



# University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Fact Sheet-06-99

## Some Ways Sensors and Intuitives Can Accept, Respect, and Embrace Human Differences

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Have you ever compared your experience at an event with others to see where the focus of your attention was during that event? For example, some people pay attention to the sensory details of their surroundings, such as colors, textures, the design and furnishings in a room, what people are wearing, with very specific observations of many different elements. To others, these details are overlooked. They focus their experience on the personal meaning of the event, how they feel, and the symbolic aspects or essence of the event. These people are more likely to concentrate on the meaning and function of the event rather than the details of the experience. They draw abstract conclusions that are not limited to their direct observations or just what their senses tell them about the people and the event. Perceiving is a mental process by which we become aware and understand the multitude of situations and circumstances that come our way every day. The contrasting approaches described above illustrate two different but very fundamental approaches to perceiving, the “sensor” (S) and the “intuitive” (N). Neither way should be judged either right or wrong. They simply represent very different mental approaches for the way people gather

information and “size up” the various situations in their world.

These two ways of becoming aware or determining what we see in a situation represent only one aspect of what is known as personality type. Carl Jung, a prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologist, spent years looking at differences in preferred processes and approaches to living our lives and defining the basic components of personality type. The basic ideas resulting from his observations and study are summarized in the box below.

*It is the nature of humankind to live in a complex lacework of social and interpersonal relationships. Habits of mind act in combination with other innate dispositions to influence how we perceive and judge these relationships. Perceptions and judgments, in turn, promote typical, discernible expressions in behavior that tend to be consistent and enduring. The structure that explains these habits and typical behaviors is psychological type.*

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kathryn Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers, developed a

series of questions and a scale to differentiate and assist in the identification of these types. Their work was an attempt to help people understand the inherent and observable differences in human behavior that originate with differences in personality type. Their mission was to help people see differences as natural rather than deliberate attempts spawned in the dark of night to irritate you to distraction and stymie all your wonderful ideas and good work! When we observe differences in other's behaviors, there often is triggered within us a natural and common response. That is, we may see these differences as but temporary manifestations of madness, badness, ignorance, or illness. We naturally account for observed differences in behavior in terms of flaws and afflictions in other people. "Oh, why couldn't they be more like me?" Or more pointedly, "They should be more like me or see things the way I do!" Our attempts to reconstruct others can result in change, but when it is done by taking away their preferred processes and approaches, we often create a scar rather than a genuine transformation.

Our attempt here is to help people see the contributions of these two contrasting mental processes from the Myers/Briggs Personality Types. In addition, suggestions will be given to help people resolve difficulties they sometimes experience with the opposite type.

### **Sensors**

People who prefer the sensing process of perceiving situations or gathering information are immersed in the sensory experience and grounded in physical reality. They are focused on facts, experience, details, and the present. They also seek the practical application of the information and data they have accumulated. They recall events as snapshots, being quite literal and detailed. They are practical and emphasize the "bottom line." They work from facts to gain a precise understanding of the big picture, in an inductive manner. They trust experience first and are skeptical of symbols such as words. They constantly seek ever

more data and develop very keen physical senses. They sometimes get so immersed in data and the past that they fail to see new possibilities and overlook new opportunities.

#### **Sensors usually:**

- \* like precise directions
- \* enjoy films and other audiovisual presentations
- \* prefer to use and improve skills already learned
- \* focus on the past (for data) and the present
- \* work steadily with a realistic idea of how long a task will take
- \* are immersed in whatever appeals to the senses
- \* are likely to recall a large number of details accurately
- \* want material presented step-by-step leading to a practical application
- \* rely on experience instead of theory
- \* prefer things that are definite and measurable
- \* may be comfortable with routine exercises that develop skills
- \* draw on current methods to solve current problems
- \* enjoy traditions and customs
- \* accept change that simply modifies what already exists and are skeptical of wholesale overhauls

### **Intuitives**

People who prefer the intuitive process of gathering information are immersed in meaning and patterns. They focus on symbols, theory, and the future. They are concerned with possibilities that relate to the future. They tend to remember the essence of an event rather than a lot of the details. They gain confidence and a sense of knowing out of their intuition and subconscious. Rather than specifics, they love ideas and concepts. They size up a situation by what they "read

between the lines.” They often solve problems using quick leaps of insight and are drawn to things that are new and different. They work from a more deductive approach, moving from the “over-all” to the detail. They put their trust in insight, symbols, and metaphors. With a focus on new ideas, they sometimes fail to see the practicalities of bringing them to reality.

**Intuitives usually:**

- \* like tasks that require imagination
- \* need opportunities to be creative and original
- \* enjoy learning new skills more than mastering familiar ones
- \* dislike taking the time for precision
- \* focus on the future
- \* skip over facts or get them wrong
- \* need variety
- \* have a seemingly sporadic approach rather than an ordered step-by-step approach to tasks
- \* are idealistic
- \* dislike routine
- \* work in bursts of energy with slow periods in between
- \* gravitate toward large-scale transformative change rather than simple amendments to what currently exists

**Additional Contrasts**

There is a systematic difference in the way sensors and intuitives tend to take in the world. Sensors like to build to a conclusion from bits and pieces, creating a theme by assembling details and data from past experiences. They often need help formulating a design or concept. Intuitives obtain the big picture through a global assessment of information, starting with a theme and then adding detail. They need help with the means to implement a design. Sensors tend to work at a steady pace

from start to finish and when reading tend to take in every word from start to finish, preferring short articles, magazines, etc. Intuitives work in bursts of productivity and may not proceed step by step, bouncing around and skimming written material. They usually like to read books and may be absorbed in several at the same time. Sensors need specifics and details to build ideas and need to be supported in their quest for specifics. They also need to have their questions answered. Intuitives tend to ignore details to generate more ideas, wanting to know the overall concept and what is most fundamental. They need to have their intuitive leaps affirmed before they are pressed for supporting factual information. In these ways, sensors and intuitives can seem like they come from wholly different worlds, with little common ground from which to work in personal relationships. Like the thinker and feeler (see Fact Sheet 06-??), this often is a fundamental source of difficulty that can lead to conflicts in a relationship. Yet there are ways to strengthen relationships when the people involved are willing to accept the need for greater understanding, less judgment, and more compromise.

**Working Out Differences**

There are many things both sensors and intuitives can do to help and support each other in a relationship. One of the most important, however, is to begin to see the opposite process as an inherent preference and the most comfortable approach to life of that person. It does not represent a flaw but simply a difference from the mental process that you prefer. Its origin is a natural predisposition and is not born of a desire to make life difficult for you. In other words, it is important to accept the

contrasting mental process as a strength that brings balance to the relationship. For each person, the preferred process brings a sense of security, comfort, and confidence in making decisions and interacting with others. With this in mind, here are some suggestions to help address the differences that originate in these two contrasting approaches to becoming aware and determining what we see in a situation.

For sensors, it is important to understand the details and how an idea will work. In fact, they need to be convinced it will work, which is why they question first and support later. Such an approach can be experienced as a very negative, bubble bursting encounter for the intuitive. While it is important for them to have some details, they can learn to appreciate and support an idea before they understand the intricacies of how something new might actually be put in place. It also is important for sensors to compromise on change, including traditions and customs, learning to enjoy and appreciate new experiences. In addition, sensors need to appreciate that current problems do not necessarily emerge from the same historical roots and may require new and innovative conceptual approaches for their solution.

#### **For Sensors:**

- \* Appreciate the excitement of new ideas and theoretical approaches without having to know all the details.**
- \* Support a new idea before having all the details of how it will work.**
- \* Understand the joy of variety rather than focusing solely on routine and known skills**
- \* Enjoy some change in pacing of work rather than only having a steady, constant approach**

detail in making sure ideas are workable or can be realistically implemented. Such detail is important in the application, even if not always critical in the initial development of an idea or approach. In addition, there is value in not only understanding the process from concept to detail, but also the reverse. In concentrating on the details, the intuitive may reveal obstacles, inconsistencies, and/or conflicts that make a “great idea” wholly unworkable.. Thus, the intuitive’s dislike of detail may restrict the outcome of a highly desirable idea by eroding the support of those who prefer sensing and need to know the how, what, and where of implementation. In addition, there is some value in both of the preferred mental processes, which is why they exist. Understanding such contributions may be an important part of any relationship. Other ideas include:

#### **For Intuitives:**

- \* Begin to ground an idea in some detail so that it can be understood and supported by the sensor.**
- \* Appreciate the need for detail and even possibly the thirst for knowing how something will work.**
- \* Practice increasing your skills at gathering information through your senses.**
- \* Learn to enjoy a more steady pace, which can be less demanding and even exhausting at times.**

#### **Other Resources:**

Berens, Linda V., & Nardi, Dario. (1999). The 16 personality types: Descriptions for self discovery. Huntington Beach, CA: Telos Publications.

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