

What's my line?

Some type (and social) agendas



Freewheelin' with **Peter Geyer**

*This is a song written exclusively for me
Something to warm me on a lonely winter's night
And if I want to think someone's thinking of me
I look into my song and see who I can see*

Colin Blunstone, 1972

*What we respect people for and what we respect them as depends
on a great deal of—usually implicit—social, political, moral,
and metaphysical background ...*

*Any suggestion that we are equal in 'latent talent' is both
implausible in itself and likely to foster the nasty thought that
the unsuccessful are just too idle to develop this latent talent ...*

Alan Ryan (reviewing Richard Sennett), 2003

*You're likely to run into people who think all four of these processes
should be equally developed. I want to start out by saying why
that might not be a good idea. If they were all of equal strength,
you would have no basic stable direction to your life because the
four processes all have different goals. S doesn't like what N
likes. T doesn't agree with F often. Your direction would shift
moment to moment, day to day, and it doesn't so shift, it doesn't.*

*You can't really have a continuing direction for your life until
your best-liked, most trusted, most preferred kind of perception
and your best-liked, most trusted, most preferred kind of judge-
ment have agreed on what is to be desired. The fact that you trust
one kind of perception and one kind of judgement doesn't mean
you can do without the ones you like less. You need to use them
like carpenter's tools: you need to know what you can and can't
do with the tools and when to lay one down and pick up another.*

Isabel Myers, 1977

What sort of person do you want to be, or have you wanted to be, and is it feasible? And how do others fit in, as mentors, guides, naggers, etc? Or have you just wanted to live life without too much fanfare, and from your individual perspective, on achievements that you assess yourself.

Recently, my local newspaper reported on a speech by Jim Vale, a local boy made good. (Black 2003). His success was in the world of motor racing, as a mechanic. The article outlined, simply and briefly, how he got there (opportunity and a particular skill, mostly), and quoted him as saying, 'So if you put your mind to it, you can do anything really.'

In this way, Vale deftly avoided his own abilities and skills that made him successful, when others pursuing the same goal at the same time had failed to do so, for whatever reason. So, for me, his message was dimmed somewhat: and I'm sure that thought ran through a few minds at his talk.

Touting a person's success as a model for another's life can be a double-edged sword; often details and contexts are left out, to confuse the unwary. When I was a young boy, I remember reading occasional articles in the Melbourne *Herald* about men who had risen from the mail-sorting room to head the then Postmaster-General's Department, usually for a year or so before they retired at 65. The message here was 'work hard, and success will follow': SJ in type terms.

It was also clear, however, that this sort of occurrence was rare—otherwise it wouldn't be an article in the daily paper. So 'be successful like me' can be a trap for the unwary, particularly if the requisite skills aren't all there and the opportunities don't materialise.

Alan Ryan quotes the sociologist Richard Sennett to that effect, and points out the implications of laziness that can follow from a lack of fulfilment of promise, as defined by others. A recent profile of the enigmatic and talented Collingwood footballer Chris Tarrant (Pearce 2003) neatly encapsulates this issue: should the footballer enjoy being himself, and thus perhaps not be as successful in others' terms?

Type guides us towards the notion that 'be successful like you' may be more relevant than emulating others, or following others' desires. Motivation in this sense is personal, individual. But that seems to me to be neatly contradicted by much of what's on show in type and similar literature; in the careers field, say.

So I enjoyed recently being asked to review a new booklet on careers by Charles Martin, whom I respect. The enjoyment came from reading things like:

ISFJs are often attracted to careers in . . . But you may find enjoyment and excellence doing something entirely different . . . Type is about your approach to getting what you want.

What's my line?

'No-one develops their personality because someone told them it would be useful or advisable for them to do so', wrote Jung (1991, 173). Whilst this comment should be understood in the context of his specific view of what personality actually is (which includes the idea that it's not a given for everyone), it also suggests that there's a subtlety to knowing yourself. This is separate from courses, therapy sessions, and even from the basic experience of knowing your type and the types of others.

Because Jung's theory is one of opposites, it follows that one opposite doesn't aim for what is important to the other. Developing the other preference is in the context of what is *desired* (as Isabel Myers might put it) by the dominant preference, not a separate development.

In my courses I've taught people whose dominant preference for extraverted feeling is the opposite of my own, introverted thinking. This opposition leads to a variety of responses from the people involved: the vast majority pleasant, and a few challenging.

What's interesting in that is not only the different sorts of people I encounter in those two types, ESFJ and ENFJ, in terms of knowledge and lifestyle, but also (and this is intended as a compliment!) their cheerful lack of interest in too much introverted thinking—which varies, of course, as to level. Same preference, different levels of interest in the opposite: just as many of the INTPs I know don't show much interest in a lot of the things important to me, and vice versa. The preference is the same, but the content varies between individuals.

Types also do different things to the expected. The two men who prosecuted the recent war in Iraq, George W Bush and Tony Blair, are probably driven by introverted and extraverted feeling, respectively: their language and approach speaks that, even if their advisers do not.

To me, the feeling function is important to all cultures in the Middle East, and expressed differently from here. These days, of course, it's more archetype and shadow, but those cultures don't come from the extraverted thinking perspective of the US and other Western governments, nor of the World Bank and similar institutions.

Nor is freedom the same in meaning and desire there as here. Paradoxically, the fundamentalisms in Judaism, Christianity and Islam seem to have much in common regarding religion and state in particular, the former two having specific doctrinal interests in common (Armstrong 2000).

Given that, we should perhaps revise our heroes and givers of wisdom and see people as they are: muddled, inconsistent and interesting, rather than perfect master, guru, individuated and unapproachable.

The biography of Isabel Myers and Katharine Briggs (Saunders 1991) is part hagiography, but there's enough there to give a view into this different family and some of the issues contained there—particularly if it's read with Isabel's own book (Myers and Myers 1990).

Jung, too, has his hagiographers and detractors, and so many things could be said here. Two things struck me in my recent reading (Henderson and Henderson 1998). One was that Jung had a very big shadow (in both senses of the term); which is fairly self-evident, on reflection. The other was that Jung did not earn enough to support his family.

Makes it all a little more real, actually. ❖

References

- Karen Armstrong 2000, *The battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, HarperCollins.
- Tony Black 2003, "'Aim high" is Jim's formula for career success', *The Warrnambool Standard*, 21 June 2003, 3.
- Colin Blunstone 2001 (1972), 'Exclusively for me' (Blunstone-Jones), Rondor Music, from *Ennismore*, Epic Records.
- Simon Caterson 2003, 'Getting intimate', *The Age Agenda/Books*, 4 May 2003, 12.
- Janis Henderson and Robert Henderson 1998, 'Let it be: An interview with C Toni Frey-Wehrin', *Spring* 64, Fall/Winter 1998, 57-88.
- C G Jung 1991, *The development of personality* (Collected Works 17), Princeton.
- Charles Martin 2003, *Quick guide to the 16 personality types and career mastery*, Telos.
- Isabel Briggs Myers 1977, audio tape (private collection).
- Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B Myers 1990, *Gifts differing* (10th anniversary edition), Davies Black.
- Linda Pearce 2003, 'Making his mark, reluctantly', *The Age Sport*, 28 June 2003, 1 & 5
- Alan Ryan 2003, 'Call me Mister' (review of Richard Sennett, *Respect in a world of inequality*), *New York Review of Books*, 27 February 2003, 31-34
- Frances Saunders 1991, *Mother's light, daughter's journey*, Davies Black.

PETER GEYER (INTP) has been using the MBTI in organisations for 15 years, and accrediting people in the MBTI for 10 years.

alchymia@ozemail.com.au

www.petergeyer.com.au

There is no neat, practical way out of life's dilemmas. You can't read a book to take away the pain of love or to make marriage easy or to make loneliness go away. There aren't really solutions to those things.

John Armstrong, 2003