



Be better.



**cpp**

*The people development people.*

## Indicators of Stress for Top Professions

A REPORT BY CPP, INC.



# Indicators of Stress for Top Professions

A REPORT BY CPP, INC.

## Introduction

How does stress manifest in the workplace? For most people, experiencing severe stress renders them temporarily unable to operate from the familiar aspects of their personality with which they are most comfortable. When they're "in the grip" of stress—a phrase coined by Naomi Quenk, PhD—they experience a feeling of being "beside themselves." Their behavior can appear clumsy and out of character, even to those who know them best, which may hamper their performance. In light of our current economic upheaval and the stress epidemic it has engendered in the U.S. workplace, we shouldn't be surprised to see loss of productivity, increased conflict, poor performance, and other issues that are adversely affecting organizations.

While some signs of stress, such as irritability and sweating, may be easily recognized, others are not so obvious. Extreme stress is often manifested in behaviors that aren't necessarily associated with stress, and that, though out of character, may not be initially perceived as problematic. As a result, these signs are often overlooked by the person at his or her breaking point, especially at work.

Although these stress symptoms may appear on the surface to be isolated, atypical incidents of erratic behavior, they are actually relatively easy to predict, identify, and manage by applying the type theory and concepts of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) instrument. In short, when under stress, people of each of the sixteen MBTI personality types tend to think and behave in a particular way that is distinct from that of all the other types, just as they have natural tendencies under normal circumstances.

You may note below the often striking contrast in both the stress responses of the various personality types and the most effective ways of dealing with them using MBTI theory and concepts. For example, individuals with the personality type most common among accountants may benefit from having someone ask them if they want to talk, while those with the personality type most common among reporters tend to become even more stressed by someone asking them "what's wrong" repeatedly. Similarly, the effectiveness of offering advice varies markedly by personality type.

## PREDICTING STRESS RESPONSE BY OCCUPATION

CPP, Inc., created this report in order to explore the causes and effects of stress within a number of the top professions in the United States. Based on data gathered from more than 800,000 administrations of the Myers-Briggs® assessment and information from *MBTI® Type Tables for Occupations* by Nancy A. Schaubhut and Richard C. Thompson, this report identifies the personality types most common to thirty-three professions, and summarizes for each profession:

- General descriptions of characteristics under normal circumstances for the most frequently occurring personality type in the profession
- External signs of stress that may be exhibited by that personality type
- Stress triggers related to personality type preferences
- Tips for managing type-specific stress

This report examines not only fairly common and well-known professions, but also those for which the effects of unmitigated stress responses may have public safety repercussions, or even life-or-death consequences, such as police officers, safety engineers, and physicians.

Similarly, it also examines professions such as payroll clerk and loan officer, which, while they may not affect public safety, nevertheless have an obvious impact on our daily life.

A few of the professions covered in this report—such as that of financial analyst, whose role in the recent financial meltdown has been the subject of much public interest—have in fact recently made news. This report is not intended to infer that the financial meltdown is the result of stress. However, as poor decision making is one of the most common results of stress, the report's findings do suggest that the role of workplace stress in this major event ought to be considered.

Please note that, while this report identifies the most frequently occurring personality types within a number of professions, individuals of all sixteen Myers-Briggs® personality types appear within all professions (additionally, the frequency with which a specific MBTI type occurs within an occupation is not an indicator of ability or strength in these occupational areas). Therefore, the information presented will not apply equally to each individual, and in many cases may not apply at all. The section under each profession that describes the prevalent personality type under "normal" circumstances serves as a guide to whether or not the various tips offered will be effective.

Also, please note that the information in this report is not a comprehensive representation of all the information available on stress responses related to personality type. For more complete and specific information on stress responses, organizations and individuals may want to consider using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Stress Management Report from CPP, Inc., which details stress information according to individual situations.

## General Observations

### GRAVITATION TOWARD PROFESSIONS THAT CAUSE STRESS

While people often gravitate toward professions that allow them to more fully-use their personality preferences, they don't necessarily gravitate toward careers that offer the lowest levels of stress.

For example, people with the personality type prevalent among middle school teachers are likely to get stressed out by "having to follow rules, procedures and routines" as well as being "disrespected or ignored." For such an individual, it may be difficult to imagine a more stressful environment than an 8th-grade classroom. Likewise, police officers may be stressed by "having to deal with others' bad decisions," which is, almost by definition, what a police officer does on a daily basis. Similarly, family practitioners and pharmacists may be stressed by "receiving last-minute requests or demands" – once again, par for the course.

It is possible that, in some instances, the elevated level of interest exhibited by people dedicated to their work actually creates opportunities for stress. If this is the case, stress management is all the more critical of an endeavor for organizations.

Furthermore, it should come as no surprise that, for many of the professions detailed below, we are just as likely to associate its professionals with their "signs of stress" as we are with the description of what they are like under normal circumstances. Thus, the challenge arises of determining when someone has crossed the thin line dividing behavior denoting extreme stress levels and intermittent irrational outbursts that are "hazards that come with the job."

# Findings: Stress Management by Occupation

## PSYCHIATRISTS:

The following information provides insight into the personality type (INTJ) that is most common among Psychiatrists (this personality type is also prevalent among **Medical Scientists**):

Under normal circumstances:

- Independent, logical thinkers
- Innovative problem solvers
- Likely to value conceptual and theoretical structures and explanations
- Insightful about long-range implications and outcomes
- Objectively critical of their own and others' ideas
- Able to effectively cut to the heart of a problem, simplifying complex issues
- Apt to dislike and avoid noisy, frenetic, disorganized work and home environments

Described by others as:

- Uncannily insightful about people and situations
- Future oriented and visionary
- Intensely focused on whatever they are thinking or doing
- Direct, forthright, opinionated
- Aloof and seemingly unapproachable at times
- Sometimes stubborn and inflexible

Signs of stress:

- Obsessively focusing on some aspect of the outer world
- Losing focus, becoming scattered and disorganized
- Overreacting to what people say or do
- Blaming others for minor mistakes or factual errors
- Coming up with a complex theory to explain one or two isolated facts

Stressors:

- Being bombarded with facts and details
- Having to adapt to changes in routine
- Encountering obstacles in the outer world—traffic, equipment failures, interruptions, flight delays
- Having to interact excessively with individuals and groups
- Coping with crowds, noise, confusion, chaotic environments
- Dealing with incompetent people, illogical systems
- Being criticized professionally, having your competence attacked, not being recognized

Tips for managing stress:

- Engage in positive activities that accomplish something useful,

such as cleaning out closets, sorting photographs, fixing things

- Take steps to lighten their schedule and stick to their commitment to do so
- Step back and use logic to analyze the situation
- Get closure on some lighter, more manageable tasks
- Remind themselves that it will pass

Worst ways they can respond to stress:

- Push people away if they offer to listen to them
- Refuse to accept or ask for help with their workload

How others can be most helpful:

- Validate their feelings, even if they seem “over the top”
- Be physically present but don't offer advice or tell them what to do
- Treat them the same way as always, as if they were their usual self

How others can make things worse:

- Push them for an answer or a decision
- Demand that they socialize
- Offer unwanted help and advice
- Point out that there are alternatives that might work

## REPORTERS:

The following information provides insight into the personality type (ENFP) that is most common among reporters (this personality type is also prevalent among **Dental Assistants; Bartenders; Clergy; Public Relations Specialists; Waiters; College Professors; and Pre-school, Middle School and Secondary Education Teachers**):

Under normal circumstances:

- Excited by the many possibilities in the outside world
- Comfortable trying out new things
- Optimistic about what the future holds
- Energized by change, complexity, new experiences, and new places
- Likely to seek out and find like-minded individuals
- Easily bored by details, routine, and repetitive tasks
- Turned off by structured environments with many rules and procedures

Described by others as:

- Innovative and original
- Friendly, warm, sociable
- Enthusiastic, catching others up in their interests
- Intense and sincere
- Excited and exciting to be around
- Sometimes overwhelming

Signs of stress:

- Obsessing about irrelevant details and facts
- Focusing excessively on their body, imagining that they have some dire illness
- Being irritable, snappish, impatient
- Feeling depressed, hopeless; withdrawing
- Failing to see any possibilities beyond their current, dismal reality
- Being pessimistic and incapable of seeing the big picture
- Engaging in inflexible, rigid thinking

Stressors:

- Having to follow rules, procedures, routines
- Being unable to pursue your ideas and interests
- Working within a highly structured, rigid, detail-oriented environment
- Being required to do something that violates your values
- Feeling distrusted, disrespected, ignored, not recognized
- Receiving criticism about themselves or what they have created
- Finding that they are unable to fulfill the multiple demands they have taken on

Tips for managing stress:

- Attend to physical needs—resting, sleeping, eating properly
- Change their environment, especially get outdoors
- Engage in physical exercise
- Get involved in a creative activity
- Prioritize, then delegate some tasks to others
- Pause before saying “yes,” and force themselves to say “no” at least some of the time
- Share their negative thoughts and feelings with someone who won’t minimize them or try to talk them out of them

Worst ways they can respond to stress:

- Work harder, faster, or longer
- Agree or disagree with others vehemently and indiscriminately
- Spend a great deal of time alone ruminating

How others can be most helpful:

- Encourage and help them to take a break from the stress-inducing situation, even if only briefly
- Suggest and join them in a different activity and a change of scene, such as taking a long walk, going to a movie, participating in a sport, or taking a weekend away
- Listen quietly and without comment to their worries and concerns
- Communicate that you take their perspective seriously, regardless of its unreality or inappropriateness

How others can make things worse:

- Repeatedly ask, “What’s wrong?”
- Remind them of their typical optimistic, energetic perspective
- Treat their reactions as a joke, while they are being deadly serious about their situation

## POLICE PATROL OFFICERS:

The following information provides insight into the personality type (ESTJ) that is most common among Police Patrol Officers (this personality type is also prevalent among **Financial Analysts, Construction Managers, Industrial Safety and Health Engineers, Lawyers, Loan Officers, Retail Salespersons, Surgeons** and **Food Services Managers**):

Under normal circumstances:

- Committed to maintaining high standards for themselves and others
- Naturally inclined to be critical
- Focused on skills and abilities, hate incompetence
- More concerned with being respected than with being liked
- Enthusiastic problem solvers
- Drawn to organization and clear communication
- Turned off by excessive displays of emotion

Described by others as:

- Confident, competent and decisive, able to get things done
- Goal oriented, focused on the bottom line
- Responsible and reliable
- Sometimes insensitive to others’ feelings

Signs of stress:

- Behaving in an angry, short-tempered, irritable manner; exploding
- Having emotional outbursts
- Being hypersensitive, easily hurt, overly sentimental
- Becoming quiet, withdrawn, uncommunicative
- Feeling insecure, self-doubting, overwhelmed
- Worrying that people dislike them
- Feeling unappreciated, taken for granted

Stressors:

- Not having control of your own time and schedule
- Being with incompetent, irresponsible, indecisive people
- Having to deal with others’ bad decisions
- Being in a disorganized, chaotic environment
- Coping with constantly changing goals and procedures
- Being with highly sensitive, overly emotional people

Tips for managing stress:

- Engage in physical exercise, especially with a group
- Take a break, read a good book, or watch an engrossing movie
- Relax with friends in a new setting, find a change of scenery
- Spend some time alone to calm down, get a grip, rest
- Talk to an uninvolved, trusted person for a reality check
- Treat the situation as a problem to be solved; reframe your efforts; identify a new perspective

Worst ways they can respond to stress:

- Isolate themselves
- Refuse to ask for help
- Take on more work and responsibilities, even if they believe they should
- Take it out on uninvolved people, such as family members
- Keep thinking obsessively; engage in unproductive, circular thinking

How others can be most helpful:

- Fulfill their obligations to them
- Let them know their plans in advance so there will be no surprises
- Listen to them without contradicting them; be supportive and positive
- Try to talk to them, even though they may respond in an uncooperative, unreasonable way
- Help them sort things out, if they ask for such help
- Keep them from acting rashly

How others can make things worse:

- Change things just for the sake of change
- Give them more tasks and responsibilities
- Tell them that they're overreacting, being irrational
- Question their skills and abilities
- Tell them everything will be okay, be patronizing
- Give them unsolicited advice
- Show either excessive emotion or total indifference

## PAYROLL CLERKS:

The following information provides insight into the personality type (ISFJ) that is most common among Payroll Clerks (this personality type is also prevalent among **Pharmacy Technicians** and **Data Entry Keyers**):

Under normal circumstances:

- Caring and concerned about family members and others close to them
- Attentive to details in their own and others' lives
- Respectful of and likely to value traditional attitudes and behaviors
- Committed to living up to their own high standards of behavior, expect others to do so as well
- Devoted to ensuring others' comfort and well-being, using their practical, hands-on knowledge to create warm, welcoming environments
- Likely to find it hard to accept attitudes and behaviors that seem too different or extreme
- Likely to be uncomfortable with uncertainty and what is not known

Described by others as:

- Responsible, conscientious, and reliable

- Warm, kind, and devoted to others' well-being
- Willing to do more than their fair share of what needs to be done
- Likely to put others' needs ahead of their own
- Helpful in practical ways, attentive to details
- Quiet and unassuming

Signs of stress:

- Catastrophizing, imagining dire outcomes, especially for themselves and those they care about
- Becoming uncharacteristically forgetful and inefficient about everyday responsibilities
- Feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope
- Feeling hopeless, depressed
- Feeling irritable, tense, anxious
- Being harshly critical, mean, blunt, aggressive, sarcastic
- Making impulsive decisions, reversing them later

Stressors:

- Dealing with rapidly changing situations or unexpected events
- Receiving last-minute changes and unrealistic requests
- Coping with disorganization
- Feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities
- Being taken advantage of or taken for granted
- Dealing with domineering, angry, critical, or uncooperative people
- Being around conflict, lack of harmony, people not cooperating

Tips for managing stress:

- Leave the situation
- Distance themselves from others and from ongoing demands
- Prioritize tasks
- Break tasks down into manageable pieces
- Finish the task at hand or just accomplish something
- Ask for help with tasks
- Analyze and evaluate a worst-case scenario or get someone to help them do that

Worst ways they can respond to stress:

- Allow themselves to imagine even more unlikely and extreme negative outcomes
- Doggedly continue to do what they are doing even though it is not working
- Go without rest and sleep
- Beat themselves up for not managing well
- Refuse to ask for help or accept help when offered

How others can be most helpful:

- Stay calm and controlled even when they seem frazzled
- Listen to them, be understanding and empathetic
- Validate their concerns
- Offer specific, tangible help
- Help them prioritize or see alternative ways of handling things
- Leave them alone so you can think

How others can make things worse:

- Add to their workload; ask them for details about anything
- Reject or dismiss their concerns and worries
- Be patronizing
- Tell them what they should do
- Make small talk or chit-chat
- Insist that they calm down

## FAMILY PRACTITIONERS/PEDIATRICIANS:

The following information provides insight into the personality type (ISTJ) that is most common among Family Practitioners/Pediatricians (this personality type is also prevalent among **Accountants, Biologists, Civil Engineers, Pharmacists, Software Engineers, Computer Programmers, Nurses** and **Weapons Specialist Supervisors**):

Under normal circumstances:

- Oriented to gathering facts and details and using them when they need them
- Committed to truth and accuracy
- Organized, methodical, and practical
- Focused on past and present realities
- Reliable and conscientious
- Careful not to speculate about the future or the unknown
- Distrustful, even disparaging, of ungrounded ideas and sloppy procedures

Described by others as:

- Calm, quiet, and controlled
- Grounded, realistic, and practical
- Meticulous in everything they do
- Conscientious and reliable
- Unimaginative and rigid at times

Signs of stress:

- Catastrophizing, imagining that their own or others' minor errors will lead to terrible disasters
- Uncharacteristically misplacing or losing things
- Making impulsive purchases without thorough research
- Losing control, becoming emotional and tearful
- Becoming disorganized, inefficient
- Showing irritation and anger
- Becoming more outgoing, sociable, and talkative

Stressors:

- Dealing with sudden changes or any change you deem unnecessary or illogical
- Coping with the pressure of impending deadlines
- Receiving last-minute requests or demands
- Being forced to work on a new task before completing a current one
- Dealing with novel, previously unknown circumstances or

surroundings

- Being in an inefficient, disorganized environment
- Having to depend on people whose work is sloppy or incomplete

Tips for managing stress:

- Get away from the stressful environment, even briefly
- Take time out to do something they really enjoy
- Accomplish small projects or parts of overwhelming tasks
- Spend time alone without distractions so they can work on whatever is causing the stress
- Bounce possible solutions off of someone they trust and respect
- Ask for help with prioritizing their responsibilities

Worst ways they can respond to stress:

- Overdo their natural style by gathering ever more details and working harder and longer
- Look for evidence that their worst fears are entirely valid
- Loudly blame others
- Refuse help when it is offered
- Withdraw, shut down

How others can be most helpful:

- Leave them alone to sort through and complete tasks
- Offer concrete help, not vague promises or intentions
- Not interfere, but be available if they ask for input
- Help them put things in perspective, remind them of the bigger picture
- Not invalidate their stress or ignore signs that they are stressed
- Listen to them and empathize without judgment

How others can make things worse:

- Not do what they ask
- Minimize their fears, make a joke out of them
- Give them help they don't want or didn't ask for
- Offer unsolicited advice
- Be patronizing, minimizing the source of their distress

# Conclusion

## THE LINE BETWEEN HEIGHTENED AWARENESS AND STRESS

Developing a heightened awareness of the sixteen MBTI types and how each one experiences and reacts to stress can help individuals handle stress more effectively, and can help colleagues in the same profession understand how they can help alleviate others' stress.

Stress is an inevitable part of life, and even moderate stress can be energizing and motivating. Even though individuals with certain MBTI type preferences may appear to be drawn to the very occupation that presents the most stressful situation for them, that stress can also be energizing and motivating to them. However, if the stress of those situations is excessive, it can elicit the undesirable "in the grip" reactions people try to avoid. By becoming aware of how to recognize, respond to appropriately, and learn from stresses at work, people with certain preferences can prevent costly mistakes for the organization.

While various irrational thought patterns are common to stress reactions for all personality types, this doesn't mean that all stress-induced thoughts have irrational roots. For example, people with the personality type most prevalent among family practitioners, pharmacists, and weapons specialists may be prone to "catastrophizing," or imagining that their own or others' minor errors will lead to terrible disasters. Obviously, in any one of these professions, a small error can in fact have dramatic consequences.

## UNIVERSAL DO'S AND DON'TS

It is important to remember, when discussing MBTI personality type preferences in any application, that personality is innate and that while four-letter type may explain certain aspects about a person, it does not explain everything about a person. Individuals use all eight of the preferences at one point or another but feel most energized and comfortable when using their preferences.

MBTI type concepts aid in self-awareness and provide a spotlight to help people see and understand more clearly what is really involved in stress reactions, and how to overcome them. Understanding others' stressors in the workplace can open communication, aid in managing objectives, and help everyone work more effectively toward a common goal.

# Appendix A:

## PROFESSIONS AND MOST FREQUENTLY OCCURRING MYERS-BRIGGS PERSONALITY TYPE\*

Accountants: ISTJ  
 Architects: ENTP  
 Bartenders: ENFP  
 Biologists: ISTJ  
 Civil Engineers: ISTJ  
 Clergy: ENFP  
 College Professors: ENFP  
 Computer Programmers: ISTJ  
 Construction Managers: ESTJ  
 Data Entry Keyers: ISFJ  
 Dental Assistants: ENFP  
 Family Practitioners/Pediatricians: ISTJ  
 Financial Analysts: ESTJ  
 Food Services Managers: ESTJ  
 Industrial Safety and Health Engineers: ESTJ  
 Lawyers: ESTJ  
 Loan Officers: ESTJ  
 Medical Scientists: INTJ  
 Registered Nurses: ISTJ  
 Payroll Clerks: ISFJ  
 Pharmacists: ISTJ  
 Pharmacy Technicians: ISFJ  
 Police Officers: ESTJ  
 Psychiatrists: INTJ  
 Public Relations Specialists: ENFP  
 Reporters: ENFP  
 Retail Salespersons: ESTJ  
 Surgeons: ESTJ  
 Teachers (middle school, secondary, continuing education): ENFP  
 Waiters: ENFP  
 Weapons Specialist Supervisors: ISTJ



## Your Guide to Performance

At CPP, our only job is to help you be a better HR professional and, in turn, help every employee flourish. While we're best known for our products like the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® assessment, CPP is also a group of people who can offer you the information, guidance, and support you need.

We offer solutions to help you improve organizational performance and address whatever challenges you face- from team building, leadership and coaching, and conflict management, to career development, selection, and retention. Perhaps that's why millions of individuals in more than 100 countries use our products each year. They include people at Fortune 500 companies and businesses of all sizes, as well as educators, government agencies, and training and development consultants.

Let's make a difference together. Talk to us today to see how.

650-969-8901 : [www.cpp.com/mbti](http://www.cpp.com/mbti) : [custserv@cpp.com](mailto:custserv@cpp.com)  
1055 Joaquin Road, 2nd Floor, Mountain View, CA 94043  
800-624-1765 : [www.cpp.com](http://www.cpp.com) : The Myers-Briggs® experts



\*MBTI® Type Tables for Occupations, by Nancy A. Schaubhut and Richard C. Thompson, CPP, Inc., 2008.

©2011 by CPP, Inc. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Myers-Briggs and the MBTI logo are registered trademarks of the MBTI Trust, Inc. The CPP logo is a registered trademark of CPP, Inc.