How do INFJs inhabit their workspaces?

With industry, dedication, and great care. They are more likely to have a vocation (a calling) than a strategically-engineered career.

Like Van Gogh’s sole white iris in a field of blue, INFJs are ‘strangers on the earth’: poetic innovators, mystics, spiritual guides, archetypal healers, earnest completers, religious leaders, psychotherapists, writers, champions of the disenfranchised. In my three case studies, for example—from the sporty Ocker in the Outback to the psychotherapist who coaches business executives—there is a spiritual, mystical and humanitarian underpinning.

Despite their reserve and their tendency to avoid social groups, INFJs are fiercely both people- and task-oriented. They have an extraordinary capacity for ‘holding people in their minds.’ They tend to enjoy complex problem-solving, pondering, and inspiring others toward their visions for the greater good. While INTJs tend to work ‘ahead of’, ‘alongside’, or ‘apart from’ the group, INFJs independently work for the group.

Isabel Briggs Myers (1980) says that INFJs naturally concern themselves with people, sometimes so much as to appear extraverted. It is actually the feeling process, not the individual, that is extraverted …

The individualism of the INFJ is less conspicuous, no because their inner vision is less clear and compelling, but because they care enough about harmony to try to win (rather than demand) acceptance of their purposes.

More than other types, INFJs are humble visionaries who facilitate people potential. Unlike the upfront leadership style of types such as ENTJ, INFJs have a caring way of subtly herding people from behind. They have an extraordinary gift for knowing how people are really feeling, knowing the subtext, predicting the future, and providing safety. In their work or life they may have suffered hurt, been overlooked or misunderstood. They invariably ensure that others are not subjected to similar pain.

Having an INFJ leader is a nurturing experience, although team members may not be aware of the intense effort and thought that their leader devotes to them. Their concern for the emotional life of people is paramount.

I’m continually impressed by the way they deliver constructive criticism or negative sanctions to recalcitrants in such a caring manner that they are appreciatively thanked and the required behavioural changes are quickly forthcoming. The INFJ talent for giving confronting feedback in the nicest possible way needs to be witnessed. They will boldly go where no one else would dare, and effect unbelievable outcomes.

INFJs won’t be corralled. Independence, autonomy, acceptance, creativity and goal achievement are essential. As Martin (1995) notes, they are most satisfied in careers that make use of their grasp of possibilities, concentration, warmth and organisational ability, and tend to be found in careers where ‘creativity and tending to human development are primary’:

Their confidence in their insights into the nature of things and people and their fertile imagination often attract them to careers where they can draw out the possibilities in others [and] can lead to exceptional empathic abilities, which may seem to border on the psychic.
INFJs have a mysterious capacity to accompany others through the dark. My vision is far-seeing.

Brian Walsh

I can sit and stare into the fire for a long time.

Brian Dodson

Ni with Fe is rarest type, Pedersen (1993) asserts, and that rarity is further enhanced by the INFJ’s lack of visibility: their ‘need for privacy, dislike of groups, and avoidance of large organisations and bureaucracies keep them behind the scenes’:

... it’s unfortunate that this type occurs so infrequently. Those INFJs who are able to bring their innovative visions to fruition often make significant contributions to the welfare of humankind.

A number of INFJs considered my invitation to be profiled in this article, but declined due to their need for privacy. Finally, in desperation, I confess to recruiting my colleague, my girlfriend, and my husband!

Typical of their type, my case studies—Brian Walsh, Anna Rosenberg, Brian ‘Doddo’ Dodson and Trevor Liddell—were all initially reticent.

Observing INTJs in relation to their workspaces in part 4 of this series (Australian Psychological Type Review, November 2004), I identified INTJs as organisers, improvers of systems and processes so that things are done properly. In contrast, INFJs are most concerned with the human condition.

Like INTJs, INFJs have exacting standards, but their perfectionism is initially directed inward—‘I must be perfect, and I expect the same of everyone else’—then driven externally by their ethics and integrity. This idealism can lead either to disappointment and disillusionment in the workplace, or to high-performing teams and creative innovations.

While the ENTJs and ENTPs in my articles incorporate other people and resources in order to get the job done quickly, the INFJs shoulder great burdens, as they are disinclined to delegate or refuse. Their high standards may be considered ‘nitspicking’ and unreachable by some other types.

Unless they trust their staff to deliver the expected quality, INFJs remain reluctant to pass work on. Yet they appear to cope effortlessly without fuss. If, however, they feel ‘trampled on all sides’ by too many people, too many demands, too little time, the prolonged overload may trigger distress. Spending time alone remedies this emotional overwhelm. After some respite they return to the team with passion.

Provost (1990) notes that INFJs express their originality through reflective solitary activities such as reading and music (playing, composing or appreciating). Other play activities include artistic and cultural events, and collecting aesthetic objects.

Brian’s collections include five guitars, an extensive DVD collection, and over 50 Ganeshas (a Hindu deity, the elephant god of knowledge and remover of obstacles). Anna collects Buffy The Vampire Slayer DVDs.

While Provost notes that INFJ energy for physical activity may seem low to more exuberant types, my case studies are all highly energetic. Active and fit, both of the Brians run regularly, undertake hands-on work such as house renovating, and play sport. Anna has trained in aikido and yoga for many years and takes her dog for brisk, long walks, as well as toiling hard.

Both Brians have been running since childhood. Both broke school records, were sports captains, played serious football, and continue to have an active interest in health and the body. Brian also spent many years as a ‘white maggot’ (football umpire) and a lifesaver at historic Sandridge Beach.

The three work at a high pace, and their delivery of outcomes exceeds everyone’s expectations except their own. However, this may be due to their self-awareness of their need for fitness and physical activity in order to sustain their heavy schedules.

Careers counselling themes

INFJs usually have a mysterious capacity to accompany others through the dark, knowing exactly when and where to shine their torch to guide them, and when it’s preferable to walk alongside in darkness.

Whether taking their team through downsizing, seeing troubled patients, or nurturing a devastated friend, they provide the safety to ‘hold’ others as they attempt the unknown. INFJs tend to have a special way of seeing, mirroring, nourishing, teaching, and caretaking.
Provost (1990) observes that many people in the helping professions burn out because they give tirelessly to others, come home to give again to family and friends, do not assertively claim time for themselves, and feel utterly depleted. Many are Feeling types [who have] more difficulty asserting their needs than Thinking types.

This resonates with the presenting problems that I see in my practice. I don’t see many INFJs, but when I do, they tend be exhausted or desolate, usually nursing a great hurt or injustice. Their values, ethics or morals have been violated and they have lost hope. Feeling ashamed or unworthy, they find it hard to ask for help and soldier on, using their willpower to cope. Their dogged persistence may not falter until they eventually become physically sick.

If a fatigued INFJ feels unwanted and unsupported in a work culture, it takes little to revive them: genuine acknowledgement, respect for their moral or ethical stance, and canvassing their thoughts is usually all that is required. However, they may not necessarily endear themselves to time- and cash-strapped executives with competing imperatives and conflicting philosophies of interpersonal management.

For INFJs, the trigger to consider a job or role change is invariably a serious issue of personal or professional betrayal: usually by an ‘economically rational’ management system that fails to value its people capital.

In the business world INFJs often represent an annoying sole voice in the wilderness. While they may feel bewildered and angry by a focus on expediency, dollars or outcomes at the expense of people and ethics, they are capable of discovering solutions that can satisfy the non-negotiable differences between business demands and individual needs.

The nature of the relationship with the people around them is pivotal to INFJs’ optimal functioning. Alignment of values and ethics with their direct report is vital, so it is helpful to focus there. They can accommodate opposition from, or not getting their way with, the rest of the organisation, as long as they feel heard and their concerns are factored in.

While INTJs may express irritation with the lack of intellectual collegiality in a workplace, INFJs are unlikely to complain about their feelings of emotional aloneness.

As the organisation’s conscience, INFJs may become exasperating thorns in the side of their CEOs. This can lead to a destructive game, the Battle between Good and Evil. This game is unwinnable, due to the INFJs’ lack of political savvy or willingness to ignore their heart intelligence.

INFJs’ extraordinary work contributions may often go unacknowledged. They are immensely diligent and loyal, exceptionally humorous and entertaining, just and fair, and honourable righters of wrongs. But their humility and modesty means that INFJs don’t market themselves with panache. Unassuming, they tend to put the success of their colleagues and team above their own, providing extensive time and attention and sharing their accolades.

INFJs’ vocational avoidance themes can be summarised as:

• Not feeling they can take up ‘self-indulgent’ space, put their needs before others, or ask for what they want
• Fear that if they make demands, others will stop loving and abandon them
• Loss of hope
• Feel too much—too sensitive, too idealistic, too naïve, too stubborn (won’t let go of principles)
• Afraid that their well-contained rage may fly out of control

INFJs’ play activities include artistic and cultural events

Village by Trevor Liddell

‘It displays my significant themes and has a brooding ambience, rich colours and bright highlights in an overall dark composition.’

Adelaide by Anna Rosenberg

‘My drawing is to capture feeling. I see something—a photo of a friend’s dog, or a friend’s niece—that triggers emotional resonance. I want to draw it for someone, a gift of love.’
Brian Walsh, INFJ

Brian, 53, has been in private practice for 15 years, specialising in long-term psychotherapy, organisational consulting, and mentoring. Prior to self-employment he spent 21 years in diverse roles including clerical, administration, overseas project management, orientation and mobility instruction and client service management.

Brian’s past workplaces have included the Commonwealth Public Service, Guide Dogs Australia, Education, rehabilitation centres, and sessional lectureships at postgraduate level for the University of Melbourne and RMIT University. He has qualifications in psychology, orientation and mobility, sonic guide, gerontology, massage therapy, somatic psychotherapy, and has undertaken management training at Mt Eliza.

‘The Public Service didn’t want to know how you felt’, says Brian. But his perfectionism and sense of duty served him well. Starting as the junior office boy, he gained rapid promotions, because he got things done. At 22, he began studying part-time for a psychology degree at night.

When I heard about the Guide Dogs Association, I just knew that I was meant to work there. I trained as an O & M [orientation & mobility] instructor and loved working with clients, teaching them how to move around safely using a variety of mobility aids. We worked intensively with one client for four weeks before starting with a new client. I also consulted to hospitals, rehab centres, nursing homes, and Kew Cottages.

Brian continued his postgraduate studies at night, and kept getting promotions. He loved the opportunity to pioneer new ways forward and improve service delivery, but hated the politics of executive management.

I was also torn between the dilemma of groundbreaking achievement in the field through leading and managing, and my love of working intensively one to one. I realised that the only way to stop getting caught up in management roles that interfered with my counselling preference was to become self-employed. I envisaged that if I ran my own business, I could juggle roles to suit.

To enhance his understanding of the mind–body–soul connection, Brian studied anatomy, massage, healing and body work:

In 1991 I began a three-year specialised training in somatic psychotherapy that required body knowledge. This orientation supports my preference for body-inclusive psychotherapeutic practice.

Pedersen (1993) notes that INFJ mental health practitioners are likely to subscribe to wholistic paradigms of mental and physical health. Like Anna and Doddo, Brian has an interest in wholistic therapies. He divides his week between organisational consulting and his therapy practice. Brian takes a long-term perspective with clients in his private practice:
Most of Brian’s clients are aged 30 plus, with a roughly equal distribution of males and females. After their initial meeting, if both wish to proceed, his commitment is ‘infinite.’ Depending upon their individual needs and degree of trauma, he may see them for 12 months, or for 10 to 15 years.

Who comes for therapy?

People who are suffering. They come because they are in pain and may have experienced deep trauma. It’s often about their connection with other people—their relationship difficulties are usually the presenting issue.

We work through the cause of the distress, developing awareness, capacity for change, and the opportunity for some peace and contentment. Therapy helps unravel destructive or unsatisfying behaviour patterns and influences, and old hurts from childhood. I support and encourage the client to come to their epiphanies and decisions.

Brian considers each therapeutic hour a ‘sacred moment’:

Having already set up my counselling room and read my notes, I like private time before the client arrives. I greet the client, escort them upstairs, and invite them to take a few moments to bring themselves into the room, and then we begin. With clients, I focus on the here and now between us. How my body feels in empathic response (the inner knowing) informs my work.

Brian loves the unique nature of the therapeutic relationship: the intimacy, and the application of theory into practice. He’s curious about each and every client and what has shaped them. Great skill is required for active listening, pattern recognition of issues, ‘being present’, tone, word usage, and timing of intervention.

I take great care in creating an environment where people can feel heard and accepted. I am joyful when people make the sort of progress that they desire.

Brian spends two days a week coaching managers and professionals to be effective with people and tasks, and helping them recognise and express their emotions for intra- and interpersonal mastery. Problem-solving incorporates unconscious processes (psychotherapeutic interventions) at the individual and organisational levels.

Brian aims to design and deliver programs that are consultative, organic, strategic, flexible and responsive. He meets with the organisational representative—the CEO, equity partner, service manager, school principal, etc. Mining the emergent issues and themes, he picks up on organisational and individual needs.

I use a range of strategies and professional development, working with individuals and groups for congruence or alignment. I am interested in the organisational health of the business and delivery of identified goals and vision.

The organisations that Brian works with agree to a strict code of ethics. He works privately and confidentially—no reporting back on individuals. His concern is that neither the organisation nor the person is compromised, that everyone wins.

I spend a lot of time in ‘seeding’ mode—thinking and creating ways to reveal, challenge, and excite change. I enfold material and technique from art, film, literature, music, story telling metaphor, and body work (e.g., sculpting the team).

Given his multi-faceted roles and intensity of people contact, it’s important for Brian to relax. He needs a lot of time alone, without social commitments.

I love private time with my partner, seeing movies, walking on a beach, and reading. I have been married to my soul partner for 24 years. She’s integral to me.

With an avid interest in filmmaking since his twenties, Brian enjoys creating short films. He has named this entity Kailash Productions, after Mount Kailash in Tibet (revered by Buddhists and Hindus as the centre of world). The painstaking filming and editing process exercises his fourth function. His frustration with computer technology glitches is less easily reframed.

I started school early, at three. That meant throughout my school years I was always the youngest and the smallest in the class.

I worked diligently to keep up, despite lacking the age-appropriate development to understand many of the concepts we studied. At 14 in HSC, Macarthur’s strategies with sheep in NSW didn’t make much sense to me!

Sport became my arena for excellence. I was school captain of athletics at primary, captain of the cricket team in Year 12, and held the school athletics record for 800 metres. I won a sporting scholarship to attend St Kevin’s for Years 11 and 12.

Australian Psychological Type Review Vol 7 No. 1 March 2005
My short films tell stories about people’s journeys. I enjoy raising societal issues, storyboarding, designing how I’ll represent it, deciding how I’ll shoot it.

Editing is such a finicky, detailed process, but I am becoming more patient. My perfectionism means that my work output is low, but that’s okay: it’s something I share with my favourite director, Stanley Kubrick.

My motivation for making films is both creative self-expression and my desire to touch people in a particular way: to touch their emotionality.

Interested in reading about spirituality, Eastern philosophies and sacred places, Brian has been particularly drawn to Buddhism. He enjoys reading textbooks on psychotherapy, film directors, and the art of filmmaking, and adores listening to music: Clapton, Santana, Van Morrison.

Brian also takes delight in teaching and playing with his Rottweiler pup Remus. And he continues to run twice a week with a couple of mates from the Public Service, whom he’s known since 1969.

Brian’s favourite colours are black, white, aubergine, chocolate, charcoal, kingfisher blue, and pastel pink.

How does Brian inhabit his workspace?

In this busy world, with its quickening rhythm, I want to create a place that feels calm, aesthetically pleasing, and with a quality that invites people to feel safe to express their soul—a sacred place.

In my childhood I sometimes found solace alone in a church—that feeling of spirit is so important. It concerns me that so many people are stressed, alienated from their feelings, and have lost their sense of self.

Brian is affronted by mess. His office and counselling room are ordered and structured. He prefers plenty of light and space, with artwork that has special meaning for him. Design, form, texture, tones, colours and comfort are important.

On his desk Brian keeps several personal items that connect him with the people he loves. Everything is in its rightful place: It’s ordered and structured, and overlooks a water garden. I need light, airy space to work in. At my desk I work visually: whiteboards, charts, calendars, coloured stickers and timelines. I must have the right colour and thickness of biro.

Brian’s diary is pristine. His files are kept in locked cabinets, organised chronologically and alphabetically. He gets upset if people borrow items from his desk and don’t return them to exactly where they had been. ‘All of this anality helps me keep order in my day’, says Brian.

I attempt to do too much and go above and beyond, but zestful contribution is essential to me. I love to nurture others, unravel horrendous problems, follow my inspirations, and make a difference. I recognise that my dedication is somewhat obsessive.

Who is Brian?

I’m a creative, imaginative lateral thinker. I have great care and concern for people. I’m conscientious, kind, and perceptive.

I exercise my intellectual curiosity and use my ingenuity to solve problems. My vision is far-seeing, and I like bringing a sense of discipline and order to each step along the way to my goals.

There are always issues to work on:

I’m earnest, intense, and obsessive. I am overly sensitive (I get hurt by things others wouldn’t worry about). I worry.

I am stoic. I am stubborn about how things should be best done. (My way’s the way to go!) My high standards mean that I am never satisfied.

I find it easy to give and difficult to receive. I put myself last. I find it almost impossible to tell people what I want. In a group, I would like people to ask, because I won’t volunteer without genuine interest, encouragement or talk space.

‘Life can be easy, or it can be a struggle’, says Brian. ‘My propensity is to choose the hard road.’

I love my work—I have empathic love for each and every client. When I work with people, I actually care very deeply.

I’m privileged to have this role; I’m holding their souls.

What is Brian’s life about?

Understanding why I am here.

Relationships: being in relationship with myself, my partner, friends, and others.

To make a difference.
The teacher

Anna Rosenberg, INFJ

In her early 50s, Anna is tall, with a calming presence. She walks her talk: her empathy, demand for honesty and search for meaning are expressed in her eyes—beautiful green pools of deep emotion.

Anna’s capacity to facilitate the learning and development of others dovetails well with her creative approach to all she does. Ahead of the trends, she masters obscure theories and knowledge, experiments with lifestyle, and encounters the rare. Anna designs amazing learning experiences for people, incorporating film, literature, psychology and spirituality.

Many people hold strong memories of the workshops, games and encounters Anna has led. For example, she held a film discussion evening for 30 colleagues and friends. The group explored how to watch a film at a meta-level, how to critique, examine where and how the director takes us, and to contemplate parallels between films’ themes and our lives.

The group enjoyed The French Lieutenant’s Woman in a comfortable theatrette, followed by a buffet dinner where everyone brought favourite dishes to share. Anna orchestrated a provoking discussion that was informative and illuminating for all.

Anna’s special interest in her students has been instrumental in their achieving their full potential. Her care for the world compels her to rail against cruelty, injustice and indifference. Her capacity to accompany another on unknown journeys, such as terminal illness, catastrophe, spiritual crisis and emotional pain, is awe inspiring.

Anna grew up in Tottenham in Footscray, where my dad gave me a section of his shed as my own play place. By the time I was 8 I was already teaching, having rounded up local kids into my own shed classroom. I did well academically. I like to listen and I like language and reading, so I was well suited to the old style of teaching of ‘shut up and listen and do what I tell you’, because that’s what was expected of me at home.

Anna’s parents did everything they could to promote education. They came from farms in Europe, and were not educated beyond Grade 5.

I cannot remember a time when my parents did not expect me to go to university, and Dad once told me I had a choice: ‘Go to uni or have your back broken.’

I loved learning and I had three teachers in particular who were kind to me and who made English a pure joy. I was always in the top five at school and it was about the only thing I felt good at, and that won me approval from my parents.

Teachers, Anna noticed, also seemed to always have the answers, to be in control and to have no self doubt. They also had power, and all that was important to her, coming from a home which eventually became ‘violent and emotionally chaotic.’

Education was the way out. 30 years ago, teaching was about the only thing on offer for girls who wanted to go to university:

I loved school and learning. I felt successful and had good friends, thus achieving my parent’s goals. I wanted to teach. I can’t remember a time I considered anything else.

A teaching bursary gave Anna the money to support herself. Within six months of starting her degree, she had left home.

Anna taught for 28 years in the public and private systems, tertiary (training teachers at Rusden, now Deakin University), CAE, a VCE tutorial college and private tutoring. She has taught English, history, geography, religion, woodworking and general studies. Her love is English, which she has taught across all levels, specialising at VCE for 21 years.

Anna has also run seminars for colleagues, and run tutorials as part of her Masters studies at Monash University.
Anna’s workspace is ‘light and airy, well-organised, pretty and filled with personal memorabilia. The carpet is soft, the colours are warm, and the room exudes peace’:

My desk is generally tidy and decorated. It is organised with the use of suspension files for all our everyday bureaucratic needs and an in-tray for all bills and mail which need attention. I have all my tools, pens, scissors etc in the left-hand drawer, and all the stationery, banking records, etc, in the right drawer, and I sit between the drawers.

Anna’s partner Max custom-built her desk, so it has great significance for her.

The walls of my work space are covered in paintings done by friends, and photos of family and friends and pets who have died.

My desk is decorated with an ink blotter covered in paintings of medieval women, and gifts from friends, and a chess piece as a reminder of my father. I also have my toy tiger, Walter, on my desk, a gift to me from my grandmother over 40 years ago.

Anna’s approach to working and creating is ‘very logical and pragmatic.’ Starting with what she feels—Anna feels situations and has gut reactions to them—she then asks herself a series of sequential questions, checking that the answers resonate in her as her truth. The questions tend to be in categories, such as De Bono’s six hats.

If Anna feels she is not up to resolving a situation because she doesn’t know enough or is too upset or emotional, she will ask an expert in the area for input and add that to the mix. She may then read up in the area, mulling until she has the key issues and some ideas in place, before discussing it with her partner, Max (IXTP).

After that discussion, I will see which of the possibilities feels right and best for me. Intuition is also in the mix, and I listen to my gut.

I know I’m on the right track when I feel a sense of release and ease inside, and I can see the steps I need take to achieve my purpose.

Anna is most comfortable when asked what she thinks. ‘If I am not invited to speak, I tend not to. I am a listener and observer. I like being considered and included in a conversation.’ Anna also admits to being ‘not much of a team player’:

Give me a broad overview of where we need to end up and leave me to it. Please don’t give me instructions, other than a skeleton outline if necessary. I will work out what I need to do and how, using my creativity and innovation, if you leave me alone to do it my way.

Anna has recently included pencil drawing in her repertoire of creative pursuits. She did not know she could draw, but for years she felt a pull to collect coloured pencils, gathering a large assortment:

Several years later, I wanted to touch them; work with them. Shortly after, I felt pulled into a shop where I was attracted to an art magazine. There was a picture of coloured pencils, and an artist’s wonderful drawing of animals. I ‘recognised’ that was exactly what I wanted to do.

Soon after, we wandered into a local gallery that had an exhibition of these wonderful drawings. Asking about them, I discovered the artist taught there. A few minutes from home. Synchronicity. I began taking sessions with Janet.

Anna tried a couple of drawing courses, but hated them: ‘Too many rules and too structured, not to mention too much to learn before you start drawing. I simply wanted to do it—quickly.’

I spoke to Janet about my frustration and she said, ‘Get some tracing paper so you can trace the outline of the image, and get straight into it!’ That freed me up to fly.

For Anna, it’s ‘all about the colouring-in.’ She has only been drawing for two years. She feels emotional when she is drawing, but does not feel she is an artist. When Janet insisted that she hang a couple of drawings in an exhibition, Anna felt ‘so shy and strange.’ I’m feeling shy talking about it’, she says.
Anna describes herself as very clear about what she wants, and very disciplined and determined in doing what she needs to achieve her goals.

I am quiet, happiest in my own company, or with my husband and Gus, my Schnauzer. I am curious, I love learning something new and achieving understanding.

I’m willing to give most things a go, as long as they are private things, things I want to do and have a curiosity about.

Anna does not need a lot of people in her life. The friendships she does have are very deep, intimate and cherished.

I don’t generally need people to talk to in relation to my emotional life.

Everyone, even Max, will generally get to hear what I am feeling or thinking once I have internally processed the experience, my feelings, thoughts and attitudes.

Anna says she is ‘generally positive, calm, well-organised, highly responsible and reliable.’

I am creative, love stories, film, music and dogs. I work best alone or with one other. My shadow side is that I am not a team player; I like my ideas and want to be left alone to carry them out.

While she projects confidence, in a crowd Anna feels ‘utterly alone and worthless.’ Noisy and crowded places induce panic and anxiety, and if she is subject to them for too long—for example, a three-day Year 7 school camp—it can take weeks to recover.

If I am not soaked in solitude, I become ill in every sense. I physically shut down with exhaustion, I lose language and can’t think straight, becoming teary and depressed, followed by rage and anxiety at a high level.

I become resentful of everyone and everything, and feel destroyed if someone asks something of me, because I’m too exhausted to discipline myself over the inner tension created by saying ‘no.’

I lose connection to myself and my spiritual self and feel abandoned and cut adrift, and then I just feel despair and hopelessness.

Anna’s shadow side includes deep bouts of depression and anxiety:

My abandonment issues rise up, and I feel disconnected from everybody. I also deal with issues of resentment, that there’s no-one to look after me (which is logical if you don’t tell people where you’re at).

There are times when Anna doesn’t want to be responsible for anything or anyone:

I also see myself as weak in that I won’t just come out and say what I really think if it’s something negative, I always look to soften it and make it nice—and sometimes I just want to be baldly rude.

‘I am always watching and monitoring myself to choose the path between the two opposites’ says Anna:

If you take all my positive aspects and look at the opposite, that’s the tension I live in. Sometimes I just want to let rip and not care any more.

Anna’s passions are spiritual work, reading, film, opera, theatre, physical fitness, drawing, her home and her marriage. Her favourite colours are pastel pink, fire engine red, and sunny saturated yellow.

What does life mean to Anna?

Connection; to myself, spirit, my partner, friends, humanity, the planet. I also notice a sense of belonging in our environment— the feel of the wind and sun, birds singing.

I love certain books, music and films because whoever wrote them reaches and connects with me. We share a wavelength—their music is how I feel, their theatre examines my thoughts, their words know me.

Sharing these moments, I don’t feel so alone.
There is such spirituality in the Outback. It’s amazing. I want to understand it.

I have great admiration for the people in the bush. They’re mentally tough and motivated by their love of family.

The bush calls me. I often have to get away, take off for a few days with the mates, or by myself, and go bush.

Camp fires ... I can sit and stare into the fire for a long time.

The rural financial counsellor

Brian ‘Doddo’ Dodson: INFJ

Rural financial counselling services were set up, with state and federal government funding, to help farmers when their initial troubles struck in the 1980s. Counsellor Brian ‘Doddo’ Dodson traverses a large domain—23% of New South Wales.

Born in the Sunraysia district, Doddo, 55, is a former banker (20 years with the Bank of NSW, now Westpac) who then worked with a welfare organisation. He has also owned a fruit property (grapes). Initially he studied business at Melbourne’s Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (now RMIT University), and has trained in family dispute resolution counselling.

He usually has a caseload of around 200 clients. Although the pastoral houses and banks were reasonably supportive through the worst of the drought, he reckons that ‘there is a pretty fair chance 10% of those clients won’t be here in 12 months.’

I am determined, caring, perceptive about families and their needs. I diffuse tension and conflict. I am a conciliator, an advocate, and an ethical person. I have the ability to hang on when others let go. My hanging in there achieves things—I’ll look after files that others give up on, I take on the tough cases.

He suspects he learned this from his father, a quiet, gentle man who performed extraordinary feats for colleagues when fighting as a commando behind enemy lines. His mother was more distant and cold: ‘She was not interested in my internal world!’

Doddo has great admiration for the women on the Western properties: they have, he says, ‘enormous durability’.

They cook breakfast, put on a load of washing, go out and muster, then come back and cook. Most of them work like two men.

They stand with their partner in the paddock in extreme conditions till nightfall, and get up the next day and do it again.

In the last decade Doddo has witnessed a trend that disturbs him: what amounts to a ‘migration’ of women from the beleaguered properties into the towns. In their battle to get some money ‘quite a number of families are breaking up—Mum and the kids are coming to town looking for work; Dad is staying on the farm.’

They’re physically breaking up, not breaking up emotionally. But it puts strains on them and who knows what happens down the track?

He is working five days a week, coming home and cooking a meal, drinking a bit too much, then it can be a four- or five-hour drive into town for the weekend to see the family. It’s been happening for the last ten years, but it’s happening more and more.

In bad times the country women, some of them with professions such as nursing, have to become the family’s sole breadwinner. Drought squeezes the towns. One typical town has only five of its 18 small businesses still open:

A lot of these smaller towns are made up of roo shooters, shearers, property hands. With the lack of work they move to larger centres to find work and won’t come to the back country again.

In these hard times some farmers contemplate suicide. One of the financial counsellor’s tasks is to be alert for danger cases. ‘A number of families are monitored on a regular basis.’ Calls sometimes come from neighbours. ‘We keep as much contact as we can.’

Dodson draws a couple of lessons from the big drought. One is that bad weather forecasting encouraged some farmers to hang on to stock longer than they should in the expectation that rain was imminent. The other is that the tougher breeds of sheep—like the Dorpers and Damaras—often survived better than the Merinos.
'Maybe the days of running traditional Merinos have gone', he suggests, 'people should split their flocks between Merino and some foreign stock.'

There's no escape in this country from the heartbreak of drought. The big dries will come again and again, without fail; only the precise timing is unpredictable. And every time they'll catch the graziers in a vice. Even the best providers, the most efficient managers, can't fully insulate themselves against rainless years.

Doddo is the elder twin in a family of three girls and one boy. He loved swimming and fantasised that he might become a frog-man, 'but in those days you either did a trade or joined the bank.' At the bank, Doddo was known for being a dandy; he dressed very stylishly. (Nowadays, it's R M Williams or Calvin Klein.)

Doddo's first wife died early in their marriage, leaving a baby and a toddler whom he raised as a single dad. 'I was gutted for a long time', he says, 'but I soldiered on and survived the disappointments and social isolation, the stigma, of being an oddity.'

My carefree days were with my new little family. Before the tragedy of her early death, life was good. Adored my wife and kids, career was going well … then everything disintegrated into total chaos.

Within a short space of time Doddo's first wife, his best man, and his father had all died. Afterwards, he had to work through his belief that he shouldn't get close to anyone because if he did, they would die. In the earlier years, he battled on alone.

I battled people who wanted to remove my children—sharply honing my dogged negotiation skills that would come in handy in my present work.

People didn't know what to say to me, so they kept away or looked embarrassed and did not mention it, as though nothing had changed. I wandered in a surreal dream as time sped up. My world became a racing train, whether I was sports training or working.

It's taken me until now to be able to slow down. Now if my knee hurts, I'll stop. But in the past I would not accept defeat.

Doddo has always considered himself a spiritual person, with great faith. Music and prayer somehow got him through the loss and lonely struggle as a single parent: 'I listened to a lot of music about love; it comforted me, I related to the lyrics.' He now has two young children from his most recent marriage to an ISFP, after his older children had become independent.

People who have struggled have fascinated Doddo since childhood:

I often read about Mandela, sporting heroes, POWs and minority groups, Nancy Wake, Dawn Fraser. People who had to work hard to get anywhere in life. Loyalty is very important to me.

Doddo always seeks quicker, smarter ways of doing everything, a trait that others may not necessarily appreciate as he pulls off impossible results for his clients. He liaises with politicians and key stakeholders, and is an impassioned speaker. He describes himself as ‘a Star Trek figure—trailblazing, intrepidly going off bush. A trail-biking, spiritual, social worker / explorer’:

I plant seeds, working behind the scenes to empower others. I'm unorthodox and creative, and get a charge from helping people develop their ideas. I am a valiant fighter and champion for my clients, but I never tell anyone what I have done. This interview is hard for me to do.

Doddo describes his workspace as 'vast—a huge expanse of land':

I service around 800 000 square k, about a quarter of NSW. I enjoy the autonomy, as I love doing my own thing. I'd do about 80 000 k off-road driving per year.

I feel comfortable driving out there—feels right. I feel safe despite the danger. I respect the land. There is a peace. I leapfrog to properties to visit my clients. This usually involves a six hour drive off road.

As a child I played war games, as I was brought up in a soldier settlement.

I loved school and was always school sports captain. I held the 100 yard record at the school for decades. Loved sport.

An A-grade cricketer at 15, I was signed up by Footscray to play league football. But the bank sent me to the country, so I was unable to proceed.

As Dad said: ‘C’est la vie, move on.’
Dodd has offices in Mildura and Broken Hill, but he is rarely sitting still:

It is hard to manage office staff, plus being flat out on the road. I need to work with smart people I can trust. While driving, I plan, self-assess, use my mobile. My work days are always full on. When I arrive home it hits me, and I am knackered.

Doddo is a triathlete—he has been ‘Triathlete of the Year’, and completed his last Iron Man at the age of 45. He is modestly matter-of-fact about his sporting prowess. He keeps himself fit because he has a lot he wants to achieve, and is conscious of keeping the mind/body balance to address his overwork tendencies.

Doddo devotes a lot of time to supporting young athletes with triathlon training, and invariably puts others before himself. People assume he has no needs because he is ever-available to help.

I get hurt when I’m taken for granted, treated poorly. I hate confrontations and try to be a peacemaker. As well as in my job, people with problems seek me out at sports clubs, etc. But I get really gutted when I’m abused, or treated as an invisible machine that isn’t appreciated.

I only need a few words of encouragement or to feel that my contribution is valued, and I’ll keep on going like an Energiser battery. I’ll leave for work at 5 AM if there is a tight agenda for the day, and get home after dark. I happily put in over and above.

Having achieved all the physical challenges he set himself, Doddo craves mental ones, and remains excited about possibilities. He needs solitude, and would like to spend more time writing in order to pass on what he has learned. He is looking forward to a film project coming up in the future—he has been asked to contribute to a documentary about rural life.

Doddo’s office desk is organised, with a place for everything. Same with his car, his ‘travelling office’, the Nissan Patrol. ’I’m fastidious’, he says, ‘and I’d prefer it if people didn’t help themselves to things on my desk without asking.’

I expect people to leave my things as they found them; it is important for safety reasons.

Doddo has a brass statue of David which he’s taken to every office he’s worked in:

He’s aesthetically pleasing, and represents my interest in sport. I hang a framed poem that my club wrote for me after my triathlon—a modified Banjo Patterson. A lot of research papers and piles of files.

Doddo helps farmers refinance and stay in the industry when the banks would have sold them up. He helps families with succession planning. Sometimes the best thing is to sell up and look at new roles.

I have evolved my role over 15 years, and take a personal approach to solving problems with a coffee or dinner: an informal way of networking and bringing people on board. I put lots of effort into my submissions and proposals and business plans for clients. They’re accepted because it is known that my work has integrity.

I enjoy my work and the people. I realise I push myself too hard. Like most people, some days may be dark with self-doubt.

Doddo reads a lot: adventure, romance, biography and history. He is fascinated by Burke and Wills and ‘anything about the bush’, and has been researching his family tree: ‘I like playing detective’, he says:

I love music. I relied on Joe Cocker to get me through the bad times. I wish I could play an instrument. I also love singing—I wanted to be another John Farnham.

Doddo’s favourite colours are the vibrant back-country oranges and reds: ‘They are amazing hues.’

What’s it all about?

To love and be loved. To care for others. Affection.

I would never look for accolades, but I’d like it if my gravestone said: ‘He made a difference to people’s lives.’
The construction industry project manager / artist

Trevor Liddell: INFJ

Trevor, 30, is responsible for the delivery of construction projects for a large retail business with stores in most states. He defines briefs for projects ranging from $1.5 to $22 million, engages consultant teams, obtains approval certificates and permits, appoints builders via a tender process, monitors and manages project risks, and administers the process to completion.

Mindful of the need to facilitate communication and understanding, Trevor enjoys helping teams to work well. As one of five staff in a suburban Melbourne office, he enjoys the small family company with harmonious relationships, and wouldn’t wish to work for a large, impersonal firm.

Trevor has led and taught throughout his life. He has been involved in Camp America and Camp Australia, managing the delivery of programs for 150 children, plus team leadership of counsellors. He was also a resident coordinator at university, providing academic and pastoral support and guidance, tutoring, and coordination.

Trevor has a Bachelor of Building (Hons) and has partially completed a Bachelor of Planning and Design (Architecture). Years earlier he started civil engineering and also building surveying, but he recognised that they weren’t enough; building and design came closer.

While he doesn’t see himself remaining in his current field, for now it is a reasonable choice. Despite his relative youth, he has a leadership role that exercises his interests in design and human relationships, and his passion for problem-solving to successful completion.

Trevor describes his physical workspace as ’tragically bland in its entirety.’ Although the building was architecturally designed less than 12 months ago, he does not have a window to the outside world. And the air conditioner is ‘Artic during all seasons’:

Once I took things into my own hands and switched it over to ‘heater.’ I thoroughly enjoyed those few minutes before it was switched back by the boss.

‘The furnishings, colourings, materials and furniture could decorate any normal modern office in the Western world’, he says:

Frank Lloyd Wright once designed an office he described as a Temple for Work. This place is modelled on an interior broom cupboard in that Temple.

I have placed some pictures on my workstation partition, and enjoy the banter between people, and the odd decent music that is played.

Trevor’s workstation desk is ‘quite long and spacious.’ He keeps it ‘very tidy’, and usually its surface is mostly bare: ‘I prefer an uncluttered desk to let me focus on one thing at a time’, he says.

I feel that the state of my environment directly reflects my state of mind, and I like to be in control of that environment. I wouldn’t like someone to drop a pile of papers or whatever on my desk! I quickly tidy my desk so that everything is always where I think it should be.

Trevor tidies his desk as a ‘ritual preparation’ for doing his work. ‘An observer might assume that I’m procrastinating’, he says. ‘but I feel that it is really important to get things “just so” before acting.’

I much prefer my two large wooden desks at home. One of these great desks belonged to my grandfather, and I love it. Lots of memories, and definitely a more satisfying place to work!

Trevor’s interests include the arts (painting, drawing, film, architecture, music), competition sport (middle-distance running, lap swimming, cycling, triathlons, snow skiing), and ‘meaningful and enjoyable conversation with like-minded people.’

Trevor demonstrated a gift for art from childhood. He tried studying art—but it was too arty for me!

Along with project management, he also works as a studio manager and teacher of children, adolescents and adults at art schools. He has held exhibitions of his work, and undertakes private commissions.

‘I’m not a tormented artist starving in a garret’, he says. ‘I’m happy to get my art out into city shops. I love producing my own thing. I have an entrepreneurial orientation.

‘I sell works to shops and people who see and covet my work. I intend to keep my painting as a secondary endeavour to my calling/career.’
Trevor enjoys history and literature, and loves visiting rural Victoria. He and his girlfriend recently returned from travel in Europe: he would ‘love to live there.’

Trevor likes solving emergent problems and meeting targets. He describes himself as ‘creative, spontaneous and innovative’, ‘responsible, conscientious and committed’.

To get the best from him, people should understand, value, and care about him:

I am strongly affected if someone doesn’t care who I am, what I think, what I have to offer. But they need to ask, because I don’t volunteer unless I feel really comfortable.

If he doesn’t feel valued, Trevor can not muster more than a low level of interest:

I may occasionally lower my feeling of regard and respect for them. Not very fair, probably short-sighted, and most likely unwise: but there it is.

If someone treats me unkindly, I am likely to withdraw, become introspective and silent. I am sensitive and feel things deeply.

Trevor is at his best when asked for his opinion, thoughts, feelings and interpretation of ideas, concepts and issues.

If I am asked to perform a task, I wish to be allowed to work instinctively, intuitively, and with freedom. I like people injecting wit and humour into the working day, and I love to have fun at work.

He needs to be genuinely interested in the task, project or question at hand. ‘Having meaning to all that I do is vital’, he says. ‘If I can believe in the outcome desired, I’ll be right into it.’

Since his country childhood, Trevor has been empathic, nostalgic, and sensitive. He saw himself as introverted: he had only a small group of friends, and kept diaries that were ‘self-aware and very deep.’ As a child he wanted to be an architect or an artist; now, as an adult:

I would love a job asking interesting questions—about meaning. But I also like generating money, ideas and high-risk schemes.

Trevor sees opportunities for architects and designers to create works ‘to inspire and teach others’, citing the influence of single key works on the development of architectural design and discourse:

Everything is different once a new house is added to the collective consciousness and ongoing discourse. New references expand the realms of possibility. Financial accessibility to new designs and the development of new architectural tastes in the public are major challenges.

Trevor is concerned by the new suburbs that re-create Federation-style derivatives. He would like to see sensitivity to climate and water/energy conditions, enforcement of rainwater tanks, and designs oriented to utilise natural light.

‘Culture evolution’ is what it’s all about, I think. I really mean ‘culture change’ but you can’t simply say that, because psychology and wording are factors that will affect what can be achieved ...

‘You have to show people things over time’, he says. ‘And open them to ideas’.

You encourage one bold person to actually build a new different house and … show it as an alternative house design. Only then will people feel comfortable even considering doing something different.

Brave people are rare out in the world, I reckon; and brave people with money to put into houses (usually the biggest life expense they will have) are even rarer.

Trevor aspires to walk a path incorporating his passion for design, psychological meaning, high architecture and entrepreneurship. His fantasy of the future is ‘to feel alive, thinking creative, exciting thoughts, feeling exhilarated’: ‘an exciting stretch filled with creativity, adventure, happiness, loving family, like-minded friends, and integrity’:

To contribute to society. To combine design and entrepreneurship with mentoring, consulting, writing and art.

To be pleased that I didn’t settle for less.

Conclusion

I am struck by the humility and downplaying of the INFJs in this case study—yet it captures their essence.

They are not concerned with how anyone else views them, and they have no need to explain the significance and scope of their many achievements. They toil behind the scenes, advising high-profile movers and shakers with the same focus that they offer the disenfranchised members of society.

Regardless of age, these INFJs have the quality of ‘old souls’. They bring a layered sense of care and significance that assists others to go to places that they couldn’t imagine existed.

References

Fuller, Meredith, Workspaces (series), Australian Psychological Type Review:

1. ENTJs: The artist, the headhunter and the playwright, APTR 6:1 (July 2003), 3-8.
2. INTPs: The academic, the doctor and the voluntary welfare worker, APTR 5:3 (November 2003), 29-37.
4. INTJs: ‘The professional association manager, the analyser of processes in organisations, the management analyst, the website builder and content manager — and the academic’, APTR 6:3 (November 2004), 11-25.


Martin, C R 1995, Looking at type and careers, Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

