

Personalities in the Workplace

What I Like About You

At an out-of-town meeting I attended years ago, one of the participants talked a mile a minute and crammed so much information into her comments the rest of us could barely keep up. Our meeting should have ended on time, but it did not, because she felt compelled to tell story after story about *her* adventures and *her* experience and *her* projects. She was completely unaware of how this irritated the rest of us. She thought her stories added something necessary to the meeting. Her stories featured *her*. They actually were great tales, but there were too many; one or two would have been sufficient to add something to the day's discussion.

We all liked her very much--we just didn't like her domination of every conversation. The truth is all of us get into trouble when we are completely unable to see ourselves as others see us. This woman was a valued and important member of her company, and she was not without friends. But you can be sure that there are many who, before entering a meeting in which she is participating, take a deep breath and prepare to sit with her and bear her endless chatter.

Is this kind of draining behavior what we want to be known for? Frequent interruptions, retelling the same story three different ways, ignoring the cues others are signaling . . . it's too much work to attempt communication! Most who act this way are truly unaware of it, as are the folks who are on the opposite end of the spectrum: the ones who sit in silent criticism of every comment made, who wait until everyone has weighed in and moved the process along to set every attendee back ten paces by dropping a judgment bomb. "Why would you do it that way?" they'll intone with morbid seriousness, as though everyone in the room is a simpleton exhibiting unrelenting stupidity. They can't be convinced to participate with enthusiasm because they want to be identified as the set-apart, impersonal voice of reason and thoughtfulness; to be enthusiastic would connect them to the group. Too bad they can't see how others avoid them, because they perennially rain on even the most modest of parades. They are know-it-alls.

Know Thyself

What I have described to you are characteristics of weakness in two personality styles that have many highly-desirable strengths. The self-centered talker who is *aware* of her tendency to take over a conversation can be a charming, lighthearted presence in even the toughest of situations. She'll always have an entertaining story and never meets a stranger, and part of her appeal will be that she hears herself and knows when to put a cork in it.

The morose, self-appointed authority frequently has a deeply compassionate streak with a desire to prevent others from being affected in adverse ways. He also often has grasp of points others can't see, but his inability to explain them well makes him seem like the consistent bearer of unwelcome news. His dreary and even snooty pronouncements create resistance instead of the empathy he's often shooting for. If he could see himself as others see him, he might use that empathy to gauge the tone of the folks he's with, because it's a skill he possesses. But he can't—because he's living in his weaknesses and is clueless as to why folks don't want to hang out with him.

I know very few people who truly do not care how they affect others. Most of us want to be considered receptive and respectful while expressing ourselves uniquely. We don't want our unchecked, negative personality traits to make a greater impact than our positive ones. I would be horrified knowing that as I entered a meeting, all thoughts locked together in a collective, "Oh no—Sue's here."

Our strengths are the engine of effective, vital communication. We want to be self-aware enough so what we communicate is received the way it was meant to be heard. It can only be a good thing when we understand something of ourselves that goes deeper than just knowing our preferences. The good news is that recognizing our own personality strengths and weaknesses makes us very cognizant of other people's, and we can adjust our preferences to meet another person at his or her level of communication. This simple act frequently has enormous consequences. We won't *always* have an impact because of this, but we will far more frequently than those who never attend to it. We will see more productive interactions with friends, employees, and coworkers, and family members. Isn't this important? I think so!

One of Steven Covey's Seven Habits is "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Relationships can sometimes seem like such a crap shoot! You work to understand, you think you're listening, you feel you've got a handle on what makes someone tick, and then *out of the blue* they pull some unbelievable stunt that has your head spinning! Maybe you hear through the grapevine that "She can't stand you" when you thought everything was going swimmingly, or it gets back to you that a coworker was deeply offended by a comment you thought was humorous. You sit with an employee in a performance evaluation and make what seems a benign suggestion, when to your utter astonishment, the person becomes defensive and personal and claims you're just trying to get rid of him. *Huh?* It's enough to make you want to become a hermit, cutting off all human interaction. (There's a reason people want to marry their pets.)

Just when you think you have most folks figured out, just when you think you know where most things fit in relationships, some odd, exceedingly frustrating person turns up! Men and women come along who are the exception to every rule or every strategy we employ and we find ourselves unable to figure out how to dwell peaceably and civilly with them. We want folks to act as we would act, and they don't, so we decide they are simply *weird*.

Honestly, there are some who fit the profile of just being odd, but the problem is usually that we see life from a certain perspective and we assume that everyone else does, too. Here is Profound Truth #1: It's not until we have a solid picture of how others approach the world that our eyes are opened and we can be comfortable with differences in personality. Wouldn't it help to see how they see, even if only a little bit? Any information that gives us insight will put us miles ahead in the relationship department.

Doesn't Everyone See It My Way?

When you see a studious, quiet child who loves to read, are you surprised twenty years later when she enters her surgical residency? Were you shocked when your nephew who loved to entertain at family gatherings opened a restaurant where he thrived in an atmosphere of hospitality and every patron felt like they knew him personally? Don't you say to yourself, "He/She was always like that"? That's what our ancient ancestors saw, too. They knew we were born with an innate view of how the world turned. They believed we were born with certain attributes and tendencies. Fast-forward a couple of thousand years or so, though, to the

experts who arose and told us we were “tabula rasa,” meaning “blank slate”—life experiences and socialization alone are the pens that write on us, they said; biology has nothing to do with personality.

Within the last several decades, however, technology has given researchers the ability to put to the test this thinking. Discoveries in brain development, the findings of neural pathway development, the isolation of genes containing hints of particular personality traits—these have all provided the scientific community with more accurate indications of how we become what we are. Guess what they’re discovering? What men and women who lived a millennium ago could have told them: we’re born with something! The truth is we pop into the world with a way of seeing life, an inborn way of approaching the world.

Nearly 2500 years ago, the physician Hippocrates noted what he saw in treating patients from all over the known world. A great observer and documenter, he saw that people seemed to fall into four basic expressions of personality, or *temperaments*, and a person’s temperament often determined his or her tendency toward illness and approach to recovery. He believed that temperaments were created by the varying amounts of fluids in the body, so he named each one accordingly. He was working with the limited knowledge of the human body he had, and it turns out he wasn’t so far off. Hippocrates anticipated our knowledge of the biological underpinnings of personality. He got the exact biology wrong, but isn’t that a minor point? He was forging new territory!

Hippocrates called the first personality *Sanguine*, which is the Greek word for blood. The second personality he referred to as *Melancholic*, and these folks, he believed, had more black bile in their systems. Then there was *Choleric*, from the word “cholera,” which means yellow (pronounced like the word “cholera” with a “k” on the end of it). Finally, he called the fourth temperament *Phlegmatic* because this person supposedly produced more phlegm. Much later, others refined his observations and applied them to understanding personality. We long ago discarded the bodily fluid theory but the Greek names for the personalities hang on and have become part of our language.

No Boxes Here

What do fluids and Greek name have to do with what makes us tick? Here’s the thing: everyone with whom we work or live or play, anyone we come in contact with throughout our lives, is motivated first by an internal makeup: *temperament*. Don’t make the mistake of viewing this as an exercise in classification. This is not some restrictive box in which to place people and keep them pigeonholed. This is just an easy way to identify how you and someone else can see the same event quite differently. You don’t need a degree in psychology to understand the basic components of personality. You simply need to be able to identify the patterns. Once you can do this, you will have insight into how to approach relationships at work, at home, and in any situation you encounter. I’m going to give you tools to recognize the patterns. This is nothing new or weird or psychobabblish. This is plain old, thoughtful, observational technique in harmonizing our communication so that others can truly see and hear us, and feel that we truly see and hear them.

Keep this in mind: we are all different, even though we generally all have two eyes, a nose, a mouth, two arms and two legs. Just because we have the same essential structure does not mean we all look alike. (Perhaps we will all look alike to those aliens who are soon to arrive on the planet, but then . . . they’ll all look alike to us, too.) As well, we are all different even

though we express the features of our temperament in unique ways. Our personalities are identified by certain characteristics, but they are simply *structures* that express the life we bring to them. The four personalities are an explanation of how different people see life coming to them. Each one receives, processes, and expresses it in a singular fashion. When viewed with all the others, we can get a glimpse of how to relate a bit more effectively.

I won't turn this into "Sue's Sure-Fire Way to Get Along with Absolutely Everybody!" We all know people who defy our efforts to understand them. We sometimes suspect they're a mystery to *themselves*. As we proceed through an overview of each personality leaning (remember, there are only four, so we're not talking about having to learn something along the lines of the Periodic Table of Elements) you will recognize friends or family members or colleagues who *might* be that wonderful person I'm describing, except . . . oh dear . . . they look more like the enumeration of weaknesses instead of the more desirable and understandable strengths. That's because some folks, because of life experiences and influences and, perhaps, many other little things of which we will never gain insight, have resulted in a man or woman who lives in his or her weaknesses. They've got those lovely strengths, and maybe we can see glimmers of them, but they are so overshadowed by the weak ways they've chosen to approach life and relationships that we can't help but feel what a pity it is to see a person hindered by self-unawareness.

One of the most liberating aspects of learning these four simple, memorable personalities is the mirror it provides. We are often blind to what others find offensive in our interactions, and we keep doing things that have always seemed to work when the truth is no one has been courageous enough to tell us how annoying we are. Read thoughtfully and process in a self-examining way. It only takes a bit of self-awareness to completely change the way we relate, not to mention the cupful of compassion we can show those who can't see the weaknesses they wave like a red flag.

May your eyes be opened by what follows!

I Felt Kind of Sanguine About It

Have you ever worked with someone who is loud and gabs a lot? Maybe you live with a child who doesn't just provide information: he or she tells a detailed story and you can't understand how a simple event can be turned into a full-blown production! Perhaps you've noticed your spouse works out problems by talking, talking, talking, and it makes you crazy, crazy, crazy!

You've encountered the Sanguine personality! "Sanguine" is a Greek word meaning "blood," and thousands of years ago it was thought that some people had more blood than others and this made them full of life and fun, motivated by the life-giving flow in their bodies. I like to use the Greek names for each personality but I also use an identifying word, and "popular" is the identifier you might remember long after you've forgotten how to say "sanguine" (pronounced SANG-gwinn).

Popular Sanguine people are easy to spot because you can hear them. They tend to talk and laugh loudly. Many times at business meetings I have been told, "Sue, I didn't know if you were here, and then I heard you!" It's usually easy to locate the Popular Sanguine in the room, because he or she is often surrounded by people, telling stories, entertaining a crowd and enjoying the attention. Popular Sanguine folks are colorful. They like to stand out. They want to be noticed. They are often dramatic storytellers. It's not a bad or wrong to want to stand out;

it's just a style. Popular Sanguine men and women stand out in the jewelry they wear or in clothing choices. They may dress professionally, but it will always have some kind of flair to it. Whatever their fashion, it's usually designed to draw attention.

These are extroverted, sunny, optimistic people. Their primary desire is to have fun. Their work motto would be, "If it's not fun anymore, it's time to look for a new job." Sanguine people are not prone to making a goal and heading toward it. What's the fun in that? It's far more interesting to take the road that looks intriguing and see where it leads. If it doesn't bring success, well, so what? There are other roads. Everything will work out somehow!

In fact, this don't-worry-be-happy approach to life characterizes this personality. Your Popular Sanguine friends are perennial optimists. People energize them, and they are never too tired for a party or a lunch with friends. They naturally draw folks into conversation and create a memorable encounter. Every person they meet has the potential of becoming a new best friend! The Sanguine needs to talk to process life events, and when there's no best friend around to provide some give-and-take and listen to them work out bothersome matters, they can feel alone and lonely.

The Popular Sanguine man or woman often sees life as a glorious adventure. It may be an adventure close to home, played out in the daily life of family and work, but it's got to be fun and involve feeling close and loved. It may be the adventure of risk taking, where there's always a new experience and the possibility of saying, "I had the best time of my life!" No matter how they seek serendipity, underneath it all there are three very essential needs: affection, attention, and acceptance.

These needs are not exclusive to other personalities. We all need affection! We can all do with affirming relationships in our lives. It's just that for the Popular Sanguine, these are deep, internal, motivating factors that ultimately drive this personality. While their natural, hardwired way of expression is extremely visible and verbal, something underneath knows that by being entertaining and charming, they will be liked and embraced, and so these essential needs are operating in nearly everything they do. When their basic needs of attention, affection, and approval are not met, they can become depressed.

Just as their strengths are very apparent, so are their weaknesses: they may talk too much. (In fact, this is the most common complaint they hear.) They are frequently disinterested in others, lending the impression that the world revolves around them and their experiences, their feelings, and their thoughts. "It's all about me" is the message some Sanguine folks can transmit, and that's just not very pretty. Annoyingly forgetful, consistently late to appointments, often defensive, exhibiting scattered and unfocused thinking, they need the help of other people in keeping them on track. Their love of attention can be a very sad need to always be the center of it, and criticism of this flaw may have them asking an inexplicable, "Why do you hate me?" You see, in the deepest weaknesses this persuasion of personality can express, if you do not absolutely adore everything they do, then it must mean . . . you *hate* them.

Do you know a Popular Sanguine? They are the most visible personality and sometimes the most fragile, so handle with care. Remember they respond to any attempt to make fun and they need you to like them. They aren't this way just to make you crazy: it is the way their brains are wired. Don't try to corral their high spiritedness: it is what makes them unique.

Keep in mind this good news about every personality pattern: many are mature enough to have overcome the weaknesses natural to their temperaments, or to have headed them off

at the pass early on, before they became problematic. For example, Sanguines may have a natural desire to be liked, but it doesn't mean they will be driven by it. They may Doesn't everyone want to be liked? Most of us recognize that the whole world won't find us delightful, and we can live with that. It's just more fun when they *do!*

It Was a Day for Being Melancholy

Are your closets precisely ordered by color or length of clothing? Are your dresser drawers filled with items folded in a precise way so that everything fits the way it's supposed to? Do you tend to be cautious, having only a few very close friends? Then you are probably a Perfect Melancholic temperament!

"Melancholic" is from a Greek word referring to bile, and thousands of years ago it was thought that some people had more bile than others and this somehow made them reserved and analytical. "Perfect" or "Proper" is the identifier you might remember long after you've forgotten this temperament is called "melancholic."

Perfect Melancholic people tend to be introverted. Where Popular Sanguines are loud and off-the-cuff, Melancholics are quiet and thoughtful. Where the Sanguine will interrupt you with some thought that popped into his or her head and then have a good laugh about it, a Melancholic person will think carefully, choose his or her words, and would not think of interrupting anyone so rudely. Melancholic representatives do not necessarily believe they are perfect, but they believe perfection is attainable, and this is a primary driver in their temperament.

Where the Popular Sanguine will dress to express, the Perfect Melancholic does not announce himself so obviously. He or she tends to dress a bit more conservatively or, if they exhibit a great sense of style, it will be in creating clear and obvious "look" with attention to details, frequently matching items and color perfectly. They are usually very put together and always quite neat. There is a right way to keep things, you see, and it always involves neatness and being tidy. There is a proper way to execute a task, and that is thoroughly and carefully. For the Melancholic, it's all about precision. If they had a work motto, it would most likely be: "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right the first time."

Perfected are sensitive, careful people who pay attention to details in relationships, in activities, and in their work, and where the Popular Sanguines meet a new best friend everywhere they go, the Perfect Melancholic holds close only truly faithful friends. They are interior people who weigh their thoughts and ideas conscientiously, analyzing how something might sound or could be perceived. They work well alone, and they need quiet to refuel and regenerate.

Can you see how difficult it might be for a Sanguine married to a Melancholic, or for a Melancholic supervisor who must manage a Sanguine employee? The Popular Sanguine will need to talk to process the day while the Perfect Melancholic is desperate to find some silence. A Melancholic must be aware that the Sanguine is not trying to be annoying! Popular is just expressing his hardwired temperament. On the other hand, the Melancholic is not intimating that Popular Sanguine is not loved and adored! Perfect cannot help his or her need to dwell in a quiet place to find the center once again. **Profound Truth #2: We must learn to be sensitive to the way others take in the world.**

The Perfect Melancholic person needs to know you are sensitive to his or her needs. They can sometimes watch others with a judgmental air because they are deeply invested in

the proper way of doing things. To not have the time or ability to do things the right way is pretty much an agony. When you do not know what *they* consider the proper or right way, you are at a terrible disadvantage. If you *do* know what they see as “the right way” and ignore it, you are pretty much implying that their preferences are inferior; or, if they don’t take your missteps personally, they may simply write you off as foolish. Take time to be sensitive to the Perfect Melancholy’s ideas and dreams. He or she can slide into dark moods when they sense insincerity. Because perfection is a standard that seems possible, Melancholics are not only measuring others against it, but themselves also, and this can paralyze them. Keep in mind that deep inside the Perfect Melancholic core exists a need to have everything in order. They simply cannot exhale until everything is in its place. Know this and you’ll prevent many a misunderstanding.

As for weaknesses, this group can gravitate toward the extremely judgmental. If they’ve never tackled their unwise tendencies, they can take a know-it-all approach to others, exhibiting an irritating one-upmanship to prove their superiority. They can seem incessantly complaining or unhappy, unable to see the good in life. “Morose” is a word often used to describe the Melancholic people I’ve known who haven’t overcome their weaknesses. They can be so focused on detail they miss the impressions they’re lending, and they wonder why people get frustrated with them.

In praise of their best qualities, however, if it were not for the Perfect persuasions in my life, I would never be organized. My Melancholic husband will take time to read a map like I read a novel, and he can provide me with astonishingly precise directions to some location to which I must travel. He is an expert packer: from items that must be shipped to clothes folded into luggage, not a bit of space is wasted. He can instantly see details that I cannot. He can hear nuances that I miss, and he is keenly sensitive to clues that tell him whether or not a person can be trusted. I used to see his way of viewing the world as suspicious and cynical, but I now understand that he takes a serious view of life and without his insights, I might be swindled and hoodwinked! There is nothing wrong with suspicion in a world full of deceivers!

My Perfect Melancholic coworkers are rock-solid trustworthy and take personal responsibility for a job well-done. My friends leaning to this style always remember my preferences. My favorite actors and musicians and thinkers show themselves so often to have the Melancholic view of life. It’s a beautiful thing.

Cholerics Have No Calories

Who in your life is the person forever pointing a finger in your face and announcing, “You know what you need to do?” Who is the bossy intimidator? The one who always knows what to do and is the person you can count on to get things done? You are acquainted with a Powerful Choleric personality.

“Choleric” is from a Greek word meaning “yellow,” and thousands of years ago it was thought that some people had more yellow bile than others and this somehow made them aggressive and strong-willed. “Powerful” is the identifier you might remember long after you’ve forgotten this temperament is called “choleric” (pronounced KOLL-err-ick, like the word “cholera” with a “k” on the end).

Powerful Cholerics are natural born leaders. They have goals and plans and they are on a mission. For the Powerful Choleric, the internal fire never goes out. As with the Sanguine, they are energized by people, but they are less inclined to need others’ attention or affection.

Like the Perfect Melancholy, Powerful Choleric people like order, but here is the important difference: where the Perfect Melancholy person needs order for the pure sake of order, the Powerful Choleric likes order because it creates *efficiency*. It's time-saving, and the Choleric personality wants to get as much done in as little time as possible. In fact, the Powerful Choleric can work the hardest and the longest of all four personalities, and they don't understand why *you* can't.

This personality can be perceived as very bossy and intimidating. They are natural good decision makers, so they are usually right, which is why they can be so irritating; they'll let you know it, and emphatically! Even when they aren't right, they usually refuse to admit it. If there were a Choleric work motto, it would be, "Either lead, follow, or get out of the way." If they find you can't lead, they will either check out or take over. Someone has to be in charge, and if the person in charge can't do it, the Choleric will step in and fly the plane! How hard can it be?

My friends with this Powerful inclination are purposeful and focused. They know where they are going and have a view to the next task that needs to be completed. One buddy says, "A good day is when I can check off every task on my To Do List." She keeps a pad and pen by her bed because she wakes up in the middle of the night with an idea that must be pursued and she doesn't want to forget it. I heard someone explain the constant drive and energy this way: "I can't turn it off!"

The world moves on the commands and bravado of Cholerics. Without Powerful Cholerics, we might all stand around waiting for someone to raise a hand and accept the role of a leader. Choleric people were born giving orders and they can't switch off their natural leadership capabilities. They do not wake up in the morning thinking of ways to irritate you with their abrasive personalities; they think the way they act is how everyone should act and they don't understand your problem with it! It is when you need help with focus and determination that a Powerful Choleric becomes vitally important. They can assess your situation and give you plans for action. They can push you and help you take steps to the next level. They have no time for people who do not want to change and move forward; they want to see results in themselves and in others. And when those results are realized, they want to see in a big way that you appreciate them. Love they don't need so much; it's appreciation they expect, and emphatically. It's the one with the Choleric temperament who is most prone to saying, "All that work and they didn't even thank me."

Here's what Powerfuls don't get: They can't see how they run over other people with their plans and orders and drive. They find it difficult to step back and view themselves from another's perspective, and even when they do, their first inclination is to dismiss what others see. It is a tough job to face down a Choleric and tell him or her the truth, because they see themselves as right about everything. "It's my way or the highway" is an old tune that Powerful Choleric sings, and they weave it into the way they communicate. They appreciate people who are straight with them, who will tell it like it is without fear, so you may need to work on your courage factor if you need to give them news they won't like to hear. They can consider those with whom they're frustrated idiots or worse, and they may keep this to themselves . . . or not. They are fearless in their opinions and if they have never tamed this beast, they can step all over others like an elephant in a field of mice. People run in fear. If this is your personality—and you know as you read if it is or not—is this what you want? Coworkers who can't bring themselves to confront you? Family members who avoid you? Maybe it's worked for you to be so intimidating, but it doesn't make for great communication. Consider your delivery!

Phlegmatic is a State of Mind

For my father, there was not an event in his life that he would not have described as simply “fine.” Wedding day? “Fine.” The day I was brought home from the hospital was also fine. How do I look, Daddy?” “Just fine, sweetheart!” Do you like that meatloaf? “It’s fine.”

My dad was a Peaceful Phlegmatic. “Phlegmatic” implies (as you’ve probably guessed) phlegm, and Hippocrates surmised that some people had more phlegm than others and this caused them to be stable, easygoing, very balanced, and not given to enthusiasm.

Where Popular Sanguine would like you to lighten up and have some fun and Powerful Choleric wants you to get moving and work harder, and Perfect Melancholic wants you to put things in order and be respectful of others, Peaceful Phlegmatic doesn’t really want you to do anything. They aren’t out to change you. These folks are calm and stable and reliable, and they don’t really care whether you do what they want or not; it’s up to you. They’ll be fine if you do and fine if you don’t. Others might wither up and die if life were only “fine,” but for the Peaceful Phlegmatic, “fine” is a good thing. You see, Phlegmatic people just don’t get too excited about things, so they rarely use superlatives to describe their opinions.

Peaceful Phlegmatic people want peace, and they will go out of their way to make sure it is maintained. They will not engage in arguments and will simply go along with what others want to avoid discord. Ask a Peaceful Phlegmatic family member where they want to go to dinner and they frequently respond, “I don’t care; wherever you want to go is fine.” The fact is that Peaceful Phlegmatic really *doesn’t* care; food is food, after all, and they will happily go along with someone else’s decision. But a characteristic of our Peaceful friends and family members is that even if they *do* care they won’t say so. Why create a conflict over a choice of restaurants? Let someone else choose.

Peaceful Phlegmatic is a tried and true friend. These folks will go out of their way to be helpful. They are generous and compassionate. They are giving people who can’t say no, especially when they know someone is in distress. They prefer rest and peace, and they don’t function well with deadlines and demands. Unlike the Powerful Choleric who has to jump on a task before it grows cold, Peaceful Phlegmatics will procrastinate and avoid, even on important matters, because they’d rather not deal with the stress. They are reconciled to life and maintain the same attitude through trials and through joys. This does not mean they don’t have strong opinions or feel deeply about issues. It’s just that their feelings do not quickly rise up to affect their behavior. Phlegmatic men and women can keep their faces passive when the ground is shaking. It may seem like they don’t care, but that’s just because their emotions don’t erupt like the other patterns. It’s a very long road for that emotional reaction to finally make it to the face or voice. Give it time and plenty of room and you’ll find out what they really think.

These are not super-motivated, driven individuals. Because of this they can feel they don’t get any respect, or that people don’t see their worth. They don’t have strong, expressive characteristics like the other three personalities; they are quietly present, rock solid, and unemotional. If they had a work motto, it might be, “Can’t we all just get along?” A woman I met at a convention seminar told me after I spoke, “I tell my husband he’s got just one speed. I say to him, ‘I hope I never have a heart attack on your watch! Old Mr. One-Speed will take a look at me lying on the floor and move his one speed into action, casually making his way to the phone to call 911!’ He just doesn’t have another speed to put into gear.” That is a humorous but oh-so-telling description of the Phlegmatic temperament!

This doesn't mean Peacefuls aren't strong! Phlegmatic men and women have a will of iron. When they don't want to do something, they cannot be moved. I have often heard the term "passive-aggressive" applied to Peaceful Phlegmatic, and not without reason. Instead of telling you from the beginning they'd prefer not to participate, a Peaceful will say they will and then won't show up. They're not moved by your anger. No matter how much you shout, cry, demand or give ultimatums, the Phlegmatic will retreat inwardly and refuse to come out until they feel the coast is clear. They may seem like marshmallows, but they can exhibit a will of iron that simply will not be pushed.

In the scheme of positive relationships in which people are living in their strengths, however, you could hardly find a friend or coworker more helpful and forgiving. They accept you seemingly without judgment; even if they *do* have judgments, they won't burden you with them. You'll feel understood, even if you aren't, and sometimes that's enough.

It's All Good

Can you see how valuable it might be to simply take a little time to note the obvious cues about a person and then see if making an adjustment to your delivery enhances communication? Let the Sanguine talk, and laugh at his or her jokes. Brighten the day with a little gift or a shared confidence. Show Melancholic all the details; be prepared to present logical and full explanations of your thought process on a decision, and give this person quiet space to detox from the noise of life. Get quickly to the bottom line with your Choleric listener and don't waste her time with defensiveness; show your appreciation appropriately. When possible, allow the Phlegmatic lots of time and room to do things at her or her own pace, which may be rather slow. Show them their work or opinions mean something.

You may be all one temperament or mix of two. You may wonder if you've got a bit of all four; the truth is we all do, really, because we each possess a unique mix. You're blended the way your genetic heritage and your social upbringing and your life experiences meant you to be. It's all good! Work to see others the same way and you are on the road to understanding what makes people tick!