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Hippocrates Personality Quartet As A Communication Tool

A lot of people probably has purchased one of the books written by the famous couple Florence and Fred Littauer. They discussed an ancient old personality quartet or four basic types of personality all humans seem to have. Why is it ancient old? It was actually the famous Greek physician Hippocrates who lived from 460 until 377 B.C. who introduced the four human 'temperaments': choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholic. The famous Russian physiologist Pavlov has also used and refined the Hippocratic scheme. The Littauers, however, have made the quartet available for a wide audience because they have been able to make a practical tool. Their most important advice is: know yourself first before you can know someone else. The four personality types, as emphasized by Hippocrates and repeated by the Littauers, cannot be considered to be completely separate and distinct from each other. In reality, most persons represent 'in-between' types.

What are actually the typical characteristics of these four personality types? The choleric can be considered to be highly excitable: this person's emotions are very easily aroused. This person is vehement in speech and action and his/her movements are carried out swiftly. He/she is bold and ambitious but tends to be incautious. The melancholic, in turn, can be seen as the opposite of the choleric because this person is highly inhibited. The melancholic person is characterized by slowness of thought and a tendency to be depressed. The melancholic has difficulty making friends, but he/she is reliable because constancy and determination are the other traits. The in-between groups consist of the sanguine and phlegmatic types. The sanguine have a tendency towards excitement, whereas the phlegmatic have a tendency towards inhibition. The sanguine person is stable, yet active. He/she is courageous, hopeful, amorous and cheerful, but somewhat inconstant. He/she is courteous, lively, alert, and demonstrative. The phlegmatic person is stable and calm. He/she may even look cool, sluggish or apathetic. Normally quiet and reserved, he/she does not easily become friendly or antagonistic.

If one does not know a person very well, Hippocrates personality quartet can certainly be used as an effective tool during interactions. Communicating will then become easier if you know what you are and what the other person may be. However, personality is a 'tricky' thing with many limitations. There are actually many personality typologies available. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator offers sixteen different personalities and how can we know which personality fits us or another person? It will take a lot of memorizing and analysis before that is known. An interesting typology is called the Enneagram which divides all people into nine basic personalities. The Enneagram is actually similar to the personality typology offered by numerology. The only difference is that personality number five and seven are switched.

Aside from these typologies available in the market, the most important question which must be answered is: how can we use our personality effectively? If we can use our personality more effectively, we will become better communicators and perhaps even get more success in life. Much has been written about improving our personalities and the message is always positive: you can always become what you want. Of course one cannot change everything in one's self, but attempts can be undertaken to improve our self-image and communication performance.

Usually the advice given in many written texts and repeated over and over again by numerous communication gurus can be summarized in the following points:

1. Concentrate on one thing at a time;
2. Understand how you came to be what you are;
3. Imagine yourself becoming what you want be;
4. Suggest to yourself that you can be what you imagine;
5. Act the part you want to play in life.

This list is not exhaustive because in the end it boils down to our ability to improve our own lives. Communication is of course an important skill in our attempts to improve our lives.

In communication, we need to constantly seek ways to improve our interpersonal communication skills. The way we convey our messages to others must be refined all the time. A very important element in acquiring good communication skills is self-confidence. You need to ask many questions to yourself: do you remain cool in emergencies? Do you avoid blaming others when things go wrong? Can you always be depended upon to do what you say you will do? Do you go out of your way cheerfully to help others? Do you have reasonable faith in humanity? Do you show an interest in the interests of others? Do you take an active part in any organizations in which you belong?

Another element which is related to the above issue is our ability to imagine ourselves becoming what we want to

be. The power of visualization or imagination is extremely important if you want to change yourself or at least become a better communicator. The combination of will and imagination is very strong and will help you change in a positive way. If you want to change yourself, but your imagination dwells on thoughts of failure, then you will fail. This is called the law of reversed effort.

Finally, you need to be able to talk yourself into change. This technique is called affirmation. You should constantly repeat to yourself what you want to change> If you want to become a better communicator, you should repeatedly say to yourself: I am a good communicator! Avoid saying: I will become a good communicator because you might fail. You must picture yourself as already a person who is a superb communicatorZZZ

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