

Using the MBTI® and Strong Assessments Together in Career Transition

The number of people in career transition has risen sharply in recent years, thanks largely to changes precipitated by a turbulent global economy. Many companies have been forced to downsize, if not shut down, laying off employees and often saddling survivors with a heavier workload. Lean and mean is the new standard in business, a reality that is understandably taking a toll on career and job satisfaction.

As harsh as the current business climate may be, it does present an opportunity for people in transition—an opportunity to reinvent themselves and create a truly satisfying professional life. Channeled appropriately, career stress can lead to a reemergence of meaning and purpose with a renewed energy to pursue one's passions. This is where the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) and *Strong Interest Inventory*® assessments come in—ideal tools to help you start the process of working with your clients to make their lives better.

The MBTI personality instrument has been used for more than 60 years to help individuals better understand themselves and how they interact with others. It offers perspective on many aspects of people's professional and personal lives, including decision making, project management, change management, approach to conflict, and stress management. The MBTI preferences indicate where people tend to focus their attention, how they take in information, how they make decisions, and how they deal with the external world.

The *Strong Interest Inventory* assessment is one of the world's most widely respected and frequently used planning tools. For more than 85 years it has been used to match people's interests to careers they might enjoy and find fulfilling. It explores individuals' level of interest in six broad areas called General Occupational Themes (GOTs)—Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional—as well as in specific interest areas that often point to work activities, projects, course work, and leisure activities they may find motivating and rewarding. Using this information, individuals are able to extract occupations that may be of interest to them and/or areas to consider as potential new directions in their career.

When we combine the data from these two assessments, an exciting and powerful story emerges and we start to see clients embrace new possibilities. This guide explores how you can use the combined data to help your transition clients successfully navigate their search for a new, better-fitting career.

STRONG GOTs AND MBTI® PREFERENCES

Research suggests a number of relationships between the Strong GOTs and the MBTI preferences, most notably Realistic with Thinking and Perceiving (TP), Artistic with Intuition and Feeling (NF), Social with Feeling (F), Enterprising with Extraversion (E), and Conventional with Sensing and Judging (SJ).¹ Let's take a look at each of these combinations.

Realistic/Thinking and Perceiving

A number of correlations exist between the Realistic Theme and the Thinking and Perceiving preferences. The logic, analysis, and common sense required to operate machinery and tools successfully requires being present and in the moment (Perceiving). People who prefer Perceiving tend to enjoy process and will be consistent and tenacious in assessing a situation until it is understood or a problem is remedied. By paying attention to the here and now and what is happening right in front of them, people with a preference for Thinking can express in a practical way their penchant for logic.

Artistic/Intuition and Feeling

The intersection of the Artistic Theme and the Intuition and Feeling preferences might be described as capturing the "heart and soul" of the artist. The preference for Intuition gives rise to ideas, inventions, creative arguments, other possible realities, and physical forms we can only imagine. Artists use their intuition to tap into their creativity and explore what could be. Often they will describe a project as a work in progress, with no idea what the end product will look like. But they know in their gut that it will be something fantastic. The Feeling preference represents the artist's sensitivity. Relationships, expressions, experiences, and desires all fuel an artist's creativity and are related to Feeling. With a focus on internal values, external connections, and understanding the world by way of meaning and relationships, artists infuse their emotions and feelings into their work and bring their passions to life.

Social/Feeling

People with a high score on the Social Theme often enjoy spending their time taking care of people, teaching and training, and joining with others to work through difficult situations. They are motivated by their desire to give of themselves to help others. This parallels the Feeling preference and its inherent attention to values and morals. People with a high Social score often feel driven to provide service to others. They experience tremendous satisfaction in influencing the life of another person, especially when they can see that their efforts are having a positive effect. Similarly, people with a clear preference for Feeling tend to make decisions based on how they feel about something and how others will be affected by their choices.

Enterprising/Extraversion

The Enterprising Theme speaks to influencing, managing, and persuading others. What better way to do that than by sharing one's energy, enthusiasm, and excitement with others through conversation? People who score high on the Enterprising Theme tend to be competitive and enjoy

winning others over to their way of thinking. One vehicle for persuading others is the quick-thinking energy that an Extravert brings. People with a preference for Extraversion tend to “think on their feet”—they can formulate a thought or argument while they are talking. Sometimes Extraverts open their mouth and start speaking without knowing what they will say or how their argument will end. Somehow, though, they manage to share significant thoughts and are sufficiently believable to gain influence with others. Extraverts can motivate and inspire others simply by sharing their enthusiasm for a topic. Susan T. Fiske, Amy J. C. Cuddy, and Peter Glick conducted a study in which they examined first impressions and what was necessary to establish and make a good impression.² Their research revealed that 80 percent of people extract their first impressions through two elements—warmth and competence, with warmth always trumping competence. If you can connect with another person, you have likely already won half the battle.

Conventional/Sensing and Judging

The Conventional Theme is about organizing, understanding, and managing data, systems, and information. It is no surprise, then, that the Sensing and Judging preferences are a good fit with the Conventional Theme. Sensing has to do with the kinds of information people prefer—and the more information, the better. People with a preference for Sensing like specific, concrete, practical information that enables them to make sound and effective decisions when implementing systems or best practices. People with a preference for Judging like planning and closure. Making lists, checking them off, and tracking progress keeps systems tight and helps ensure that deadlines are met. The combination of Sensing and Judging offers the sensibility and reliability required in the kinds of roles that involve meticulous, conscientious attention to detailed information.

EXTRAVERSION–INTROVERSION AND GOTs

The Extraversion–Introversion preference pair explores where people focus their attention and how they energize themselves during any given day. Why does this matter in the context of career transition? The answer has to do with engagement, an important element of job satisfaction. Understanding how our clients “recharge their battery” lets us know how we can help them achieve *flow*, a term coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly to mean the optimal experience in which people tune into their passions and become so engaged that time stands still and they get lost in the flow of the activity.³ People with a preference for Extraversion often talk about feeling “wound up” after a presentation or performance because the energy flow is still going. People with a preference for Introversion might achieve flow by diving into research and reading or thinking about the content in a new way. Writers often talk about being “in the zone” or, by contrast, having writer’s block, both experiences driven by the way they metabolize their energy.

Extraversion and Introversion are also significant because in each of the GOTs, we can imagine that the way our clients connect with the world will affect their visibility in the professional roles they choose. According to research, the Enterprising and Social Themes seem to be associated more with people who prefer Extraversion and tend to like working with others, while the Realistic and

Investigative Themes tend to be associated more with people who prefer Introversion and tend to like working independently.⁴ Conventional and Artistic are evenly split between Extraversion and Introversion. Of course, these correlations in no way limit where or how people can start thinking about their career search, but they do provide some useful ideas about how the tasks involved in certain professions or roles may influence people’s requirements for and use of energy.

FUNCTION PAIRS AND GOTs

Next, we can examine the function pairs—the drivers of type. The two middle letters of each MBTI type represent the dominant function, the preference that is most used by, and thus comes most naturally to, people of that type; and the auxiliary function, the second-most-used preference, which supports the dominant function and sometimes is the first preference others see. Extraverted people generally show their dominant function first, while Introverted people often show their auxiliary function first. That might be part of the reason why Introverts are sometimes misunderstood. Function pairs provide further insight into the intersection of type and interests. The following chart shows how the function pairs and GOTs interact.

Strong GOT	MBTI® Function Pair	
	ST	SF
Realistic	Analyzing data Using information to protect others Building or repairing machinery Analyzing computer networks Organizing data in spreadsheets	Protecting people from harm Designing safer freeways for people Increasing personal connections through data Nourishing others through farming Building someone’s home
Investigative	Devising a formula for a medication Reading a dental X-ray Analyzing a rock’s composition Observing animal behaviors Applying technology to science	Establishing a nutrition plan for a patient Treating a cancer patient with medication Researching eye care for children Studying the impact of sleep on people Learning about the human body
Artistic	Designing a city’s downtown area Creating a corporate logo Grading an English essay Writing a finance column Photographing bonsai trees	Finding a specific library book Reporting a human interest story Editing a public service announcement Translating instructions for passports Researching and constructing a legal argument
Social	Administering IV medication Writing a high school budget Teaching an accounting class Observing and recording symptoms in an ICU Diagnosing a speech disorder	Teaching someone to walk again Providing speech therapy Organizing a community potluck dinner Implementing a case management plan Coaching a birthing patient in labor

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Strong GOT	MBTI® Function Pair	
	ST	SF
Enterprising	Researching employee health benefits Comparing potential fabrics for a chair Forecasting sales for the quarter Leading an operations department Writing questions for a focus group	Working as a personal shopper Talking about constructing a retirement fund Helping a person choose the right computer Managing janitors at a children's hospital Assisting people with rebooking a flight
Conventional	Gathering research for a case/argument Analyzing software and computer compatibility Constructing an IRA portfolio Doing a person's taxes Reconciling a company's profits and losses	Serving as a medic in the Marines Organizing an executive's schedule Producing an independent film Preparing a meal at a hospital Helping people understand their investments
	NF	NT
Realistic	Maintaining a natural landscape Designing a fitness plan Responding to a 911 call Planting beautiful flowers Designing network systems	Directing a boot camp for new recruits Designing green space in a city Making a diagnosis based on an X-ray Building a modern piece of furniture Envisioning a future car design
Investigative	Writing about treatment for anxiety Counseling a person for addiction Managing a research project Realigning a person's spine Teaching astronomy and the constellations	Understanding the root of social problems Creating a mathematics college course Developing an iPad app Experimenting with liquid formulas Researching brain behavior
Artistic	Teaching painting to high schoolers Delivering a leadership workshop Writing an ad campaign for coffee Photographing a family holiday portrait Managing a company's public image	Illustrating an anatomy textbook Writing a marketing pitch Debating the impact of ESL programs Designing a modern, green school building Creating a conflict management model
Social	Writing a special-needs curriculum Counseling a problem student Arranging flowers at a wedding Waiting with a patient for surgery Performing a holiday show with students	Teaching a foreign language Prioritizing an educational budget Instructing college students in architecture Delivering a sermon about patience Facilitating an addiction recovery group
Enterprising	Leading a team of real estate agents Buying a clothing collection for a store Running a nonprofit agency Creating an eclectic menu Doing a complete makeover on someone	Designing a modern wing in a museum Leading a technology company Opening a restaurant Serving as mayor for a city Selling life insurance

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Strong GOT	MBTI® Function Pair	
	NF	NT
Conventional	Leading a nursing home sing-along Teaching a course on marketing Creating a public health workshop Supporting an environmental lawyer Organizing a company-wide retreat	Experimenting with planting an innovative crop Running a home for blind people Designing a software system Teaching an economics course Making an accessible-to-all room and ramp

WHOLE TYPES AND GOTs

Finally, we can also look at the relationship between whole types and GOTs. Each MBTI type represents people with individual results, preferences, clarity of those preferences, and dynamics. Every ISTJ is going to look similar to and different from every other ISTJ in terms of interests. However, we can hypothesize about shared areas of interest based on drivers of type and a holistic understanding of what type dynamics means.

ISTJ

ISTJs approach the world by wanting to understand it—how it works, what makes sense, and the difference between right and wrong. They want to be your “go-to” person for many things and are motivated by a desire to fix things. They tend to be deliberate, reliable, and consistent. Interactions with the GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Conventional, and Realistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ISFJ

ISFJs approach the world by wanting to understand it so they can contribute to it. They have a passion for service to others, whether through organizing, providing structure, or contributing information. They are interested in pleasing others and being accommodating in relationships. Once ISFJs understand their role in a relationship, others can count on them to do their part. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Social, Investigative, and Conventional but, of course, are present in all Themes.

INFJ

INFJs cherish their internal world and rely on their intuition when making decisions about people. They are reliable and often work hard behind the scenes to organize things and make sure people have what they need. They show care and concern for others through quiet support and encourage people to live up to their potential. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Social, and Artistic, but, of course, are present in all Themes.

INTJ

INTJs have a rich internal world in which they construct and focus on what is most important to them: a vision for the future. They like to feel in control of the world in which they live and tend to concentrate on intellectual concepts, demonstrating drive and vision. They like structures and routines that make it possible for them to plan and take action to improve the world around them. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Enterprising, and Realistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ISTP

ISTPs need to understand how things work. They observe and analyze situations in order to see how the pieces fit together. ISTPs are flexible and can adapt well to any situation. Their desire to simplify things and understand them in an efficient way makes them valuable problem solvers and analysts. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Realistic, and Conventional, but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ISFP

ISFPs like to help others. Their contribution comes in the form of information that is based on their experiences of the people, places, and things in their lives. They enjoy tasting all that life has to offer and having the independence and freedom to do so. ISFPs are driven by their desire to make a difference and tend to be helpful, kind, and observant. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Social, and Artistic, but, of course, are present in all Themes.

INFP

INFPs like to dream up ideas about improving something or trying something new. They enjoy flexibility and variety as they experiment with new ideas. Their main motivation is making the world a better place, which they do through their kind acts and consideration for others—as well as through their passion for their own growth and development and that of the people around them. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Artistic, Social, and Investigative, but, of course, are present in all Themes.

INTP

INTPs have a rich internal world in which they practice developing what is most important to them: becoming proficient in many areas and demonstrating their competence. Their main motivation is mastering the world in which they live. They enjoy playing with ideas and strategies to solve complicated challenges. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Enterprising, and Artistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ESTP

ESTPs enjoy being present and active in the world around them and become excited by new and fun things. They are skilled at assessing what is needed in the moment and taking quick action to resolve a crisis. They are often the focus of fun and action and enjoy work that satisfies both of these criteria. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Enterprising, and Realistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ESFP

ESFPs are connected to and aware of their external environment, especially the tangibles they can experience. They are motivated by offering practical service to others and by providing information to help people be successful and get what they need. ESFPs like living in the moment, having fun, and bringing their flexible, spontaneous style to the work they do. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Social, Enterprising, and Artistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ENFP

ENFPs are gifted at making people feel welcome and included in the fun. They are spontaneous and enjoy learning about people and things from different cultures. Their curiosity helps them connect people and networks so they can think about possibilities and a vision for empowering people toward growth and development. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Artistic, Enterprising, and Social, but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ENTP

ENTPs like to learn everything about everything. At the core of their personality are an ingenious perspective, an innovative approach, and, most important to them, a drive to share their vision and ideas with others. ENTPs want to be experts, and they work hard to integrate a wealth of logical facts into their everyday conversations. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Artistic, Social, and Investigative but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ESTJ

ESTJs are clear, concise, articulate, and directive in expressing what needs to get accomplished to reach a goal. They enjoy directing others with logic, precision, and efficiency in the service of getting things done. They have high standards for themselves and others, and are fair in assessing things based on realistic parameters. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Enterprising, and Realistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ESFJ

ESFJs are very verbal and like to share their observations and feelings with others. They strive to make a difference, enjoy providing practical service to others, and need to feel appreciated. They work hard to make sure everyone is getting along, as harmony helps them do their best work. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Social, Conventional, and Realistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ENFJ

ENFJs enjoy being around others and want to make sure that everyone gets along and feels valued. They need to know they are appreciated and thrive on receiving verbal feedback and public affirmation that all the help they give to others is appreciated. ENFJs especially enjoy helping people deal with their relationships or feelings and finding creative ways for people to meet their goals. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Artistic, Social, and Enterprising but, of course, are present in all Themes.

ENTJ

ENTJs are driven by the pursuit of knowledge and excellence. They strive to develop mastery and expertise in many things and expect competence from the people with whom they interact and work. Theories, systems, innovations, and an overall desire to make things better informs their creative tendency to improve upon and enhance current structures. Interactions with GOTs predominantly reside in Investigative, Enterprising, and Artistic but, of course, are present in all Themes.

CONCLUSION

Professionals often find themselves entrenched in a career without ever having thought about whether it is a good fit or something for which they have a passion. When you work with clients to help them align their interests with their preferences, you enable them to see the bigger picture. Partnering with your transition clients to help them self-assess using the *Strong* and MBTI tools will influence the strategy they take in their search for a career that is both personally fulfilling and professionally rewarding.

NOTES

1. Isabel B. Myers, Mary H. McCaulley, Naomi L. Quenk, and Allen L. Hammer, *MBTI® Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Instrument* (Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc., 2003), 180.
2. See Susan T. Fiske, Amy J. C. Cuddy, and Peter Glick, "Universal Dimensions of Social Cognition: Warmth and Competence," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, 2 (2006), www.people.hbs.edu/acuddy/2007,%20fiske,%20cuddy,%20glick,%20TICS.pdf.
3. See Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).
4. Myers et al., *MBTI® Manual*, 180.



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