

## Using Temperament and Interaction Styles with Clients for Career Development and Job Transition PART 2 of 3

Here is Part 2 of a 3-part article that originally appeared in the *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*. It is reprinted here with permission from the Career Planning and Adult Development Network. If you missed the first article, here is the link:

[Article 1 of 3](#)

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### The Article, Part 2 of 3

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### Applications Part I

### Two Cautionary Tales on Job and Environment Fit

Not being aware of how important job fit is for your career can actually cost you a job. It can also keep you in a job that is unappreciative of what you bring to the table or prevent you from leaving an environment that is stressful and unrewarding.

**“Now I see why I was laid off.”** I was teaching a class at a local community college, when a participant raised his hand and said solemnly, “I now realize why I was laid off.”

You could have heard a pin drop.

I had been explaining the differences between the In-Charge and Chart-the-Course Interaction Styles. The In-Charge style is an extraverted style, and it’s all about keeping things under control and in motion to get results. This style moves fast, decides fast, and deals with details as they arise. This style can express tremendous confidence and almost always leans toward decide and act now, decide something different tomorrow if we need to due to new incoming information. I’ve heard a frustrated In-Charge board member say, “Do something. I don’t care if you do something wrong, just *do something*.” If your project appears to be out-of-control or going nowhere, you have just invited an In-Charge manager to move in and take over or give the task to someone else. Control and motion—those are the keys to this style.

The Chart-the-Course style, on the other hand, is an introverted style. This style wants things to be under control too; it just has a completely different way of going about achieving control and getting results. Think of a project manager or an engineer carefully gathering details, on his own, mapping out a plan, directing others to implement the plan, and checking all along the way to see where things stand and what adjustments need to be made. Often Rule Number One with this style is “No surprises.” Their drive is to anticipate what might go wrong so that they can plan for contingencies and act *before* things go wrong. This style is all about *anticipating*.

The man who spoke up in my class was beautifully applying what he had just learned to his recent layoff experience. He recognized his former manager’s behavior as a Chart-the-Course style and saw his own behavior as a classic In-Charge style. He shared,

*I now realize my decide-and-move-fast style made me look like a gun-slinger to my new manager. I could never make sense of his move-slow-and-plan-it-all-out process.*

*I ignored all those requests he made for more details from me.*

*It just didn’t make sense. I knew what I was doing and had 17 years of success to prove that I did.*

Now, he was out of a job. Understanding why was at least a relief.

It doesn’t matter how good your track record is. If management sees you as a risk and a threat to stability and success, you may find yourself out of a job, no matter how

unjustified it looks to you. And the person who ousted you will feel completely justified. In fact, it would seem to them that they were doing their duty.

I've heard so many times from Boomers in my classes, "Where were you 20 years ago when I needed you?" I learned about Temperament Theory and Myers-Briggs in my 30's and Interaction Styles in my 40's. I understand the sentiment, "Where was *this stuff* 20 years ago when *I* needed it?"

**"I will never do this to myself again."** I regularly teach a 2-day class on Interaction Styles and Temperaments to job seekers at a community college. At the end of the day on Temperaments, I ask if students would be willing to share their "ah-ha" for the day.

One student who was a job seeker after a recent layoff shared that she clearly recognized herself as having Stabilizer (Guardian) preferences. She liked orderliness and tried to develop processes to help things happen in an orderly way.

She recognized during the class that the entire family in whose business she had worked for 17 years had Improviser (Artisan) preferences. They seemed to do things in a "catch-as-catch-can" way. From her perspective, there always seemed to be some kind of emergency, and no planning or system seemed to be in place to help things go more smoothly.

Now she realized that they were all perfectly happy that way. They had always resisted her trying to organize things and put processes in place. They never seemed to understand why she thought more organization was necessary.

She shared,

*For family reasons of my own, I stayed in that job, as difficult as it was for me, for 17 years. I now realize that they were never going to appreciate or see the value of the organizational skills that I brought to the table. I will never put myself in that situation again.*

Just think about what Temperament and Interaction Styles information can do to help a client recognize sooner instead of later that they're in a bad fit and will never be appreciated. Think how differently those 17 years could have gone. No one's core skills and contributions should go unappreciated for 17 years.

## **Applications Part II**

### **Flexing to be Effective with Others**

Eight client examples here demonstrate how both Temperament Theory and Interaction Styles helped clients overcome the blind spots of their own preferences and flex their behavior to improve their effectiveness in the workplace. The preferences discussed here include the Temperaments Improviser (Artisan), Stabilizer (Guardian), Theorist (Rational), and Catalyst (Idealist). They also include two clients who learned to flex their behavior for their own Interaction Style preference for the Chart-the-Course and Get-Things-Going styles.

**Consciously sharing your reasoning:** I was coaching a Marketing Field Support Manager whose preferences were In-Charge Improviser (ESTP in the language of Psychological Type). His natural tendency as an Improviser was to take action. Having an In-Charge style only accentuated the speed with which he jumped into action and took his whole department with him.

When I was using a 360-degree feedback instrument with him, the impression surfaced that he just jumped into action without thinking first. I realized it was natural for his preference to give that impression, so we discussed it from that perspective—how it “looked” to others at times. No harm, no foul, no blame—just how it could be perceived by others.

I will never forget his thoughtful response. He paused to think, then looked up at me and said, “I can see why they would say that. But, I *do* think it through first. I just don’t share that with them. I think it through on my own, then walk into the meeting room and tell them what we’re going to do. It never occurred to me to say my reasoning out loud.”<sup>1</sup> We discussed how he could flex his behavior, and he agreed to start sharing his reasoning.

*From the perspective of Psychological Type, it did not even occur to him to share his reasoning because, having ESTP preferences, his preferred judging function was Introverted Thinking. One naturally introverts one’s introverted functions. (I know that sounds obvious, but it can be a series revelation to someone who introverts their judging function. You can help them realize WHY they’re not thinking to say it out loud and help them to choose to do so when necessary.) Telling others what actions they were going to take was coming from his Extraverted Sensing function. Once I showed him their misperception and the potential cost to his career, he decided consciously to share the reasoning of his Introverted Thinking judging function.*

This kind of misperception can make or break a career. Being able to take action is valued; being perceived as “leaping before you look” can be seen as inviting an irresponsible level of risk, resulting in being passed over for promotion—or worse.

**Realizing the impact your behavior is having on others:** I was teaching Temperament Theory to a group of Technical Support managers one day when a manager in the class shared an astonishing level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence. I was emphasizing how Stabilizers naturally look for what is wrong in a situation or a new proposal because they're trying to stabilize the situation by preventing anything from going wrong. They can be unfairly perceived as “negative,” “nit-picking,” and “always raining on everybody’s parade.”

A thoughtful manager recognized herself in the description and raised her hand to share her own development process.

*I was always the one in the meeting who spoke up and saw what was wrong or could go wrong with what they were proposing. One day I noticed that no one was listening to me. They were looking away or using their blackberry; some eye-rolling even happened. I then realized that I had come to be seen as the person who “always had something negative to say” so they discounted my input.*

I asked how she handled that. She replied,

*I realized I was going to be the “boy who cried wolf” if I didn’t change my behavior. One day I would be able to see something really important that was going to fail, but no one would be listening to me by then. I decided that I had to pick my battles. When something small came up, I just kept quiet. When something really important could go wrong, I spoke up. They started listening to me again.*

Think about what this insightful young manager did for her own career with that decision. She became conscious of her impact on others, changed her behavior, and regained the respect of her peers. When I knew her, she was highly respected in the department. She did this herself without the benefit of Temperament Theory, but learning it helped her understand the dynamics of what she’d done and why it had worked. Think of the clients who might salvage their careers by learning something as fundamental as “pick your battles” from Temperament Theory so that they’re not always seen as the “negative Nellie” of the group.

**Pointing out *what was done right* can produce as much learning as pointing out *what was done wrong*:** I was coaching a very effective sales manager. We had gone through her 360-degree feedback report previously, so she started telling me about what she was doing differently now. For one thing, she was spending more time on the road with her sales reps, as they had requested. She told me what a great job this rep had done when he took her on a customer site visit. Knowing her Temperament preference was Theorist, I asked,

*Did you tell him that?*

There was a long silence. She quietly replied,

*No.*

The Theorist preference is focused on the *future* and on *how to improve the system*. Why on earth would she tell him what he was doing *right* if he was *already doing it right*? It's just not logical from her perspective. He was doing the right things, so nothing needed improving, nothing needed to be said.

I pointed out that she was making *an assumption* that he *consciously knew* what he was *doing right*. If she wanted to increase the chances that he would repeat his successful behaviors, she needed to point out to him what was right about what he had done.

Don't assume someone knows how right their behavior is. There can be great learning in *getting conscious* about what you're doing that is effective. Being conscious about choosing your behaviors greatly increases the chances that you'll choose those behaviors again.

Note that I did not use the motivation, "He'll feel appreciated and acknowledged if you praise him for what he did right." I needed to speak *her* language as a Theorist. She wants her employee to be *competent*, so I motivated her to use new behaviors that could increase the chance that his current competent behaviors would continue. I struck a chord with the core drivers of her Theorist Temperament preference, so it worked.

**How a Theorist CEO talked himself into saying, "Thank you":** A colleague of mine was a CEO with clear Theorist preferences. I'm sharing his story with you because it demonstrates how effective using a client's own core drivers can be in motivating them to modify their behaviors to be more effective.

As a Theorist, he seldom used anything resembling what he would consider "feeling language." His wife, however, was a very thoughtful (and feeling-based) Stabilizer. He noticed how she treated people, how she spoke to them, and how successful her interactions were. He observed this for years in their marriage. He realized there must be something he could learn from her success. He decided to try to express appreciation since it was so effective when she did it.

One morning, after a late night board meeting, he passed the desk of his Executive Assistant. She had worked very hard and very late to pull everything together to make that meeting a success for him as the CEO. He turned to her and simply said, "Thanks for staying late to help with the meeting. I appreciate it."

Simple words, not warm and gushing, just plain speak expressing appreciation simply and earnestly, without frills or emotion. In other words, it was a change in behavior for

him, but he did not have to “become someone else” to use this behavior. In fact, being the solemn, non-expressive person that he was, this simple, straight-forward talk meant more coming from him than any effusive expression of gratitude could possibly have meant. And it definitely landed.

He smiled and reflected,

*I got so much mileage out of the simple act of “saying thank you” that it would actually be illogical not to do it.*

Can you hear the Theorist logic that he used *on himself* to flex his natural style and use new behaviors? He made this change himself, all in the name of being more effective; in his language as a Theorist, being more *competent*. The more you can use the language and core drivers of your client, the more easily and quickly you can help them adopt new behaviors that help them increase their competence and get better results.

### **How a results-oriented manager learned to get buy-in by flexing his style:**

One of my sales manager clients had Chart-the-Course preferences. His natural process was to go off by himself, gather his data, make a decision, then call together his team to tell them “what we’re going to do.”

This was December and he had to roll out a new plan for their January meeting. Knowing his preferences, I asked him,

*How do you intend to get input from them before you put the plan together?*

Silence.

*I was just going to do the planning myself, then roll it out.*

What he needed was commitment and buy-in. Chart-the-Course behaviors do not necessarily generate commitment and buy-in. They can produce clarity about expectations, but they do not automatically generate any buy-in.

On the other hand, the core driver of the Get-Things-Going style is to get people to “*want to*.” I knew he needed the benefit of those behaviors.

I asked how his roll-out had gone last January, and he admitted, “Not very well.” I thought he might be open, therefore, to flexing his behavior.

I explained that asking adults for their input is a win from at least two perspectives. First, it’s a compliment to them as adults and professionals to be asked. They’ll feel respected. That generates good will, and, to use Covey’s language, it puts credit into his “emotional bank account” with them. Second, if they see something of themselves in the

plan, they will feel more invested and be more likely to follow through with it instead of falling back into old behaviors.

He thought about that, then said a bit tensely,

*Well, all right, but if what they suggest isn't logical or practical, I won't accept it.*

I assured him I did not expect him to accept anything “illogical or impractical.” “Logical and practical” were part of the “gifts that *he* brought to the table.” I did not expect him to violate those. Just tell them, “I’ll be gathering input from all of you. Please share suggestions you have for how we can be more successful in our plan this year.”

At the end of January, I asked how it gone. He replied, “Better than ever. They seemed more onboard and, unlike last year, I sensed no resistance in the room.”

That’s what Get-Things-Going behaviors are all about—getting people bought in and cooperative instead of resistant. That’s how Get-Things-Going behaviors produce success; they achieve buy-in. You don’t have to have this preference to learn from and use these behaviors with success. You do have to use Get-Things-Going behaviors with sincerity and respect.

I was able to get his buy-in because I was presenting the case that adopting this new behavior would help him increase the likelihood of cooperation and success. A Chart-the-Course preference is all about plotting a course and achieving success.

**How a very enthusiastic manager learned to give her staff the time they needed to make a change:** As a young Get-Things-Going style manager, I really enjoyed leading cross-functional teams of people from multiple departments and skill sets, as well as leading a department of 8 to 10 writers. My “turn on a dime” nature was very useful in the IT environment because change came swift and mercilessly, and only the flexible survived. On a personal level, it served me extremely well, but what serves you personally may not serve you in a group situation. I needed to recognize that my core strength was not shared by everyone, so I needed to adapt my behavior to help others be successful when things changed.

As an example, in our team meetings, writers would bring up problems they’d run into during the course of the week. We would discuss how the problem was solved and ask if anyone else had run into the same problem. I wanted everyone to benefit from each other’s learning instead of all working individually on the *same* problems, which would waste company resources and frustrate all of them in the process.

One week someone had come up with an especially useful solution, so I exclaimed, “That sounds like a great solution. Let’s change our process and all do it this way.” I looked

around the room into what appeared to be a wall of deer-in-the-headlights expressions. Proposing a sudden change, easy for me, was clearly not working for them.

I learned, instead, to take a behind-the-scenes approach. I would say, “That sounds like a promising solution to a problem many of us may be running into. Would anyone like to volunteer to investigate this during the week and report back to the group about the feasibility of this change?”

The response was completely different. Usually multiple writers offered to work together to investigate the potential new solution. The next week, they reported on it, and the team usually unanimously voted to adopt the change.

Get-Things-Going is a very useful style, but I needed to adapt to others’ needs when I was proposing a change that affected everyone. I learned, the hard way, that I could give an entire team whiplash. I also learned I could flex into Behind-the-Scenes behavior and make the change much easier on everyone.

**How a Get-Things-Going trainer used Chart-the-Course behaviors to succeed in the classroom:** I’ve trained managers and teams for 15 years. I have a very flexible, emergent Get-Things-Going style. In a training room, however, the students “don’t know what they don’t know.” They can’t see the path I have in mind, so they can’t see the logic of it or make sense of it. I, therefore, need to *show them the path ahead* and from time to time remind them *where we are*.

To help students who think in a more linear way than I do, I need to flex into Chart-the-Course behaviors. I lay out for them up front what the structure of the day looks like with the agenda. The agenda is like the project plan, and my saying *where we are* from time to time is like a project manager helping the team see where they are in the plan and how they’re doing as they head toward the goal. Think of “where we are now” as the red dot on the diagram of a large building or at a park that orients someone with the accompanying words “YOU ARE HERE.” I’m helping them see the map that is in my head, so they don’t feel like “we’re all over the place” or wonder where we are going. This classic Chart-the-Course action is a great balance to my Get-Things-Going energy.

**Flexing the In-Charge style to help a leader succeed:** In-Charge energy is very fast-paced and can feel somewhat forceful to people who prefer other styles. There’s no blame here. It’s not that anyone is doing anything “wrong.” This energy can feel very welcomed when people are enjoying the confidence and positive energy of a leader. That same energy can feel “in your face” or somewhat overwhelming in a one-on-one situation or when the person with the In-Charge preference is displeased with them or the current situation.

One way to help clients with an In-Charge style is to advise them to *ask for what they need from others ahead of time*. Instead of being arduously dragged through a tedious list of details, they could ask for the “executive summary” first. Then, they can ask questions if more details are needed. This action alone can tremendously help communication between someone with In-Charge energy and all the other styles. They should *always ask for this ahead of time*—waiting until the person is trying to communicate with them is likely to create a “disconnect” for the other person.

You can help a client with In-Charge energy by pointing out that they can increase their effectiveness by exercising their patience for the two introverted styles (Chart-the-Course and Behind-the-Scenes), which can be slower by nature because they’re processing so much internally. Take a breath, slow down, trust that there is value there; it will just come out more slowly from the introverted styles.

Do not rush the Chart-the-Course employee or co-worker who is monitoring a lot of details. You are *not* helping them be successful. Likewise, do not rush someone with a Behind-the-Scenes preference. They have an organic process that has to “gel” before they have an answer for you. Rushing them causes all processing to stop; it does not get you an answer faster.

The Get-Things-Going style is as fast-paced as the In-Charge style, but prefers less directive language. Just softening the tone of voice and showing tolerance for the kind of activities that get others onboard will help bridge the gap between someone with an In-Charge style and others with a Get-Things-Going style.

Finally, an In-Charge client needs trusted advisors and needs to be willing to *listen* to them. Their natural impulse is to decide and move quickly; decide again tomorrow if necessary. But some decisions are irrevocable. A balanced client with an In-Charge preference knows when to check their own bias toward taking action quickly. Read about George Washington’s military career. Had he not allowed his trusted advisors to rein him in when he wanted to decide quickly and charge into the fray, the United States of America might not be here today. His generals saved him from engaging in action several times when their rag-tag army would have most certainly been defeated by the better-armed and better-trained British soldiers who vastly outnumbered them. He was a wise In-Charge man and leader. He allowed others to protect him from his own blind spot—and he succeeded.

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