

# Look to the Trainer, Not the Tool



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I was recently asked by a client for an MBTI® assessment success story – the tale of a client system that would help support a company's decision to use type. This client wanted evidence that the MBTI instrument was a powerful tool that would bring about results and a return on investment (ROI) of time and money. The client found my answer surprising. I told him that he was not likely to find specifically what he was looking for and, more important, he should read with great skepticism any such tool-focused ROI case study he might come across.

Validity studies, self-selection type tables, correlative studies, brain scan research, etc. supporting the accuracy of type and the MBTI® assessment abound. Two books that lead the charge in supporting type and the MBTI inventory in this way are the *MBTI® Manual* (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk and Hammer, 1998) and *Ideas and Evidence* (Bayne, 2005). While I urge all certified type practitioners to know about basic research, where to find it and how to use its conclusions, I would like to offer a reframe that allows us to take our attention off the psychometrics of the MBTI assessment and place

it onto the trainers, consultants, coaches, and counselors who are using the tool, for it is those individuals who are the most important factor in successful client engagement, not the tool they choose to use for training.

Sharp trainers, consultants, and coaches facilitating good designs help bring individuals, leaders, and teams to the next levels of performance. While I love type and the MBTI assessment, they are not the point or the most valuable commodity. Time with a good trainer and the process a client is led through make the ultimate difference. Wise clients – and it is in part our responsibility to help our clients make wise choices – are more concerned about the trainer/consultant and the approach he or she will take, not the tool they use.

Not long ago when I wanted a porch built onto my house, I did not hire a hammer. I hired a good carpenter who knew how to use the tools at her disposal to build what I wanted. It just so happened she used a hammer (among other tools) to reach the end result I had in mind.

Similarly, organizational clients do not care about what tool you will use (or should not), but care about the outcome you help them achieve. Too much energy is focused on the tool when it is the outcome that is important – and the process which unites us in getting there. I feel you would be wise to view the MBTI assessment as a hammer – it is a wonderful tool that you can use to build and develop people, teams, and human systems, but it is not the point. You and the work you fashion and deliver are what matter.

To further the hammer analogy, you can use a hammer to build something useful and beautiful, or you can use a hammer to hurt someone – intentionally or by mistake – but either outcome is due to the wielder of the tool, not the tool itself. The MBTI assessment is a wonderful tool, but when an intervention succeeds,

it does so because the trainer and the design effectively pull out the tool's benefits. Similarly, when training fails, it does not reflect badly on the MBTI assessment's validity – only on the design of the training and the consultant.

I am not suggesting that successful case studies or the question of the MBTI assessment's validity are not important. I am suggesting that any such case studies or marketing materials (testimonials and personal metrics) would and should support ROI for time spent with *you*, not any particular tool.

Remember the cost differential – the MBTI assessment costs about \$12-20 per administration, but a day with a good consultant/trainer costs between \$1200 and \$3000, often more. This disparity reflects a

difference in value. The MBTI instrument in the hands of an incompetent trainer/consultant is of little use and can even do harm, but a great trainer/consultant can do wonders without any instrument at all. A sharp trainer with a great tool like the MBTI assessment in his or her hands is a combination hard to beat, but I would not give the credit in this case to the tool.

This reality brings me to two concluding points: it is vital you be the best consultant/trainer you can be. Also, as good as any tool is, it benefits you to diversify your approach to your professional and organizational development.

### **KEEP YOUR TOOLS VARIED**

As the saying goes, if your only tool is a hammer, everything you see will look like a nail. Effectively focusing

on outcomes and your clients' needs will lead you to use multiple tools to respond to various needs that arise in working with the groups and leaders you are training.

### **KEEP YOUR SKILLS SHARP**

To keep your type training designs fresh, experiential, and client-focused, incorporate as many experiences as possible to assist participants in learning from and communicating with each other. In general, successful workshops are less about listening to a trainer and more about experiencing a new model and actually applying it to a real-time situation. ■