. "Each person needs to understand what kind of environment makes them happier, in addition to which specific tasks they enjoy performing the most, and which professional relationships are going to bring them the greatest fulfillment," says Norbash. Through this self-awareness, radiologists can take into account their personality types when making career decisions.

Make It Work

No matter how well suited we are for a certain career, there will inevitably be instances in which we feel nudged (or shoved) outside of our comfort zones. Career coach and self-described introvert Mark Hipwood suggests a balance between stretching our comfort zone and working to tailor the work environment to fit our needs. "You have to figure out ways of making your work life sustainable, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert," says Hipwood, author of *Energised: An Introvert's Guide to Effective Communication*. "If you acknowledge your personality type and decide that you don't want to use that as an excuse to escape from doing well in your career

or pursuing what you enjoy, then you're going to need to come up with a toolbox of ways to respond to challenges."

For example, extroverts may find themselves frustrated by time spent without much interaction. "I wish that I could interact with patients more," says Beverly G. Coleman, MD, FACR, who considers herself firmly situated in the extrovert camp. "It's more limited now than in the old days of radiology." A common extrovert strategy is to "refill" their socializing reserves throughout the day. A radiologist might do this by setting up morning rounds to speak with patients or finding other meaningful tasks outside the reading room to break up long stretches of independent work. Other strategies could include scheduling lunch dates or socializing before work, perhaps at the gym or with family.

Extroverts may also feel more fulfilled when they make workplace interaction a priority. Throughout her day, Coleman makes an effort to engage with attending colleagues and the radiology staff where appropriate. For example, she says, "I may spend a little time talking over a case I have read, to show colleagues something rare or interesting." Interaction can also come through following up personally on patient history questions and volunteering for hospital committees.

Meanwhile, an introvert might benefit from organizing the day to allow for independent work interspersed with more collaborative tasks. Many introverts also map out social interactions when possible, like planning out a script before making a phone call. "Before going into



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a consultation with patients, introverted radiologists might make time to sit down and organize their thoughts to help them communicate their ideas effectively," suggests Hipwood. "It doesn't matter if other people don't do this. If you need to do it, then you should feel comfortable doing so."

Radiologists must also take into account patients' personality types. "Just like radiologists, patients may be either introverts or extroverts," says Ron Riggio, PhD, professor of psychology at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, Calif., "and it is important for health-care professionals to recognize these different patient personality types and respond to their needs. For example, introverted patients may be too reserved to ask questions, so radiologists need to make sure that the patient is getting all the information he or she needs." On the other hand, says Riggio, when interacting with more extroverted patients, radiologists may need to keep the conversation on track in order to cover all of the necessary information.

Building a Team

Just as radiologists explore their relationships with their careers and patients, they must also be mindful of their interactions with colleagues. Different personality types can sometimes find it difficult to see the world through another person's eyes, but, according to Hipwood, that's an opportunity for shared understanding. "When you meet someone who thinks differently from you, it's so easy to just shut down communication with them and say, 'We just don't have enough in common,'" says Hipwood. "That's a recipe for disaster.

You're far better off sitting down and having a conversation about how each of you thinks and how you like to operate."

Norbash agrees, citing the interplay between different personality types as an integral aspect of a dynamic workplace. "If you have a diverse group of individuals with non-similar backgrounds, perspectives, and personalities, your chance for a rich environment is greater," he says. "And so is your chance for creativity and long-term learning." Norbash sees a team composed of individuals with overly similar personalities as a missed opportunity. "It may seem like it's a natural fit," he says, "but it's not necessarily joyful or gratifying, where creativity and expression are concerned."

Far better, he believes, is to build a team with varying but complementary personalities and strengths. "In an ideal situation, you'd strike a balance between having a group that is diverse yet not perpetually conflicted," he says. "There is an inevitability that, at times, certain individuals will not get along. But if you have a crystallized set of talking points that you can consistently communicate about the mission and vision of a department or group, and if you take the time to get to know the individuals who are involved, then you can overcome the vast majority of those conflicts."

While being a part of a team of diverse personalities brings certain challenges, Norbash maintains that it's worth the effort. "People are the most valuable resource that any organization has," he says, "and not to take the opportunity to build an effective, diverse group is an unthinkable waste of resources. Putting together a team with a variety of strengths is not only possible; it's essential." //