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FAMILY MATTERS: Personality tests becoming more common in workplace

By *TONYA FREYMILLER-HAZEN*

If you are searching for a new job, don't be surprised if a prospective employer asks you to take a personality test before offering you a position — especially if you're young. Nearly one in three American workers aged 18-24 reported taking a personality test in the last two years, and a report in the Boston Globe indicated 89 companies in the Fortune 100 use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to determine how and with whom their employees work best.

While personality tests have been the subject of some controversy over the years, employers who use them report marked savings in the hiring process. Estimates suggest it costs a minimum of \$5,000 to search, screen, hire and train a new employee. Companies want to be sure they get a return on that investment by hiring the right person for the right position.

The notion of a personality test can be unnerving to the prospective employee. The word "test" indicates there are right and wrong answers. In truth, however, there are no right or wrong answers in these inventories (more appropriately termed assessments), and employees can take heart in knowing the assessments are looking for strengths and preferences more so than weaknesses.

While it's impossible to prepare for a personality assessment, it helps to understand their intent and what they're measuring. Most will look at five aspects of personality. A study published earlier this year in the Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management summarized them well:

- **EXTROVERSION:** Measures interpersonal interactions, including warmth, sociability, assertiveness, excitement seeking, energy and positive emotions. People high in this area are sensitive to monotony, take more risks and tend to be less careful.
- **CONSCIENTIOUSNESS:** Measures self-discipline, including self-motivation, propensity for setting and achieving goals, persistence, organization, competence and dutifulness. People who are high in this factor are thorough in decision making, goal-oriented and less likely to make analytical mistakes.
- **OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE:** Measures the tendency to proactively seek new intellectual experiences and ideas, including imagination, curiosity, open-mindedness and culture. People high in this factor enjoy learning.
- **AGREEABLENESS:** Measures the tendency to be compassionate toward others, including characteristics such as tolerance, tact, respect, modesty and altruism. People high in agreeableness are easy to get along with, cooperative, emotionally stable and trustworthy.
- **NEUROTICISM:** Measures the tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anxiety, depression, hostility, self-consciousness and impulsiveness. People high in this factor may be more distracted, sensitive to stressful environments and prone to errors when under stress. They tend not to seek active control of the environment.

If you take a personality assessment, you should be given the results. Most are accurate and reliable, so be sure to review results with an open mind, viewing them as an opportunity for greater self-awareness.

Rather than focusing on performance, today's personality assessments seek to discover what motivates you and what position will allow you to shine. When employers understand your strengths they can match you better to a position where you not only will perform well but also enjoy more personal satisfaction.

Tonya Freymiller-Hazen is a therapist at the Family & Children's Center in La Crosse.