What's Your Color?

This quick quiz may revolutionize your relationships.

Do you always butt heads with certain people? Have you ever wanted to wring the neck of a person who just doesn't "get" you or fellow team members? Are you sometimes shocked when people draw opposite conclusions from the same information?

A simple personality test can make all the difference.

The whole subject of personality is one we tend to overlook when seeking ways to make our organizations more successful. But what makes organizations work is the people within them. Success is all about how well people with different natures get along, make decisions, and work together respectfully. Mutual respect is the soul of a fine-tuned workforce, as well as an effective board.

No, you can't change people's basic characters. But once you understand them, you can improve relationships.

> **"You can't change personalities, but you can improve your relationships."**

More Ways to Create a Diverse, Motivated Team

Build on your new understanding with these articles (NonprofitWorld.org):

The Organizational Personality and Employee Performance (Vol. 21, No. 1)

Inner Leadership: Mental Strategies for Nonprofit Staff Members (Vol. 18, No. 3)

Leading from Feeling: Coaching Tools for Interpersonal & Organizational Excellence (Vol. 27, No. 1)

The Key to Building Productive Teams (Vol. 21, No. 4)

Beware of These Three Personality Pitfalls (Vol. 31, No. 4)

Take the Test

One useful test is the True Colors personality assessment. Take the test at testq.com/career/quizzes/96-whats-your-true-color, and ask others in your organization to take it, too – staff, board members, volunteers, all the teams and groups who work together. Then compare your results.

The True Colors assessment divides people into basic personality types, represented by colors:

Orange: These people love fun and freedom. They're action oriented and optimistic.

Blue: Blue people are caring and sensitive. They're peacemakers, who value harmony and cooperation.

Green: These are thinkers with an intellectual approach to life situations.

Yellow: Yellows are systematic and detail oriented. They like order and rules.

Red: If you're a red, you act spontaneously, trusting your feelings more than your brain.

Black: With fierce determination, this type sets challenging goals and does whatever it takes to achieve them.

Brown: Browns are steady, reliable, genuine, and down to earth.

These colors serve as a kind of shorthand – a common language for describing a complex set of characteristics. When you pinpoint your native attributes and see how your traits fit with those of other people, you open doors to fruitful alliances, deeper understanding, and a climate for effective interactions.

Compare Your Results

Knowing your own personality can be an "aha" moment in itself. Comparing your results with colleagues can add another level of epiphany. Once you know that certain people's colors are on the other end of the spectrum from yours, you may suddenly realize why you've always clashed with them.

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Problems can arise when people of opposing colors try to work together, unless they make an effort to understand one another. Yellow people (who like to go by the rules) tend to have trouble working with orange people (who prefer few or no rules). Likewise, green people (who value logical thinking) may have difficulty understanding blue people (who tend to respond with their hearts rather than their heads).

Understanding diverse personalities is extremely helpful in conflict resolution. If two people are having a dispute, there's a good chance that discordant personalities are playing a role. A quick personality check will often diffuse the tension and pave the way for a win-win settlement.

As you compare your test results with others, it will become clear that so-called "difficult" people have positive attributes that can be helpful if handled properly. It's all in the perspective. Simply discussing people's personalities is a powerful bonding experience. Just being heard – having your point of view validated and accepted by others – can meet people's needs and smooth the way for more compatibility.

Build Effective Teams

The color test makes a great exercise to perform whenever you're starting a project with a new team. When team members understand and appreciate people's differences and what each person brings to the table, there's a much better chance they'll complete the project successfully.

Once you have a good grasp of people's character, you can also give people the roles that suit them best within each team. For instance, you'll likely be better off if you don't ask a blue person to facilitate your group. Blues want to make everyone happy. While that can be a wonderful quality in some situations, it doesn't lend itself to moving through an agenda, making a final decision, and moving on. So you may want to choose a facilitator of another color, and let blues do what they do best: With their warmth, compassion, and need for inclusiveness, they'll make sure everyone is heard.

When teams are involved in planning, it's especially useful to include a variety of personalities. Each will contribute new perspectives and fill in gaps that might occur if everyone's color were the same.

> **When you stand in the shoes of those around you, magic happens.**

If team efforts are unsatisfying, check team members' personalities. Are they consistent with the team's current goal? When making a plan, for instance, visionaries make valuable team members. But it's different after the plan is finalized and it's time to execute it. A team full of visionaries may never see the project through to completion. When moving forward with your plan, be sure there are some can-do people to direct the effort as well as some who take direction well. When it's time to evaluate results, you'll do well with a team of green and yellow personalities, who enjoy such analysis.

Proclaim Your Color

Maltee McMahon (magichappenstraining.com/services.html, magichappens123@gmail.com), who facilitates True Colors workshops for many nonprofits across the country, notes that identifying people's colors shouldn't be a one-time thing. Respect for the elements of everyone's character should be part of your organization's culture.

One way to encourage such a culture is for everyone to "wear their colors" to signal their style to others. Give everyone a button, ribbon, or name badge in that person's predominant color. Encourage staff and board members to wear these color tags not only in meetings but around the office on a day-to-day basis.

Proclaiming colors will make it easier to form effective

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teams and to know in an instant how best to motivate each person. It will also help you smooth out differences, both large and small. When a disagreement begins, it may be enough to point to your tag to communicate the fact that you're coming from a different place. Or you might add a clarifying comment such as "Enough with the details, Mr. Yellow!"

It may also be helpful to put up a chart summarizing the seven colors. Have people add their names to the chart under their dominant color. Such a display will give everyone a chance to remind themselves of the different personalities until the language of color becomes second-nature.

The color test can revolutionize your organization. It's an optimal way to create organizational effectiveness, build healthy relationships, and deal creatively with diversity. When you take just a moment to stand in the shoes of those around you, see the world through their eyes, and value the different viewpoints they offer, that's when magic happens. $