



“Stubborn, with a tendency to ignore other people’s opinions”

Up until now, I have been reluctant to undergo any psychometric tests on myself as I had this inner fear that they would reveal my suppressed intentions to eliminate certain persons, especially politicians, from the surface of the planet. I worried that when the points were added up at the end of the questionnaire, that a red flashing sign would appear on the screen saying: “Seek help immediately!” I would be classified in the far end pages of the DSM-IV revised. I had also been, as most doctors are, skeptical of these processes, and put them in the alternative box, along with horoscopes and Madame Placenta, the fortune-teller.

I now wish that I had taken these assessments earlier, as they seem to have a real qualitative validity, helping us understand ourselves and others better, and showing us our predisposition to behave in particular ways. I filled in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. I believe that this instrument is now used in many medical schools for self-assessment. It can be utilised for teambuilding, or organisational or personal development. It was developed by Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers, based on Carl Jung’s psychological types. These are introversion-extroversion, thinking-feeling, sensing-intuition and judgment-perception. We are all familiar with introversion-extroversion. Very roughly, sensing people are realistic, intuitive people are more open-minded, thinking people are rational, while feeling people are more emotional. Judgemental people tend to like an organised environment, while perceptive people are more spontaneous.

The results come out as four letters, which is your type or personality, temperament, disposition or character, which

all mean the same thing in the English language, with subtle differences of interpretation for each one. Mine was “INFJ”. These types account for only 1% of the world’s population, so I immediately checked the screen again for the red flashing light. The news was not all bad. I find that us INFJs feel that there is always something else we should be doing to improve ourselves and the world around us. The downside is that we tend to be stubborn and ignore other people’s opinions. Of course, I haven’t told the family about that part.

There are 16 types of temperament in this assessment tool. I should imagine most general practitioners fall into the INFP (healer) group. Counsellor, teacher, provider and protector types are included.

There are several other instruments to test character or temperament and they are continually being refined. Perhaps we should undertake one every decade or so, just to see how our story is progressing, and to get to know ourselves better. Pausing for a while to reassess our perspectives helps us to evaluate how great a part our own story plays in our work. The artist, Robert Genn, says that getting to know your own story is like finding yourself in a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. In a way, we are all in this position.

Dr Chris Ellis

Family Physician, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal
E-mail: cristobalellis@gmail.com