

# Using Assessment Tools in Your Career Decision Making

by Kathy Douglas

Q. What do you think about aptitude, personality, and interests tests in helping to guide career decision making? (Examples: Johnson O' Connor Research Foundation's aptitude testing program, Myers Briggs, Strong Interest Inventory, etc.). How do I align my interests and background with the results of such tests? And do following these test results really lead to a more satisfying career?

A. In general, a higher degree of self-awareness is always a good thing in terms of career development. Aptitude, personality, and interests tests, or assessments, can help define aspects of yourself that you may not already have a good sense of, and may save years of making less than ideal choices about career direction and focus, i.e. from learning the hard way. Many of us are strongly influenced by supposed-to-be's, cultural ideals and other external forces. Having a better understanding of one's proclivities and making career choices accordingly, you are likely to be more directed, satisfied and productive.

In an interview with *The New York Times* career columnist Marci Alboher, Peggy Klaus, author of *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They'd Learned Sooner*, groups self-awareness with other "soft" skills: "The hard skills are the technical expertise you need to get the job done. The soft skills are really everything else—competencies that go from self-awareness to one's attitude to managing one's career to handling critics, not taking things personally, taking risks, getting along with people, and many, many more." Self-assessment tests are a good way to boost your self-awareness as well as to identify areas you might want to work on.

Different assessment tools measure different qualities and leanings, and can be useful in helping to discover strengths, weaknesses, and preferences that you may not be fully aware of or perhaps assume that everyone possesses, i.e., they can help you take a more objective view of yourself. They are part of self-assessment that can help you define and articulate career goals, but are not necessarily going to give you hard and fast answers regarding direction. You are the final interpreter and arbiter of any such tests, but going through the process will likely lead to some personally resonant and new information that can inform your career planning, areas for personal and professional development and goal setting.

To illustrate the application of self-assessment tools to career development, let's look briefly at the Myers-Briggs personality test, which is based on Jungian psychology and which identifies 16 personality types. In addition to discovering your own type, knowledge of personality types can be extremely useful for navigating interpersonal relationships when you are working on teams, collaborating with colleagues, and interacting on all levels with individuals and groups.

Here is some basic information on the INTJ (Introvert, Intuitive, Thinking, Judging), a rare personality type:

Hallmark features of the INTJ personality type include independence of thought, strong individualism and creativity. Persons with this personality type work best given large amounts of autonomy and creative freedom. They harbor an innate desire to express themselves; that is to be creative by conceptualizing their own intellectual designs. Analyzing and formulating complex theories are among their greatest strengths. INTJs tend to be well-suited for occupations within academia, research, management, engineering, and law. Differentiating the INTJ personality type from the related INTP type is their confidence. They tend to be acutely aware of their knowledge and abilities. Thus, they develop a strong confidence in their ability and talents, making them "natural leaders." It is this confidence that makes this personality type extremely rare. According to [David Keirsey](#), it is found in no more than 1 percent of the population.

Source: <http://www.wikidoc.org/index.php/INTJ>

How can this understanding be applied to career choices and personal development?

If you are an INTJ, you might want to be looking for positions where you have a high degree of autonomy and can work creatively on long-term strategic planning, rather than one where you are doing highly energetic short-term management as part of an interdependent team. You might want to focus on organizations that have a reputation for being extremely well-managed, as opposed to one where your role will be to efficiently create order and be a mentor to young people. INTJ's are often "surprised when others don't see things the same way." If this is something you newly understand about yourself, you might spend some time developing the ability to build consensus around your ideas, an area that might not come naturally to you.

This kind of introspective work can certainly help in career development and in other areas of your life, can bring a depth to understandings you may already have about your personality, interests and aptitudes, and can be especially helpful if you find it difficult to accurately assess yourself.

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