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# Can Your Personality Get You Hired or Fired?

Personality Assessments Have Become a Big Part of the Hiring Process

By TORY JOHNSON



**May 3, 2006** — Personality tests have been around for more than a century, but employers are using them now more than ever when hiring. The main reason: to select the best possible candidates and reduce turnover, which costs a company between a quarter- to one-and-a-half times the departing worker's salary.

Even though the word "test" implies pass or fail, there's no such thing in personality assessments. There's no right or wrong, no numerical score. Instead, these tools assess our "soft" skills — personality types, strengths, styles and preferences.

More than 2,500 types of personality tests are used today, and they generally fall into two distinct categories for employment purposes: those used for selecting and hiring new workers and those used for developing and advancing existing staffers.

Last week I took two of these tests: the California Psychological Inventory, which is popular in hiring because it helps predict how an employee might interact with other people, and the Myers-Briggs, which is the gold standard for assessing preferences and styles useful for worker

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Tory Johnson is "Good Morning America's" workplace contributor. (ABC News)

development.

A confession: I was incredibly nervous before starting the online assessments. I was fearful of the unknown. What if the tests revealed weaknesses I wasn't aware of? My mind wandered every which way.

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But as I dived into the 350-plus questions between the two assessments, all of that fear dissipated. I very quickly realized it's all based on my opinions, with no right or wrong.

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CPP.com, a leading publisher and administer of many of these tests, gave permission to share some of the questions I had to answer on each of the two tests I took. These are no by means mini tests but rather an illustrative sample of items that appear in each test.

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**From Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Instrument, by Katherine C. Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers:**

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**Are you inclined to:**

- A) value sentiment more than logic, or
- B) value logic more than sentiment?

**Do you prefer to:**

- A) arrange dates, parties, etc, well in advance, or
- B) be free to do whatever looks like fun when the time

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**Would you rather work under a boss who is:**

- A) good-natured but often inconsistent, or
- B) sharp-tongued but always logical?

**At parties do you:**

- A) do much of the talking, or
- B) let others do most of the talking?

**When you start a big project that is due in one week, do you:**

- A) take time to list the separate things to be done and the order of doing them, or
- B) plunge right in?

**Which one word in each of the following pairs appeals to you more?**

- A) sensible
- B) fascinating

- A) imaginative
- B) realistic

- A) devoted
- B) determined

**From CPI 260 Assessment, by Harrison G. Gough, Ph.D.:**

**Answer TRUE or FALSE as to how you feel each statement applies to you.**

- I have a natural talent for influencing people.
- I always see to it that my work is carefully planned and organized.

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People often expect too much of me.  
It is hard for me to just sit still and relax.  
The idea of doing research appeals to me.  
I enjoy hearing lectures on work affairs.  
I read at least 10 books a year.  
I always try to consider the other person's feelings before I do something.  
I like parties and socials.

As you can see from the examples, it's impossible to paint a picture of someone based on just a few answers, which is why so-called mini assessments have absolutely no value. However, when you've answered a comprehensive assessment featuring multiple questions on similar topics, a pattern of strengths and styles will emerge. Sophisticated scoring systems are used to generate meaningful results, and certified interpreters are able to tell you what it all means and how to apply it to your career development.

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**'Faking Good'**

Many people are quick to ask if it's possible to cheat or beat the assessments. The answer is no. In fact, the CPI has a built-in mechanism designed to catch a test-taker who is trying to do what's called faking good. By this I mean people who take every opportunity to paint themselves in an exceptionally positive light will likely be flagged. One true/false question along these lines is: "I have never deliberately told a lie."

There are 25 questions that revolved around the same issue, and they are designed to get your honest answer, not just what you think makes you sound the best or most truthful. If you appear to be too good to be true, you'll likely be flagged by the test administrator.

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It's best to be honest — not only for the employer's sake but really for yours too. Be true to yourself. If you don't get the job because of it, there's a good chance you wouldn't have been a good fit, and it's a blessing to know that before an offer is made.

## A Critical Concern

The biggest criticism of personality tests stems from a fear that employers rely too heavily on them in making decisions. But every employer and interpreter I spoke to emphasized the importance of using these assessments as only one part of the decision-making process.

Think of it in terms of the SAT for college admittance. A student is so much more than a simple SAT score. The best colleges make decisions based on GPA, course loads, the high school profile, essays, recommendations and more, including the SAT score.

The same is true in hiring: Assessments are only one piece of a much more comprehensive process that includes interviews, role playing, recommendations and more. If you're asked to take a personality test by a prospective employer, ask how it will be used in the overall hiring process, and confirm that the information stays confidential. If you're passed over for a position and you believe it's because of your personality assessments, don't panic. Since assessments are specific to an individual employer and are measured against the position you're applying for and the company's culture and needs, the results do not follow you from position to position. Getting fired from a job sticks with your

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employment record, but these assessments do not.

To connect directly with Tory Johnson, visit [womenforhire.com](http://womenforhire.com).

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