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*Develop Organizations
through People!*



| Friedbert Gay

Personal strength is no coincidence - Part 1



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Are people with “strong personality” just “darlings of fortune” – you know, born lucky or with the right type of genes? No. We can all develop personal strength. If you understand yourself, you can shape your life so that you optimally realize your personal capabilities and live in harmony with yourself. And if you understand others better, you can win them over to your ideas and successfully cooperate with them. Personal strength is thus no coincidence but the result of a clear view of oneself and others. How can you improve your view? This article will explain just that.

Who has a strong personality? Angela Merkel? Without her personal strengths she certainly wouldn't have made it all the way to becoming German chancellor. Perhaps Ferdinand Piëch, the cool-headed, tactically brilliant chairman of Volkswagen's supervisory board. In the beginning, he successfully defended the company against Porsche's takeover ambitions only to turn the tables around at the end. Thomas Gottschalk, the TV talk show host, who attracts millions of viewers Saturday evenings by casually chatting away? Or Mother Theresa who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her selfless work in the slums of Calcutta? Without a doubt, people would say that she too has a strong personality. However, imagine for a brief moment that Thomas Gottschalk would take over the job of German chancellor, Ferdinand Piëch would host the Saturday evening show, Mother Theresa would head an international company, and Angela Merkel would serve in a hospice for the poor. Overall, this would be a rather alarming picture.

Even extremely successful people who attract others through their personal strengths obviously have “weak” sides. However, they have found a suitable environment – a job that allows them to put their strengths to optimal use and one in which their weaknesses are of less consequence. Most likely, they worked hard on themselves at times when their goals and the situation demanded. Angela Merkel is also a good example of this: If you look at press photos from the early 1990s, you hardly recognize the cosmopolitan stateswoman she is now in the almost shy face of the emerging politician she was back then.



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Every person has “strengths” as well as “weaknesses”. I have intentionally put quotation marks around these words because in certain contexts every apparent strength can also prove to be a weakness, and vice versa – for example, when the cool analytical person is suddenly expected to cover the Saturday evening entertainment show. For this reason, I prefer to speak of “shortcomings” or “limitations”.

People with a strong personality:

- know their own strengths as well as their shortcomings
- seek an environment (a profession, a job) in which they can put their strengths to use
- accept their counterpart’s “otherness” and deal with others constructively
- seek opportunities for personal development.

Personality models help people to develop a clear view of themselves and train them in understanding human nature. A tried and tested model for better understanding yourself and others is the persolog® Personality Factor Model. It was developed by Dr. John G. Geier and is based on the behavioral dimensions D (Dominant), I (Influencing), S (Steady), and C (Cautious). For two decades, it has been used at a number of companies for management and team development as well as to optimize telephone behavior, sales meetings, time management and conflict resolution. The model systematizes the variety of human behavior tendencies without oversimplifying them; it is also easy for non-experts to understand and use – a fact confirmed by more than 60,000 analyses per year.



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Understand yourself and others better: The four behavioral styles

Reflect for just a moment: What went through your head when you picked up a book recently?

1. Did you impatiently thumb through it while simultaneously wondering, “Which article is of use to me?” because you hate wasting time and want to see concrete results quickly?
2. What if the authors that piqued your curiosity – “Who exactly has written this article?” Did you look at the photos to see whose articles sounded interesting and then read a bit here and there until you remembered that you actually needed to check your e-mails again and make a telephone call?
3. Did you look for familiar names and take your time to decide “What more would I like to learn?” and then decide that you weren’t in the right mood and might better start reading on the weekend?
4. Did you carefully study the table of contents first to get an overview and preselect the articles that appeared interesting and then – as a third step – after taking a look at the summaries, circle those you want to thoroughly work through?

The four types of reader described above reflect the behavioral tendencies on which the persolog® Personality Factor Model is based:

1. Dominant: “I know what I want!”

People with a dominant behavior tendency are self-confident, determined and assertive. They are characterized by their strong willpower, tackling challenges and actively shaping their environment. The flip side of the coin is that people of this behavior type are not very considerate of others’ feelings and needs. This behavior tendency is highly pronounced in you if you strongly agree with the following statements:

- I find it easy to make decisions.
- I enjoy taking “command”.
- Results are what matter.
- I strive for success.
- Sometimes you have to talk straight.

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2. Influencing: “Together we are strong!”

People with the influencing behavior tendency are lively, optimistic and talkative. They are outgoing and friendly when meeting others; they like enthusing other people and getting them roused. They are not afraid of showing emotions. The flip side of the coin is that they often start too many projects in their exuberance and then don't finish them off. They may sometimes appear superficial to others with all their enthusiasm. This behavior tendency is highly pronounced in you if you strongly agree with the following statements.

- I like having a lot of people around me.
- I can get others enthused.
- A good mood is important to me.
- It's great to accomplish things together.
- You've got to be prepared to turn a blind eye sometimes.

3. Steady: “It would be better if we took a calm approach to that ...”

People with a steady behavior tendency are calm, reliable and cooperative. They value predictable processes and a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. They perform their tasks reliably and with concentration. The flip side of the coin is that steadiness is often coupled with a dread of changes and a lack of initiative. People with this behavior tendency have a difficult time dealing with conflicts. This behavior tendency is highly pronounced in you if you strongly agree with the following statements:

- I am sociable and willing to help people.
- I respect the needs of others.
- You can achieve a lot with patience and friendliness.
- It is easy for me to put myself in someone else's place.
- You should calmly weigh things before starting them.

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4. Cautious: “Whatever I do, I do it right!”

People with the cautious behavior tendency are orderly, disciplined and tactical. They follow orders and norms and perform their duties with exemplary diligence. Structured processes are important to them. The flip side of the coin is that cautious people tend to get lost in the details; it’s hard for them to let go and to delegate and sometimes they are overly cautious. This behavior tendency is highly pronounced in you if you strongly agree with the following statements:

- I have a sense of duty.
- I adhere to standards.
- I strive for perfection.
- Mistakes annoy me.
- I demand a great deal from myself.

It is very likely that you will see yourself in strong agreement with the example statements of different behavior tendencies but with a dominance in certain areas. Every person possesses something of all four behavior styles albeit to varying degrees. Which of the statements would you agree with if you could choose no more than six?

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A lot of people have two strong tendencies – that is, they primarily behave in a combinational style of dominant-influencing, steady-cautious, cautious-dominant, etc. Some people even exhibit a trio of tendencies while others are strongly characterized by a single style. Of course, these brief self-assessments are not equivalent to a comprehensive personality factor profile. What I aim to do is convey a basic understanding of the four behavioral dimensions D (Dominant), I (Influencing), S (Steady) and C (Cautious) to you. To this end, it's very helpful to keep the original basis of the four styles in mind. As early as the 1920s, William Moulton Marston was intensively engaged in the study of human emotions and behavior. Marston determined two main differences between people:

- People consider themselves to be either stronger or weaker than their environment, and
- They perceive their environment as either friendly or hostile towards them.

Dr. John Geier used these results as a basis to develop the persolog® perception and behavior/ action model, which served to systematize assessments of the four behavioral styles.

- Individuals who perceive that they are stronger than their environment tend to actively shape it (> dominance or influencing).
- Those who perceive themselves as weaker than their environment tend to react more cautiously to it (> steadiness or caution).
- Those who perceive their environment as “hostile” (strenuous, stressful), try to force submission (> through dominance or caution).
- Those who perceive their environment as “friendly” (pleasant, non-stressful), try to act in harmony with it (> influencing or steadiness).



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The four behavior styles can thus be represented as quadrants:

		PERCEPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT	
		AS STRESSFUL	AS NONSTRESSFUL
REACTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT	ASSERTIVE	<p>D ominant</p>	<p>I nfluencing</p>
	NONASSERTIVE	<p>C autious</p>	<p>S teady</p>

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Underlying the behavior styles are thus basic attitudes and patterns of reaction, which are conditioned in part by one's upbringing, role models, experience and genetic disposition. Think for a few moments back to our initial example: It surely isn't difficult now for you to ascribe a prevailing behavior tendency to the famous people mentioned above from Angela Merkel to Thomas Gottschalk. And if you mentally go through your colleagues at the company, this fact may well shed a different light on many a case of friction. Your "pedantic" colleague who insists on planning and a structured approach is following her very own style just as is "Joe Go-getter", who immediately gets all fired up about new ideas. The differences in the behavioral styles become tangible, particularly when it comes to dealing with change. When I give presentations, I like to explain these differences using the example of how people react to a relatively boring change step – a freshly renovated and newly furnished open-plan office. Here's how it goes:

- Colleague D** (with a clearly critical undertone): "Okay. That needed to be done years ago. Let's step back and have a look at it first. I see they've bought the cheapest furniture again!"
- Colleague I** (friendly and hopeful): "Great! Have you guys noticed – everything is new!? Where am I going to sit?!"
- Colleague S** (confused and aghast): "Oh no, they have ruined everything. It'll take forever before I learn where everything is now! The whole routine is gone now – this is a disaster..."
- Colleague C** (scrutinizing the scene and wagging a finger): "Does the management know about this? Was this carefully planned in advance?"



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I am just as I am.

The persolog[®] Personality Factor Model helps you to be more aware of yourself and others. So far so good. However, the point is not to neatly sort people into one of four “pigeonholes”, including many a mixed or borderline type. To avoid doing this initially may demand more understanding from you on a daily basis. For example, if you (as a dynamic-determined personality type) decide that you are no longer going to regard Mr. Smith from the accounting department as a “pedantic” person but as a cautious “C” type. However, as soon as you “immediately” need a few figures from him for an important project, he will fall back on his customary explanation (“It’s impossible to get them that quickly. First I need to . . . and anyway, have you got the request form filled out and signed?”). At this point at the latest you will most likely react just as impatiently as you did in the past.

Recognizing your own behavior tendencies and those of others is one thing. Using them constructively is another: How can people improve cooperation without giving up who they are? How can you effectively work together with others and achieve targeted results with less friction loss? These are in fact the exciting questions. They quickly lead to a very basic point: Are we as we are or can we change? Paradoxically, most people expect the “others” to change, but they themselves are not prepared to do so. If Mr. Smith in the accounting department were just a little less “pedantic” and would react just a little quicker, everything would be okay. From Mr. Smith’s point of view, everything would be fine if others would just plan a little bit and approach things as he does by following the procedures.



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Where is the way out of this dead-end street of each party expecting the other to change? Imagine for just a moment the following two scenarios:

(1) You have just successfully concluded an important project – acquired a key customer, convinced management of an idea, already achieved your annual target . . . You are fit as a fiddle, well rested, in a good mood and very optimistic that the current plan will also be successful. You enter Mr. Smith's office to ask for the figures you need as quickly as possible.

■ How is the conversation likely to go?

■ How will you act? How will Mr. Smith react? And how will you deal with a reluctant reaction?

(2) You have just suffered defeat – an important customer has surprisingly defected, management continues to be against one of your ideas, you may as well forget your bonus this year . . . You are tired, on edge and, as can be imagined, in a bad mood. You now want to finally get the new project underway so that it doesn't go wrong too. You enter Mr. Smith's office to ask him for the figures you need for the project as soon as possible.

■ How is this conversation likely to go?

■ How will you act? How will Mr. Smith react? And how will you deal with a reluctant reaction?



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Is it conceivable that in the first scenario you would muster up patience and friendliness, prepare yourself a little more for Mr. Smith, bearing in mind how he is, and almost effortlessly achieve an agreement both parties could live with? And that in the second scenario you would react gruffly and apply pressure with the highly likely result that Mr. Smith really would react stubbornly. The well known psychologist Kurt Lewin was one of the first in the field to draw attention to that fact human behavior is not purely a reflex of our character but the result of an interaction between our personality and our environment. We are not simply “as we are”; rather our behavior is the result of a complex interplay in which our counterpart and our current situation play an important role.

This is nothing new to most people. “You ought to see my boss at the tennis club! He’s like a different person there!” or “My colleague Ms. Jones is actually quite nice. But lately when we were under so much pressure, she acted as if friendships didn’t matter at all!” You hear such observations time and time again in daily life. People react to their environment and adapt their behavior. In difficult times we fall back on our inner convictions of what is essentially important to us and what characterizes us. The persolog® Personality Factor Profile reveals not only one’s public self-concept but also private self-concept. The former refers to how we project ourselves externally, what we consider appropriate in our professional environment or private life because this image corresponds to social expectations. The latter refers to how we react spontaneously, especially when under pressure. In these reactions, our personal convictions, which were formed very early in the development of our emotional world, prevail more strongly. When a healthy person’s private self-concept emerges, he or she does not undergo a radical Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde-like transformation. Instead it is as if certain contours of that person’s personality appear more strongly defined while others appear less pronounced.

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