



Jung Frankenstein

Myers-Briggs personality assessment can offer clues about what constitutes an optimal creative personality profile

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One of the great things about writing monthly articles for *Perfumer & Flavorist* is that nobody (at least so far) has ever said, “You can’t write that,” or “You need to cut that section out.” Given this glorious freedom of expression I have felt at liberty to intersperse monthly articles that do actually attempt to convey a degree of objectivity with the occasional piece that expresses my utterly biased opinions. So, here we go again.

I love movies. One of the best, and certainly one of the most original in recent years, was *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. In an age when so many movies seem to be put together to a very simplistic and utterly predictable pattern, *Perfume* was unique (and all the better for being illuminated by the magnificent *The Perfumes of Perfume* collection created by Christophe Laudamiel). Obviously the subject matter of fragrances was fascinating to me personally, but it was especially interesting to see a nonperfumer’s view of the personality of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, the story’s strange and murderously obsessive perfumer played by Ben Whishaw.

I have come across a great many perfumers over the years, and I can safely say that I have never met anybody who even remotely resembles Grenouille. His character makes for a great, macabre story, but it is thankfully, obviously, wrong. A character like Grenouille could never be a successful perfumer. That said, judging the personality type to be so clearly wrong assumes that there is some degree of recognizable commonality to truly creative personalities.



Personality profiling has been widely used in industry for many years. It gives individuals a much greater insight into their personal strengths and weaknesses than any other technique. It also allows teams to understand one another better and fosters teamwork by encouraging team members to concentrate on their strengths and allow others to back them up in areas where they are weak. It is interesting to speculate that profiling might also be used to give an indication of that elusive talent, “creativity.”

All of us involved in recruiting have struggled to determine if a potential trainee would be likely to have the talent to train successfully, and, if we are honest, we probably have almost as many failures as successes. If a potentially great perfumer or flavorist is not the Frankenstein monster portrayed in *Perfume*, is it nevertheless possible to gain some

understanding of what might constitute a typical creative personality profile? Personality profiling would only ever be a small part of the selection process, but perhaps it could still help us select trainees who would be more likely to succeed.

Personality Factors

The methods used in this industry generally derive from the approach of Carl Jung and have, at least in my experience, an acceptable level of success. Myers-Briggs is the most common tool used. Myers-Briggs divides personalities into four key factors, each of which has two opposite poles. This, in combination, gives 16 different personality types. Each personality type can be linked to many broader attributes than can readily be observed, such as a liking for neatness. They can probably also be linked to less obvious aspects of personality including creativity.

The four factors are expressed as four pairs of extremes: extroverts / introverts, sensors/intuitors, thinkers/feelers, and judgers/perceivers.

In my experience the two most important attribute pairs that could point toward a creative personality are sensors/intuitors and thinkers/feelers, so we will deal with them first. The sensor/intuitor difference is very important. Sensors gather concrete factual information and tend to focus on the detail rather than the broad picture. Intuitors gather abstract information, understand relationships and patterns and often think about many things at once. They like to look at the big picture and enjoy trying to understand how things work. Clearly, intuitors are intrinsically much more likely to be creative. Intuitors appear to make more use of the sections of the brain that are older in evolutionary terms.

These sections have more processing capacity and operate more rapidly than the newer sections of the brain that process more concrete information such as language. This distinction could potentially give us our best clue in the age-old quest to select good potential flavorist or perfumer recruits. The ability to create flavors is essentially little more than the ability to have an intuitive view of how a complex flavor will smell and taste.

The contrasts between thinkers and feelers are also important. Thinkers are objective and impersonal, even under pressure, and handle large amounts of data well. Feelers are subjective, prefer harmony over clarity, take other people into consideration at every step and will go to great lengths to avoid conflict. The contrast here is not so clear. Possibly feelers might make better poets. However, in the rather impersonal world of flavors, I suspect that thinkers are generally more creative than feelers because they handle the daunting complexity of data better. Unfortunately, they may well have much more trouble dealing diplomatically with the most troublesome customers.

Sadly, only a relatively small proportion of the population are both intuitors and thinkers, but their unique ability to filter large abstract ideas through an objective decision-making process makes them great potential flavorists.

Extroverts are oblivious to distractions and prefer the outer world and group activities, but they do need affirmation. Introverts enjoy peace and quiet and focus on their own inner world. They tend to be unusually

suspicious of compliments. It is not very clear how either factor is directly connected to creativity, but extroverts will probably be better at getting their ideas across to customers (as long as they allow the customer to get a word in edgewise). However they may have trouble handling the inevitable criticism that comes with the job.

Judgers like everything to be in its place, have to plan everything and like to resolve issues quickly and get them out of the way. Perceivers love

to explore the unknown and always want to keep their options open. Both judges and perceivers can obviously be creative, but perceivers will generally be better at handling very complex or evolving challenges. Perceivers, however, may have severe problems actually finalizing projects. Judges will certainly close projects quickly but will be resistant to accepting customer input and correcting errors.

Considering the Myers-Briggs Criticism

Myers-Briggs tests have become extremely popular in recent years and are now used by many top companies as part of their recruitment and selection processes. With such popularity has naturally also come a torrent of criticism. The first criticism is that it was the work of “amateurs,” but in my opinion this is ridiculous; similar comments could probably be made of Charles Darwin. The second criticism is that nobody is truly at

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the extreme ends of any of the four factors and that everybody’s personality is composed of some elements from both ends of each scale. This is a reasonable criticism and cautions us against taking too simplistic a view of categorizing people into one of just 16 personality types. The last common criticism is that the system seems to imply fixed personality types, when everyday experience indicates that many aspects of personality can be changed somewhat by outside

influences.

Despite the criticism, the Myers-Briggs test can play a useful role in the selection of trainee flavorists. It should obviously never be the only criteria, but it can help us in what we all recognize as a notoriously difficult process.

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