

Enhancing The Lessons of Experience:

Step 1: Knowing Some Things About Yourself

A May 05, 2010 *Management Forum Series* presentation by

Dr. Robert Ginnett

Synopsis by Rod Cox

“A study of the traits of leaders from 1900 to 1950 reveals that there is no set of inborn traits to differentiate them from non-leaders. Nothing from a statistically significant standpoint shows up in the trait arena. Not intelligence, not charisma, not physical height, not bravery.”

Yet nearly everyone can name a great coach, leader or mentor who made a difference, as well as one that clearly didn't. Why do some stand out as leaders, and others don't? Ginnett argues that leadership is not traits: it's behavior. And his studies show that leader/mentors usually share two invaluable assets: first, lots of deep experiences; and second, the ability to use reflections and learnings (including understanding what works and doesn't work with different personalities) that tie these experiences to leadership outcomes.

In this *Management Forum Series* presentation, Ginnett uses the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a tool to get a valid map for both the leader and those led. His goal: actionable leadership behaviors that are useful in improving team decision-making and intercepting stress before it adversely impacts team performance. Ginnett focuses on improving leadership potential at both individual, team, and organizational levels.

Most everyone has experienced a team that is struggling. Using MBTI as an insightful tool, Ginnett shows some ways to diagnose problems at the individual team level which is the first step toward improving team leadership skills.

Robert Ginnett is an organizational psychologist specializing in the leadership of high performance teams and organizations. Dr. Ginnett develops programs tailored to client needs, including workshops, diagnoses, and interventions. He has worked with hundreds of organizations including Novartis, FMC, Prudential, Mars, GlaxoSmithKlein, Boston Scientific, Daimler Benz, NASA, the Defense and Central Intelligence Agencies, the National Security Agency, United and Delta Airlines, Textron, and the United States Army, Navy and Air Force. He has also been a Senior Fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership, and is a tenured professor at the United States Air Force Academy.

Ginnett served in numerous line and staff positions in the Air Force including leadership of an 875-man combat force in the Vietnam War where he received the Gallantry Cross, the Air Medal and the Bronze Star. As a researcher for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, his work focused at the Kennedy Space Center in the post-Challenger period. Ginnett carries numerous educational degrees: MBO, Master of Arts, Master of Philosophy, and a Ph.D. from Yale University. He is co-author of the best-selling textbook, *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, now in its 6th edition with the 7th edition in press.

This synopsis includes concepts, observations and quotes from Ginnett's Portland, Oregon *Management Forum Series* presentation and from Forum attendees.

The Three Circles of Leadership

As Ginnett points out, anyone in a position of leadership needs to know things about **himself or herself** as well as about the **followers**. *“Leadership behavior needs to be visible to those led.”* In addition, leaders need to know about the **situation**. *“Note what’s happened in the business of airline travel in just the last ten years.”*

Because organizational behavior is constructed around individuals, groups, teams and the organization as a whole, uniting these “three circles of leadership – the leader, the followers, and the situation – is required to create an experience which can be measured in terms of successful behaviors:



“There is no such thing as a leader without followers or situations. Successful leadership happens at the intersection of these three circles.” (For more about these, see *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience, 5th Edition* by Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy. Resource information is at the end of this synopsis.)

Thus, from an individual perspective, a strong leader knows some things about herself as well as her team, and she’s aware of how individual preferences – both hers and those of the team members – can affect the relationship and the outcomes. These preferences have a decided affect on how people approach their work, and how they interact with other team members. Yet, people often conceal their true preferences in a workplace setting; uncovering the important preferences or “things” can be a challenge.

How can a leader get past this barrier?

“One of the best psychological instruments around – in terms of validity as well as experience – is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. MBTI isn’t about intelligence, nor is it about pathology. It’s about preferences. It’s also the most widely used (and abused, by those who don’t understand it.) Think of MBTI as tool that reveals our personal-approach-to-the-world software/preference;; just as right-handedness and left-handedness reveal our personal use-of-hand software/preference, our personal preferences have a huge influence on how we approach situations as individuals and as a team.”

To make sure that *Management Forum Series* attendees are clearly informed, Dr. Ginnett took considerable time to walk the attendees through terminology and concepts as shown on the following pages, answering questions as they arose.

MBTI Dimensions

Our MBTI type is the software working in conjunction with our “hard wiring.” This hard-wiring is very important. Imagine having a battery, a “life energy cell,” that requires periodic charging. The battery is the hardware. The MBTI helps us understand what charges it (the software) from four dimensions or perspectives.

MBTI information is presented via a dichotomous either/or scale (as opposed to a continuum). There is no right or wrong, just preferences:

Extroversion / Introversion: Your most natural energy orientation

People have an innate drive toward gaining or regaining energy. For some, this energy comes from the outer world (**E**xtraverted); for others, from the inner world (**I**ntroverted). Extraversion and introversion are natural drives that are different but complementary sides of our nature: they take the lead in personality development and play a dominant role in our behavior.

Sensing / Intuition: Your most natural orientation to reality.

Determining what is real is also a strong drive. Many people prefer a tangible approach (**S**ensing), noticing the sensory details of the present, and categorizing, organizing, and storing the specific provable data. Others prefer a non-tangible approach (**i**Ntuition) which seeks to understand, interpret and form overall patterns, speculating on possibilities including forecasting the future.

Thinking / Feeling: Your preference for making decisions and choices.

Some people prefer a systematic, conclusive, objective approach (**T**hinking) when they make decisions. Others prefer a more subjective global approach based on their likes and dislikes as well as the impact of the decision on people and values (**F**eeling).

Judging / Perceiving: Your orientation towards the outside world.

You may be someone who likes organizing your surroundings, being prepared, and reaching closure (**J**udging). Or you may prefer taking the outside world as it comes, adopting and adapting flexibly and open-endedly (**P**erceiving).

The following page gives more detail.

<p>Energizing: where you get your energy and how you prefer to handle it</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EXTRAVERSION</p> <p>Externally energized. Preference for drawing energy from (and giving back to) the outer world of people, activities, and things. Motivated by interactions, and may feel deprived when these are cut off. Enjoy variety and change in people relationships. Act first, think/reflect later.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INTROVERSION</p> <p>Internally energized. Preference for drawing energy from (and retaining) the inner world of ideas, emotions, and impressions. Regularly require “private time” to recharge batteries. Mind is sometimes so active it is “closed” to outside world. Prefer one-to-one communication and friendships. Think/reflect first, then act.</p>
<p>Perceiving: the kinds of data you focus on; how you prefer to gain a sense of reality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">SENSING</p> <p>Tangible. Preference for taking in present information through the five senses, and noticing what is actual, measurable, and tactile. Reality based: focus on “what is” as well as the here-and-now. “Prove it to me.” A “today” time focus. Practical solutions. Improvise from past experiences. Like clear, concrete information, and dislike guessing when facts are fuzzy.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INTUITION</p> <p>Intangible. Preference for taking in future information through a sixth-sense. Possibility based: focus on “what might be.” Mentally live in the future using imagination and creating/inventing new possibilities. Imaginative and conceptual. A “future” time focus. Improvise from theoretical understanding. Comfortable with ambiguous, fuzzy data, and with questioning its meaning.</p>
<p>Deciding: the preferred basis of making your decisions</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THINKING</p> <p>Tough-minded, analytical, factual, logical. Preference for organizing and structuring information to decide in a detached, logical, rational, systematic, objective way. Instinctively search for facts and logic. Naturally notice tasks and work to be accomplished. Often provide objective and critical analysis. Accept conflicts as natural and normal.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FEELING</p> <p>Compassionate, human, aesthetic, subjective. Preference for organizing and structuring information to decide in an attached, subjective, personal, people, values-oriented way. In making decisions, instinctively employ personal feelings and impact on people. Sensitive to people needs and reactions. Seek consensus. Unsettled by conflict and disharmony.</p>
<p>Living: your preferred approach to the external world</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">JUDGING</p> <p>Structured. Preference for living a planned and organized life, being prepared. Close-ended. Plan before moving into action. Focus on completing meaningful segments before moving on. Dislike mixing work and play. Like to keep ahead of deadlines. Naturally use targets, dates and routines to manage life at work and at home.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PERCEIVING</p> <p>Fluid. Preference for living a spontaneous and flexible life, dealing with things as they come. Open-ended. Comfortable moving into action without a plan: plan-on-the-go. Like to mix work and play. Work best close to the deadline. Instinctively avoid commitments which interfere with flexibility, freedom and variety.</p>

The 16 MBTI Personality Types

The graph below shows the relative placement of each type, including the approximate percentage of each type in the American population. The four letters in black indicate, in order, the Dominant, Auxiliary, Tertiary and Inferior cognitive functions of each type; in other words, from most frequent to least frequent, the relative frequency of use and importance of that cognitive function within the type. Note that cognitive functions are always a combination of the center two letters (the most influential letters) in any personality type.

ISTJ (11.6%) S T F N	ISFJ (13.8%) S F T N	INFJ (1.5%) N F T s	INTJ (2.1%) N T F s
ISTP (5.4%) T S N F	ISFP (8.8%) F S N T	INFP (4.3%) F N S T	INTP (3.3%) T N S F
ESTP (4.3%) S T F N	ESFP (8.5%) S F T N	ENFP (8.1%) N F T s	ENTP (3.2%) N T F s
ESTJ (8.7%) T S F N	ESFJ (12.3%) S F N T	ENFJ (2.4%) F N S T	ENTJ (1.8%) T N S F

These dominances are typical under normal situations. But what happens when the situation becomes abnormal, when we are tense and under stress?

In the Grip

Ever feel that you’re losing it? That in the heat of the moment, you are becoming someone quite unlike your normal self?

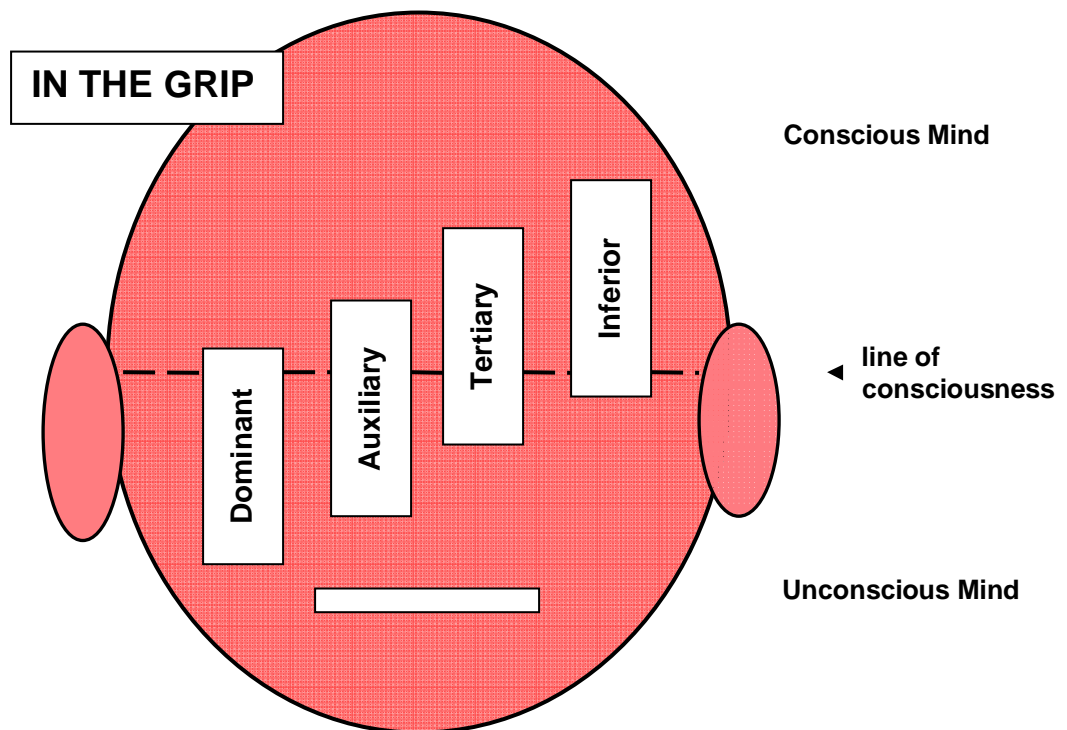
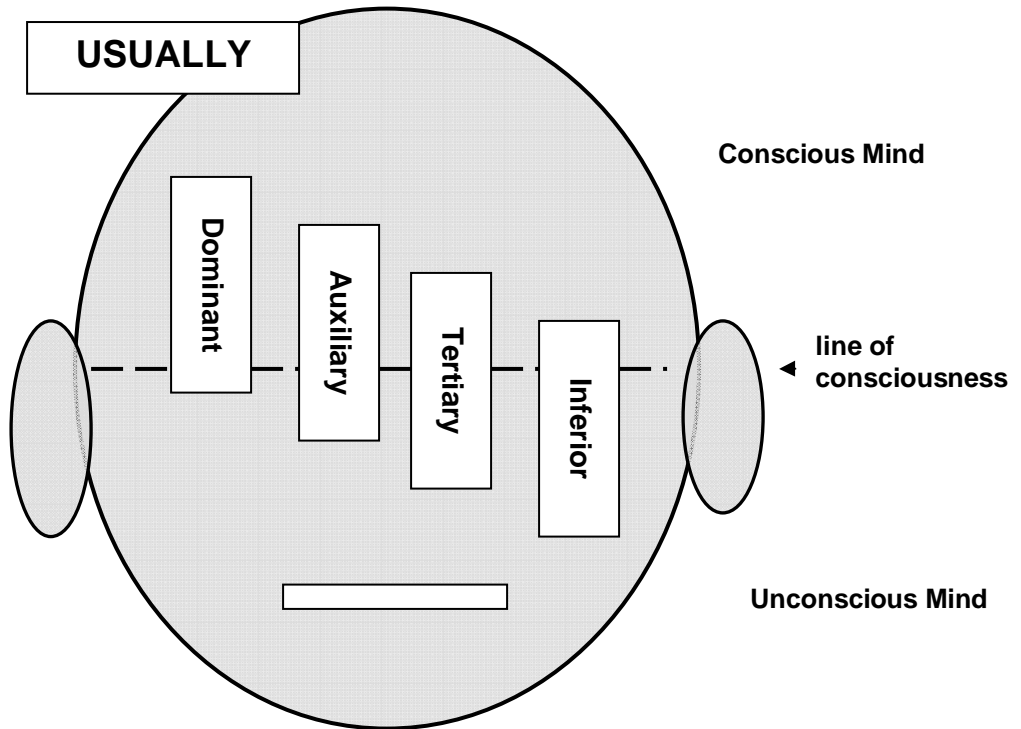
“In the Grip is about the out-of-character selves we all encounter from time to time, particularly in response to fatigue and stress. . . (This) tends to alarm us because of its Jekyll and Hyde character. Do these occurrences mean we are psychologically weak, emotionally unstable, perhaps even a little crazy?”

In the Grip explains our seemingly aberrant, abnormal experiences of ourselves and others as predictable, adaptive, and necessary expressions of our normal personalities. Knowing this . . . enables us to see them as temporary episodes from which we can benefit. We need not worry that we, or spouse, or friend, our boss, or our co-workers are coming apart at the seams or emotionally disturbed. Instead, we can appreciate and use the new and unique information we gain about ourselves and others.”

Naomi L. Quenk

In the two models on the following page, note how the cognitive functions reverse themselves “when the heat is on.”

“Leadership isn’t traits: it’s behavior. It’s what the leader does with the followers.”

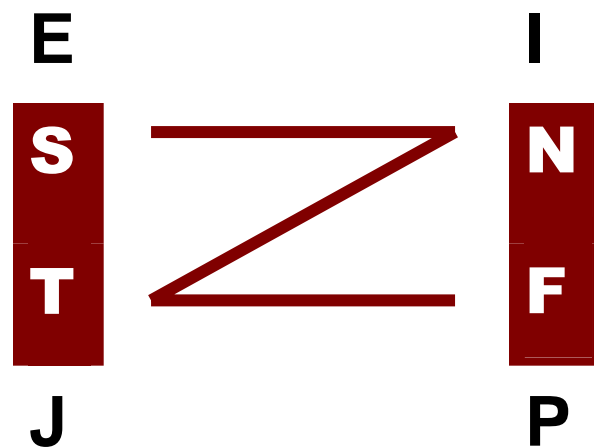


What implications does “in the grip” have for leaders? And what are some tangible ways a leader can find positive use for “in the grip” behaviors?

The Z Model

MBTI is especially good at transcending individual / team-group / organizational levels because it doesn’t require new languages at each level. It emphasizes the necessity of diversity “done right”, and of improving performance by having some of each type represented on the team. Ginnett noted *“If any individual does his 100% best, 100% of the time, then the team is blocked.”* Thus, team leaders are entrusted with building a culture that pulls selectively, cooperatively and diversely from each team member.

As previously mentioned, of the four letters in any MBTI type, the two in the middle are called cognitive functions. Said another way, they are our core personality elements. From a team leader’s perspective, they also provide a sequenced guideline for attacking nearly any team problem. The most useful sequence for effective decision making is S > N > T > F, as seen below.



Consider the challenges faced by survivors of a jungle air crash. They must first collect data and assess the situation (**S**); they must then figure out possible options (**N**); pick a first action to focus on (**T**); and then check to make sure everyone is on board (**F**) before implementation. Organizations are typically horrible at this crucial final step. If no one wants to go along, *“the decision is doomed so make a habit of checking to see if people are behaviorally committed to the outcome.”* As Ginnett noted with a smile, *“this same process works in more mundane situations, too.”*

This is not to say that a simple formula will always work. Teams are incredibly complex so any good team leader must also pay attention to:

- authority
- systems
- group dynamics
- knowledge and skills
- composition
- information systems
- strategy
- talks
- values and attitudes
- interpersonal behavior
- interests and motivators
- team building
- norms
- control systems

Summary: Four Behaviors of Effective Team Leaders

In conclusion, Ginnett illustrated the behaviors that leaders across industries are using to create effective teams and outcomes.

1. Spend time up front creating the team.

The team is there to do the work and that requires diversity. What strengths are needed? What does each team member bring? Ask, “why would I let them touch the task if they haven’t learned how to work as a team.” The idea is to start slow but finish fast.

2. Stay calm when the going gets tough.

This is a lot easier to say than to do. As you’ve learned, when things are tough, when people (including yourself) are “In The Grip,” usual approaches are likely to be turned on their heads. It may be helpful to remember the 10-80-10 rule. 10% of people are naturally calm. They don’t need to be told to take action; they just do it. 80% are susceptible to being led. Absent leadership, they may be statues, but they can be trained to take appropriate action if effectively led. And 10% of people actively behave improperly; they can’t be trained or led and they need to be removed from the team.

3. Create an environment for learning from mistakes.

The goal is to not make the same mistake twice. A good leader admits to liability for his mistakes. *“Slow down to basically recreate the team and fix mistakes before moving forward.”* The question to ask: *“what could I have done better,”* crossing boundaries to get input from each team member. *“If a team member is regularly eating the team up, get rid of him.”*

4. Develop team members through effective coaching.

A great coach helps team members predict the future. This requires knowing how to increase performance. Pay attention to all that being done “right.” Studies show that people feel fairly treated in the workplace if they get positive feedback at a rate of 4:1; i.e., if the positive feedback is 80% of the total feedback.

In summing up, Ginnett noted the contrasting patterns of an ineffective leader:

- Promoting a one-man team, usually himself, usually a task expert. “I’m in charge, and I’m perfect.”
- Dodging his role as an authority figure and not taking charge.
- Missing the personality component. If a leader is interpersonally incompetent, the team will find ways to avoid him.
- Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a leader who, when In The Grip, works counter to his usual approach.

Executive Forum recommended reading:

- ***Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience***, 5th Edition. Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy, 594 pages. ISBN: 0390560294. Available at college bookstores as well as McGraw-Hill Higher Education eBookstore.
- ***In the Grip: Understanding Type, Stress, and the Inferior Functions*** by Naomi L. Quenk. This highly informative 50-page booklet *“is about the out-of-character selves we all encounter from time to time, particularly in response to fatigue and stress.”* Booklet # 6180. Available from Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.
- ***Introduction to Type and Teams*** by Elizabeth Hirsh, Katherine W. Hirsh, and Sandra Krebs Hirsh. 52 pages. Great information about each type: what they contribute, how they may irritate team members, how they may be irritated by team members, and how they can maximize their effectiveness. Booklet #6998, Consulting Psychologists Press.
- ***Gifts Differing*** by Isabel Briggs Myers. *“The book explains the many practical applications of the MBTI typological model. It also suggests how different combinations of these characteristics tend to influence the ways people perceive the world and how they both respond to and interact with it. Type tables show how type preferences tend to correlate with occupational interests. Profiles of the sixteen types also suggest how people of each type tend to act and relate to people with other type dynamics.”* Original edition 1980; Reprint edition 1995, Davies-Black Publishing, 248 pages, [ISBN 089106074X](https://www.daviesblack.com/ISBN-089106074X)
- [wikipedia.org/wiki/myers_briggs_type_indicator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/myers_briggs_type_indicator) A well-annotated series of discussions about MBTI history, concepts, and usages.