

Four different types of employees . . .

My father's father, Adolph Valentine Boschee, came to the United States in the fall of 1884 at the age of seven. He and his relatives wintered in South Dakota, then migrated north. Young Adolph spent summer days collecting buffalo chips from the prairie for the family to use as construction material and burn for heat when the seasons changed. Snow piled so high during one of their first winters in McIntosh County, North Dakota, the family had to dig a tunnel beneath the massive drifts to get from their home to the barn to make sure their animals survived.

Adolph married Christina Krein December 11, 1900. He was 23, she 17. They farmed for a time before moving into the village of Zeeland in 1904. Then, in 1906, Adolph became part of an extraordinary team.

The village had been created in 1902 but did not become officially incorporated until 1906, when my grandfather and two others became the members of the first town Board.

It wasn't unusual for towns to spring up on the Dakota prairies -- but there was something special about this one.



The members of the founding Board were of three different faiths: A Catholic (Frank Kraft), a Lutheran (Adolph Boschee) and a Jew (Adolph Feinstein).

No other town in the Dakotas could make such a claim to diversity, and for nearly three decades Zeeland thrived. In 1926 it had one of the highest per capita incomes of any city in the nation, most of it tied up in wheat.

Six years later the government located the rail station six miles away and Zeeland began to wither. By then, though, Adolph and Christina (pictured here in 1952) had produced 13 children, ten of whom lived to adulthood. My father Arthur Reinhold was number seven and I spent glorious summer vacations in Zeeland from the late '40s thru the mid-'50s.

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Teamwork is essential to the success of any social enterprise, and the people who study organizational development have known for years that healthy organizations must concentrate

simultaneously on four interlocking tasks: Productivity, process, employee satisfaction, and shared goals.

But that also means each company must have four different types of employees on its team. For the sake of convenience, let's give them names and describe their roles:

- **Achievers** are responsible for results -- for getting things *done*
- **Agitators** are responsible for getting things done *right*
- **Negotiators** are responsible for resolving interpersonal conflicts
- **Navigators** are responsible for making sure everybody is rowing in the same direction

These are four very different personality types, with operating styles that are frequently at odds -- and it can be helpful for CEOs and their employees to better understand why their fellow staff members act the way they do, especially when things go awry.

I first came across this organizational development model in 1976 when a group of psychologists gathered 50 of us in a single room. Without telling us why we were there, they immediately gave us a written, multiple choice test. Based on our scores, we were then sent to different corners of the room.

At that point, the psychologists described each of the four operating styles -- and we realized all the people in one corner were Achievers, all the people in another were Agitators, and so on . . . not one of us was in the wrong place!

Researchers have spent decades trying to analyze the psychological roots of the four different personality types, the cues to which they respond and how they behave as a result. Here's a very short summary of what they've come up with (and perhaps a way for you to recognize yourself and some of your colleagues):

- Achievers are constantly trying to meet the *explicit* expectations of others, and it's a perilous existence, filled with constant performance anxiety. They believe they must be *perfect*, because their self-esteem is entirely wrapped up in the opinions of others. They can do 99 things correctly, but make one mistake and they feel like a failure.

Because they need to be perfect, Achievers will frequently "act out" when their decisions are challenged: They become rule-driven, dogmatic, won't admit mistakes, ignore data and may appear "cold" and unapproachable.

What Achievers need more than anything else is recognition for the things they do well -- and constant reassurance that one mistake does not make them a bad person.

- The primary mandate for Agitators is to meet the unspoken expectations of others. Don't ask me how they know what those expectations might be -- I'm an Achiever, not an Agitator, and tapping into the *implicit* expectations of others is extraordinarily difficult for people like me.

For example, I once served as second-in-command to an Agitator. He and I would attend the same Board meeting. When it ended, I'd come out with a long list of things the Board members had specifically asked us to do. But my boss would then spend the next hour telling me what was *really* going on in the room. He'd been focused on the unspoken messages passing among the Board members -- messages completely imperceptible to me.

Don't ask me how he did it, but I've seen other Agitators do the same thing.

Of course, that's the upside of being an Agitator. The downside is that any time they believe the underlying structure of the company is being threatened -- that people are ignoring necessary steps in the process -- they feel overwhelmed and, in psychological terms, begin making "noise": They displays mood swings, appear aimless, move to one pole or the other, seem to have no boundaries, and generally act out in ways that force others to pay attention to *them* and (hopefully) provide a distraction until their colleagues eventually realize something's been overlooked.

It's often personally painful and unproductive behavior for the Agitators themselves, but they're just doing their "job" -- and what they need most from others is a recognition that something's gone amiss and needs to be fixed. They need to feel that the process has been honored and people are doing things the right way.

- Negotiators are less focused on getting things done or getting them done right. They're more concerned with the current work environment -- especially the one-to-one relationships among the various employees.

Negotiators are generally easy-going and fun to be with -- and often the ones who make others feel at home. But Negotiators are deeply threatened by interpersonal conflict, whether they're directly involved or not. They may sense conflict escalating between two of their colleagues, but, more often, because they are so accessible, they become a magnet for people who voice complaints or frustrations. When that happens, they try to help by placing things in a larger context, searching for perspectives, connections or opportunities that can resolve the conflicts.

But if they don't find those links, they begin to shut down their emotions, withdraw, and appear either ambivalent, uncaring or stubborn.

What they need are options, alternatives that can help them restore the fraying relationships. Without them, they feel confined and trapped.

- Navigators leave productivity, process and employee satisfaction to others. They are focused instead on the big picture, the company's overall purposes and goals. They think in terms of outcomes, total systems, conclusions. That perspective makes them invaluable because they help others keep their eyes on the prize rather than blinkered by daily conflicts and crises.

Navigators are typically impulsive and highly demonstrative, with warmth and closeness expressed openly. But when things begin to unravel and they believe the company's sense of purpose is imperiled, their natural traits become counter-productive. They rush to make sure everybody stays headed in the same direction -- but they frequently act prematurely and ignore important pieces of the puzzle, glossing over what seem to them just temporary problems. Then, when things don't get better, their behavior becomes increasingly dramatic and their desperation mounts.

Fundamentally, Navigators are constantly seeking reassurance that "we're all in this together": They need to feel part of a group that has clear purposes and goals, with everybody working in harmony.

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This sort of analysis may seem too touchy-feely for some of you, but how can it hurt to better understand what drives your colleagues and why they act the way they do? The four personality types differ in so many ways: How they define their responsibilities, how they make sense of things, how they measure their self-esteem, what it means when they "act out," what they need to restore their sense of self-worth . . .

It's almost as if they live in different worlds -- but worlds worth exploring in the service of a healthy social enterprise.