

Coaching with the Myers Briggs Type Indicator: A Valuable Tool for Client Self-Awareness

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This paper explores the importance of client self- and other-awareness as a means for success in self-determination with a coaching relationship. Within the context of the Gestalt and Person-Centered coaching psychologies, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is presented as one tool that provides clients with information and insights necessary to deepen self- and other-awareness. A case study is presented in which the MBTI was utilized as the primary means for deepening client self-awareness and demonstrating the usefulness of the MBTI to support clients in being their own experts and finding their own solutions to achieving their goals, optimizing their potential and capabilities.

The Importance of Client Self-Awareness in Coaching

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines "aware" as "feeling, experiencing, or noticing something (such as a sound, sensation, or emotion). The definition of self-awareness brings greater focus: "an awareness of one's own personality or individuality."

Awareness is a key factor in effective coaching (Whitmore, 2009; ICF). "Unlike eyesight or hearing, in which the norm is good, the norm of our everyday awareness is rather poor" (p. 34). To more fully explore the importance of client self-awareness in coaching, two coaching psychology approaches that have been chosen: Gestalt and Person-Centered.

Gestalt coaching psychology includes the concept of the whole person and awareness-raising to bring about new self-understanding (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). The aim is to help the client explore the world around them in a way that broadens their choices and maximizes their ability to use their capabilities. The coach is to bring authenticity to the relationship, to center the relationship on the client as a whole person, and to focus on awareness-raising for the client (Allan & Whybrow, 2008).

Person-Centered coaching psychology also seeks to establish an authentic, accepting relationship with the client to provide a type of “social environment” in which the client knows they will not be judged or pushed to action (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). The authentic relationship and social environment are created because Person-Centered coaching holds that the client has within him/herself the answers needed to achieve goals and function optimally (Joseph and Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Stoltzfus, 2005). Thus in person-centered coaching the coach operates with an attitude of affirmation, empathic understanding, and expectation that the client is their own best expert.

In both of these coaching psychologies, there is great emphasis on self-awareness. In Gestalt, self-awareness deepens self-responsibility which frees the client to “become fully themselves, engaging with life to their full potential” (Allan & Whybrow, 2008, p. 137). When applied to coaching, developing greater self-awareness in the client provides the client with a greater set of possible behaviors from which to choose, thus enhancing and deepening the client’s capabilities for relationships and actions (Allan & Whybrow, 2008).

Person-centered coaching psychology includes the creation of “an authentic and emotionally literate relationship [where] people are able to drop their defenses and get to know themselves better, and feel free to make new choices in life” (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008: 216). When applied to coaching, this means that the work of the coach is to create the empathetic, unconditionally accepting “social environment” that frees the client from feeling judged or pushed and therefore opens the client to the awareness that allows the client to see new behaviors or actions as beneficial and possible (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Stoltzfus, 2005).

Encouraging Client Self-Awareness

Now that the basis for the importance of client self-awareness has been established, let us turn to the topic of how the coach enables the client to attain greater self-awareness. There are a number of tools available to coaches that target client self-awareness through different perspectives. Some of the most common tools for developing client self-awareness include those listed in the table below.

Table 1
Sampling of Common Tools for Self-Awareness

Tool	Targeted Area of Self-Awareness
MBTI	<p>Helps individuals to identify, from self-report of easily recognized reactions, the basic preferences of people in regard to perception and judgment, so that the effects of each preference, singly and in combination, can be established by research and put into practical use.</p> <p>Summarized from https://www.cpp.com/products/mbti/index.aspx</p>
FIRO-B	The Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation focuses on interpersonal relationships, helping individuals understand their own

Tool	Targeted Area of Self-Awareness
	<p>relationship needs and how those needs influence their behavior.</p> <p>Summarized from https://www.cpp.com/products/firo-b/index.aspx</p>
<p>Strong Interest Inventory</p>	<p>Focuses on career development by assisting individuals in alignment of interests and skills, career renewal and re-decision, and career development.</p> <p>Summarized from https://www.cpp.com/products/strong/index.aspx</p>
<p>Conflict Dynamics Profile</p>	<p>Provides individuals with ways to improve self-awareness of what triggers conflict as well as how they respond to conflict.</p> <p>Summarized from http://conflictdynamics.org/products/conflictdynamics.php</p>
<p>DiSC</p>	<p>DiSC is one of several personality assessments based on the work of William Marston. The assessment focuses the effect emotions have on motivation and behavior.</p> <p>Summarized from http://www.thediscpersonalitytest.com/?view=LearnAboutDiSC</p>
<p>StrengthsFinder</p>	<p>Seeks to help individuals identify their strengths, the natural talents that may otherwise go untapped. Provides strategies for how individuals can build and apply their strengths.</p> <p>Summarized from http://strengths.gallup.com/110440/About-StrengthsFinder-2.aspx</p>
<p>EQ</p>	<p>There are a number of emotional intelligence (EQ) assessments, including EQ-i 2.0, MSCEIT. These tests help individuals to assess how intelligently they use their emotions and provide guidance for developing greater balance in the use of emotions.</p> <p>Summarized from http://www.eiconsortium.org/measures/msceit.html</p>
<p>Hartman Value Profile</p>	<p>Seeks to expose an individual's values as a means to exposing the individual's personality.</p> <p>Summarized from http://www.hartmaninstitute.org/about/hartman-value-profile/</p>

Table 1. Created by author using references noted within.

In my coaching practice, I use a number of these tools with some regularity but I use the MBTI with nearly every client I coach.

What is the MBTI?

The MBTI is an instrument that helps individuals to identify the consistent and enduring patterns of how they use their brains. Based on the work of psychologist Carl Jung, the strength of the MBTI is that it provides a coherent approach to expecting different personalities in different people without having to expect complete uniqueness of personality (Myers & Myers, 1995). These personality differences are grouped into patterns that represent “observable differences in mental functioning” (Myers & Myers, 1995, p. 1). These patterns are termed type preferences. Type preferences “can be understood as opposite but related ways of using our minds, with the opposites being two halves that make up a whole” (Martin, 2010, p. 1).

There are four preference scales that make up the MBTI.

Table 2

Description of MBTI Preference Scales

MBTI Preference Scale	Scale Description
Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)	How do you direct your energy and attention?
Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)	How do you prefer to take in information?
Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)	How do you prefer to make decisions?
Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)	How do you orient to the outer world?

Table 2 (Martin, 2010, p. 2)

The MBTI is typically completed as an online self-assessment, where the client chooses between opposite but related ways of how they use their mind (Martin, 2010). Based on the client’s reported preferences, each client is assigned one of 16 MBTI Types and a profile of the client is produced that describes the identified MBTI Type.

Why Use the MBTI?

The MBTI has a number of benefits for the coach-client relationship when the goal is to develop client self-awareness. From a coaching perspective, the greatest benefit is the self- and other-awareness that is gained when using the MBTI. When Jung created his theory of *Psychological Types*, he created it as an “aid to self-understanding” (Myers & Myers, 1995, p. 24). Katherine Myers and her daughter, Isabel Myers Briggs, worked to extend the application of Jung’s work beyond self-understanding of how individuals use their minds to the practical implications of those preferences on everyday interactions such as communication, decision-making, and relationships (Myers & Myers, 1995).

Myers et al. (2009) state that the MBTI “seeks to identify a respondent’s status on either one or the other of two opposite personality categories, both of which are regarded as neutral in relation to emotional health, intellectual functioning, and psychological adaptation” (p. 5). Thus the MBTI is focusing on individuals with normal psyche and draws no value judgments about “good” or “bad” personality preferences.

The MBTI also does not seek to measure how little or how much (e.g., deficits or abundance) of personality preferences an individual has. Instead, MBTI measures how clearly a respondent prefers that personality trait, reflecting the level of confidence the coach and client can place on the respondent's results (Myers et al., 2009).

Also, the MBTI is a self-report instrument. This means that an essential part of coaching using the MBTI is to explore the tool with the client and perform an in-the-moment self-assessment before giving the client the generated report. This allows the client to verify the reported results and thereby gain confidence in their own expertise about their preferences. Myers et al. (2009) have determined that "MBTI results do not 'tell' a person who she or he is. Rather, individual respondents are viewed as experts who are best qualified to judge the accuracy of the type descriptions that result from their self-report" (p. 5).

A final benefit of using the MBTI is its accessibility. Based on my coaching experience, the four preference scales are simply presented within the different materials available and clients have little difficulty in understanding the scales. Because the MBTI is neither predictive nor prescriptive, clients feel open to reading the overview descriptions of their self-verified type and frequently agree that the description matches their preferences.

This self-verified agreement is a hallmark of the MBTI. Using the most current version of the MBTI complete form (known as Form M), research has demonstrated a 76.3% rate of agreement between respondent's reported type and verified type (Krause & Thompson, 2008). This high degree of agreement increases client confidence in the MBTI, aiding the process of deepening self-awareness (Myers et al., 2009).

Using the MBTI in Coaching

When the MBTI is used within a coaching relationship, clients are enabled to expand and deepen their self-awareness (Myers & Myers, 1995; Hirsch & Kise, 2011; Passmore et al., 2007), which moves clients forward in the achievement of goals / the optimization of their potential.

According to Consulting Psychology Press, the MBTI is useful in many different applications, including team development, leadership development, interpersonal skills development, conflict management, executive and line manager coaching, stress management, and career transition and planning. Myers and Myers (1995) developed specific guidance for using the type preferences identified through the MBTI to apply to topics including marriage, early learning, learning styles, and occupation.

As a result of the broad application potential of the MBTI, coaches can use the MBTI to deepen self-awareness in their clients. They can also use the MBTI to deepen clients' other-awareness, focusing on how others differences may impact the client's effectiveness in communication, conflict, leadership, and team building (Kroeger et al., 2002).

Kroeger et al. (2002) argue for the development of MBTI-based insights that enable clients to “turn the main differences among us into powerful tools instead of divisive intrusions” (p. 4). Gaining greater self- and other-awareness through the MBTI allows clients to constructively and objectively view actions others take as a celebration of differences rather than perceiving those differences as “bad” or “insulting” (Kroeger et al., 2002).

Practice

I will now describe the practice of deepening self- and other awareness using the MBTI within a coaching relationship through a case study from my own coaching experience. Within the coaching relationships that I establish, there are several key tenets:

- The client, guided and informed by the Holy Spirit, is their own best expert.
- Awareness raising is necessary to broaden the client’s self-understanding and to provide the client with understanding of the differences in others’ preferences that will influence interpersonal interactions and relationships.
- Deeper knowledge of self will aid and support the client’s ability to define and achieve specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely goals.

Many of my clients are seeking answers or improvement in the areas of:

- Leadership
- Communication
- Career
- Conflict management
- Followership
- Inter-personal, professional relationships
- Managing difficult employees

In the type of coaching I do, where the client is guided by the Holy Spirit and self- and other-awareness, it is critical to have an excellent tool to help the client deepen self- and other-awareness. I’ve found the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to be that tool.

Case Study

At “Beth’s” first coaching session, she was reeling from the shock of confronting views others’ held of her that conflicted sharply with her own self-understanding. As the Administrative Pastor of a large Pennsylvania church congregation, Beth’s duties were far-flung, involving oversight of the cleaning staff, management of the insurance policies of the church, creating and maintaining the church website, as well as running the church coffee café every Sunday, among other responsibilities. Her focus on doing all things with excellence and her forthright manner of dealing with others had caused members of the church staff to tell her she was “mean,” a perfectionist who was not willing to work with others as a team. The criticism and difficulties in staff interactions had reached such a significant level that Beth stated her goal for the coaching relationship was to determine whether to leave the ministry and return to her former career as a real estate broker.

Beth did not see herself as mean, perfectionistic, unwilling to work with a team, or too forthright. When she described herself, Beth used words like dedicated, a strong leader, effective, and someone who gets things done. Beth felt that often other staff members seemed to be capable only of envisioning and could never get the needed details defined and organized. Beth felt her true benefit to the church and its staff was her ability to be an organized thinker who got the details done well.

To begin the journey of self-awareness, Beth agreed to take the MBTI. Her self-verified type preferences included extraverted thinking with sensing, ESTJ. Characterized by Hirsch and Kise (2011) as the “Take-Charge Leader,” Beth learned that her preferences included “providing direction and focus to project and people, working toward goal completion” (Hirsch & Kise, 2011, p. 26).

As Beth began to deepen her self-awareness by exploring her MBTI preferences, she gained insight into the communication styles that caused others on staff to label her as “mean” and a perfectionist. She also found that her preferences for providing structure and direction, establishing policies and procedures, and finding the flaws and seeking to correct them contributed to the staff’s perceptions of perfectionism.

Beth began to understand at a sensory level that she was different from the rest of the staff in terms of preferences. Deeper exploration helped Beth grasp the details of her sense of “being different.” Through research I provided, Beth learned that her SJ preferences in the general US population were represented in approximately 42% of the population (Martin, 2010) but were only 29% within researched clergy populations (Oswald & Kroeger, 2002). Even more startling, the majority preference type found among clergy was actually NF at 42% (Oswald & Kroeger, 2002), a preference represented in just 16% of the US population (Martin, 2010).

The MBTI types that use intuition for data gathering and make values-based decisions prefer a very different set of approaches from Beth’s. Typically NFs prefer abstract communications, finding patterns and relationships between ideas rather than looking for facts and details as SJs prefer (Kiersey, 1998). Relationships and harmony within those relationships are central to the NFs interactions with others (Kroeger et al., 2002). The SJs focus on “telling it like it is” in a forthright manner easily causes the NF offense. The approach to leadership is also vastly different between NFs and SJs. The NF prefers collaboration and bringing others into their goals through their passion and vision, while the SJ prefers to lead from a position of authority where compliance is required and commitment is expected (Kroeger et al., 2002).

Having this information helped Beth confirm her sense that she *was* “different” in her MBTI preferences than those typically found among clergy. Beth’s deepened self-awareness and her new other-awareness caused her to realize that she needed to more fully examine her own preferences and how those preferences manifested in her behavior and interactions with others.

The outcome of this examination was deepened self-awareness of Beth’s preferences and how those preferences, in large part, differed significantly from most of the other clergy and staff at her church. As a result, Beth determined to use a more balanced approach to her communication, leadership, and decision making.

While there were times of challenge and difficulty for Beth in modifying her behavior to be more inclusive of the preferences of other people with other MBTI types, the work brought great results. Beth not only stayed in ministry, she was able to work with others on staff to reallocate her responsibilities, passing ownership of some programs to other clergy as well as working with staff members and volunteers to redesign and loosen procedures to accommodate others' preferences for communication and interaction.

Conclusion

Self-awareness is a key component of the coaching relationship (Whitmore, 2009; ICF) that enables clients to see themselves more broadly and opens up opportunities for new actions and behaviors. For clients to reach new insights and deepen self-awareness, some type of self-examination or assessment is necessary. The MBTI helps coaches facilitate clients' efforts to deepen self-awareness and broaden their perspectives. As this is accomplished, clients are able to define and achieve goals related to many different areas including communication, leadership, team building, career development, stress management, and relationships.

About the Author

Dr. Kay M. Bower, PMP, is the owner and principal consultant of Koinonia Coaching and Consulting, LLC, through which she serves individuals, small businesses and ministries that desire to achieve God's purposes with excellence through individual and team coaching, custom workshops, and interactive educational experiences. Through Koinonia Coaching and Consulting, Kay has served individuals and teams as a coach, a consultant, a trainer and a speaker. In addition, Kay has 30 years of experience working in for-profit organizations in many different roles. Kay has successfully held positions as an individual contributor, team member, team lead, project manager, group manager and director. Kay is also a published author, with articles in journals and online magazines such as *Leadership Advance Online*, *Leading Today*, the *Journal of Practical Consulting*, the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, and the *Journal of Strategic Leadership*. Inquiries regarding this article may be addressed to: kay@koinoniacoaching.com.

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