

CAREERS & OCCUPATIONS

CAREER COACHING FOR DIFFERENT BEGINNINGS (and how type helps)

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My mind was wandering the other day, as it often does, thinking about how varied my current Career coaching clients are and wondering if I could see a pattern (as I often do!).

Sue comes to me (these are real clients, but fictitious names of course) and is quite clear about what she wants but lacking confidence to believe it might be possible. Elaine, on the other hand, is comfortable within herself and her ability to handle new things, and eager to move forward – but doesn't know what she wants to do. And Jim seems to be troubled on both counts – not happy with where he is but lacking in confidence to try new things and doesn't know where he wants to go anyway. John, on the other hand, was clear about what he wanted and knew he could get there, but sought the support of a coach to work out the best path.

When I put it to myself like that, the pattern was obvious. Looking back over clients I've worked with over the years, most seem to fit into these groups quite readily.

I have found that helping clients to gain an understanding of their personality (who they are in themselves, rather than who they are trying to be for others) is a major help in these areas. I use the MBTI® as my starting point, but of course there are several tools around which will help practitioners facilitate the client's journey of discovery, and none of them should be used in isolation. Anything that helps us gain a good understanding of the underlying Jungian functions is of particular value, as is the one-to-one exploration of functions and attitudes with the client.

For clients with low confidence, understanding their type can help them to recognise their gifts and understand their core needs. So many of us, myself included, can remember that 'ah ha!' moment, when we finally recognised that so much we thought was

wrong with us was really not – we had just tried for too long to be someone else. Discovering our basic type meant affirmation for aspects of ourselves we recognised but had not valued, because it seemed that no one else did. It also relieves the pressure of feeling like a failed version of someone else's type. In addition, discovering strengths/talents and personal values helps to build a positive picture of oneself, based on what is within rather than on other people's (external) expectations which may have been internalised.

Most of us feel inadequate or unworthy at some time. And for many of us it haunts us through all our challenges without dramatically holding us back. But some clients for whom lack of self-worth is a debilitating problem may be better served by visiting a counsellor or therapist initially, to deal with the ghosts of lack of self-worth, before moving on to tackle their future.



For those with vague goals, it is quite a different sort of problem. 'Sure, I can do anything I put my mind to – but how do I know what I really want? If I'm going to invest all this time, effort and money, how will I know it's worth it?' In fact, this is often how clients might describe



their life to date. They have reached a stage in their career, perhaps after decades, when they think ‘*was it worth it? Is this what I really want?*’

A deeper understanding of themselves is an important start for these clients, too. It helps them recognise how their life and career up until now has worked for them and perhaps how it hasn’t. Their basic type preferences form a fundamental starting point, but of course clarifying talents/strengths (rather than simply learned skills) can be a major contributor to this developing picture. Other valuable avenues for exploration include personal values (rather than what others deem important), what motivates them, the passions that drive them, and so on.

Time after time, I’ve watched my clients’ journey of discovery end with amazing clarity about who they are and where they want to go with their career or their life. Because this discovery comes from within them and they own it, it has the power to transform them.

Clients who know themselves and are confident with clear goals start from a place of strength. They can benefit from coaching in a different way.

Although these clients know and appreciate their skills and strengths, their motivations and passions and where they want to get to, type can give them new insights. It helps them to recognise the patterns in what they know about themselves and see in others. If they are looking for stretch and development, understanding their Jungian preferences can point the way to exercises which will help them develop their non-preferences in the service of their goals. It can also help to clarify the degree to which the role they are working in aligns with or stretches

them. Not least, as for all other clients, type can help them get a better handle on why others don’t see the world quite as they do – and how therefore to work with others more effectively.

In addition, a career or leadership coach helps them clarify and refine their goals, examine and weigh the various options in front of them, and support for the journey as they move forward.

I have found that helping clients to understand their personality has been a powerful and flexible tool in my work – although it can only really fulfil that role if a) the practitioner properly understands the theory and practice underlying the various tools, and b) they approach it with humility. The client will usually recognise their own type sooner or later – the MBTI® or any other tool can only be an **indicator** of the direction to explore. The journey of exploration itself yields many benefits, even when not resolved to a best-fit type.

Sue is still on the journey of knowing which of her futures she really wants. Elaine has completely surprised herself with the direction she has chosen and has eagerly begun to work out her plan. Jim sought counselling after some time with coaching, but after a while his sense of direction coalesced and he is now headed in a direction he never expected with a new sense of purpose. And John, after a few sessions to clarify how to develop in the direction he wanted, has gone on to do just that.