Personal Success

“Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN
Is it possible that certain personalities make better designers? Aside from being adept at the necessary skills required to be a designer, would a certain personality be better suited for such a career? The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tests, which are based on Jung’s theory of personality type, are an assessment tool for identifying personality type. The Myers-Briggs studies claim that our personalities are determined by the way in which we orient ourselves in the world. These methods of orientation are grouped into four pairs. One will naturally prefer one way of orienting to the world over another. The four pairs are:

- Extroversion vs. Introversion
- Sensing vs. Intuition
- Thinking vs. Feeling
- Judging vs. Perceiving

For example, one person may see the world as an extrovert, sensing, thinking and judging person, while someone else may see the world as an introverted, intuitive,
feeling and perceiving person. There are sixteen ways to combine these ways of seeing the world, hence, the Myers-Briggs tests are also known as “The Sixteen Types.”

I was curious to see if there was a particular personality that might be best suited to be a designer. In her book, “What’s Your Type of Career?” Donna Dunning takes the Myers-Briggs personalities and explores different career paths that coincide with them. She stresses taking advantage of your natural way of working, using your strengths and skills, and becoming more aware of what affects your job satisfaction in order to make better career choices. Ultimately one can use this to heighten career satisfaction.

**So which personalities make good designers?** All of them, in my opinion. Based on my understanding of what a designer is, and the plethora of design jobs available, I see no personality type that has “designer” stamped all over it, and no personality that excludes the possibility of designing as a career choice. This was a relief to me. I was afraid that I was going to find my personality under the heading of “Sheep-herder.” Ms. Dunning lists occupations for certain types of working styles, but since a designer can be a manager, an artist, a researcher, a marketer, an entrepreneur or an inventor, it is impossible to say that one personality makes a better designer over another one.

Something to consider however, is **the way you prefer to work as a designer**. Are you more comfortable leading or following? Do you prefer to work by yourself or in a group? Do you like to leave your options open or are you compelled to make a decision immediately and move on to the next problem? Do you like to see results of your work as a physical product, or do you enjoy solving theoretical problems? Working in a
manner that suits your personality can have a tremendous impact on your level of satisfaction in any design position. Therefore, knowing your preferred way of working before you seek employment can save you years of frustration down the road.

SOHRAB VOSSOUGHI, INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER/ADMINISTRATOR

In his interview with Hattie Bryant, Sohrab Vossoughi of Ziba Design talks about how his role as a designer has changed since he started his firm in 1984. Sohrab confides in Hattie that he is from the “old school,” and that he uses a drafting table to work on his designs. He admits that he doesn’t know how to design using a computer, although he would like to learn someday. He has been doing less and less design work and more administrative work as the firm has grown. He tells Ms. Bryant about the day he came into work and found that his drafting table had been taken out of his office and given to another designer at the company.

“It was a sad day and also a big day of realization for me. I feel like I am no longer a designer. I know that I wasn’t using it, but now I think [about] all these years I went to school to be a designer and [that now] I am no longer a designer, I am an administrator running a business.”

Sohrab later confided in a friend who told him, “You are still designing but at a different level. Everything you do is about design.” Sohrab saw the wisdom in his friend’s words, and realized that Ziba Design was his own design project, saying, “I am building it and designing it and redesigning it every day. So I’m not done with my project.” That guy is never satisfied with anything.
MIKKEL JENSEN, INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER/WHALE TRACKER

I met Mikkel Jensen while taking a furniture design class in Copenhagen, Denmark last summer. Trained as a furniture designer at Denmark’s Design School, Mikkel found great satisfaction in designing mechanical fixtures and devices. His position as a furniture designer allowed him to do this type of work on occasion, but as he was required to do more and more computer work, he became less satisfied with his work. Known for his inventiveness and metalworking skills, he was asked by one of his clients’ associates if he could help design a system for tracking whales.

With limited success the first few years, developing and testing his system has turned into a full-time position—now in its fifth year. He spends up to six months a year in Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Canada and Brazil, field-testing his equipment. Mikkel has been seen tagging whales on numerous science and nature programs in Canada and Denmark, as well various magazines including National Geographic. He spends two to three months each year developing equipment and preparing for the next season. Somehow, he manages to help with the furniture class during the summer as
well. It goes to show that industrial design can lead to many different types of careers. One of them is bound to suit your personality. Fortunately, our training as designers affords us many more career choices than other professions do. **The key to success is the ability to see the possibilities that lie before us**, and to be open to trying them—even if they do not have the word “industrial designer” in the job description.
Chapter 11

Happiness, Responsibility and Success

“I look on that man as happy, who, when there is question of success, looks into his work for a reply”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

In the chapter entitled, “First Things First,” I mentioned the importance of setting goals and moving towards a preferred destination. Certainly one’s desire for personal growth cannot be denied, nor can one’s desire for obtaining as much as possible in one’s life or career. I think goal setting is of utmost importance, but there is another side of the coin to consider. In his book, “The Art of Happiness,” the Dalai Lama advises,

“There are two methods for achieving inner contentment. One is to obtain all that we desire. But sooner or later we will run up against something we cannot obtain. The other, more reliable method is not to have what we want, but rather want and appreciate what we have.”

Whether or not you agree with the Dalai Lama, his philosophy raises some thought provoking questions: How can you be happy where you are, while still striving to get to a better place? Where is the motivation to do better, to achieve higher standards and to improve the quality of one’s life if the advisable method is to want what you already have? Dissatisfaction with what we have seems to be the main motivation for achieving anything in life, and design is no exception.
In my interviews with designers over the past year, many of them talked about the importance of finding an inner peace—a resolve that is independent of outside circumstances. They spoke of ways to find this peace within themselves. When I interviewed Alina, I asked what her definition of success was. I had expected her to say something about “making lots of money” or “helping other people,” which are common goals for designers—and nothing to be ashamed of. However, she surprised me by saying that success to her is “when an artist, designer or architect comes to a point in their career when they know themselves and are not afraid of [the process, and are able to] control it.” She explained that her definition coincides with a Buddhist philosophy of knowing who you are and how your mind works, and not being afraid to go where the process leads you. She acknowledges that there is going to be a great deal of frustration and fear, but that one has to accept it in order to continue down the path of creativity towards a greater reward. Success to her is more along the lines of self-actualization than materialistic goals.

I was impressed by Peter Valois, a young designer who has only a few years of experience, but seems to have an understanding of the world I wish I had at his age. I asked him what success means to him personally. He said,

“I believe that happiness is the only measure of success. The question is which subsidiary goals add up to happiness. For me -- having fun, creating things that bring enjoyment to other people, making enough money to survive, respect of my colleagues (but not fame).”
“What makes us discontented with ourselves is our absurdly exaggerated idea we have of the happiness of others.”

JAY HUFF

HAPPINESS

I did some research on happiness, hoping to find a secret or two about how to achieve it, maintain it and hopefully, increase it. In his book, “The Art of Happiness,” co-authored by His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Howard C. Cutler cites research showing that happiness is determined more by one’s state of mind than by external events. An external event such as winning the lottery can result in a temporary elevation in happiness, but eventually one’s level of happiness migrates back to a certain baseline. However, this baseline level of happiness is largely determined by the way in which we perceive our situation.

“Our feelings of contentment are strongly influenced by our tendency to compare,” says Cutler. We compare ourselves with what we used to have, and with what others have. But this is not necessarily a bad thing to do. If we compare our current situation to a past situation where we were less fortunate, then our happiness level increases. Only when we compare ourselves to a time when we were better off does our happiness level decrease.

SEE SUCCESS IN ALL YOU DO

What I learned about happiness can also be said about success. Our success has more to do with how we perceive our situation than by the situation itself. Sometimes we look at what could have been, or what we hoped would have been, and fail to see the good in what we have done. Our successes can be found all around us if we choose to focus on
them instead of the failures. Although I refer to them as “rip-offs”, the window boxes I designed ten years ago are still being sold all over the country today. If I keep an eye out for them, I can find them on practically every residential street in New York City.

On the subject of “rip-offs,” Ed Kildoff of Pollen Design proudly claims to have designed the “most successful rip-off in history” with his “Rabbit Corkscrew.” Pressured by a client to re-design a corkscrew based on the mechanics of an expired patent, Ed reluctantly came up with various ways to make the existing corkscrew look new. The project dragged on and on, but a few years later when it finally made it into production, it sold millions. His client was more than happy with the success, and it helped make a name for his design firm. “I wouldn’t mind having a few more of those,” he told me.

**BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN SUCCESS**

It is easy to go through life believing we are victims of circumstance. We are quick to blame someone else for our problems or failures: “If my boss had only told me…” “If the client were more specific as to what his needs were…” “If my computer only did what it’s supposed to do…” When we see ourselves as victims, we give away our power. Our boss, the client, or even our computer determines our success—not us. Therefore, when we run away from responsibility and blame, we undermine our own success. There is a heavy price to pay for being blameless.
In his book “Taking Responsibility: Self Reliance and the Accountable Life,” Nathaniel Branden reminds us that we are responsible for our own happiness, our own success, and our own lives. Below are excerpts of an affirmation on being responsible. I thought it was worth adding another page to my thesis, which is long enough already.

“The practice of self responsibility begins with the recognition that I am ultimately responsible for my own existence; that no one else is here on earth to serve me, take care of me, or fill my needs; I am the owner of no one’s life but my own. This means that I am willing to generate the causes of the effects I want. It also means that if I need the cooperation of others in the pursuit of my goals, I must provide them with reasons meaningful in terms of their own interests and needs; my wants per se are not a claim on anyone.”

“I have the choice to operate mindfully or mindlessly, or anywhere between. To think is an act of choice; so is to avoid thinking, and I am the cause of that choice. Self-responsibility entails my willingness to be accountable for my choices, decisions, and behavior. I take responsibility for thinking about the consequences of my actions and hold myself accountable for them as well. When I choose an action whose consequences I can foresee, I am also choosing the consequences and I accept that fact.”

“Self-responsibility implies my willingness to be accountable for the ideas and values by which I conduct my life. This entails intellectual independence: the willingness to think for myself and act by the judgement of my own mind. I learn from others, but I do not grant to others authority over my consciousness or follow blindly where I do not understand or agree. I do not live secondhand.”

“I recognize that the achievement of my happiness is no one’s task but my own. No one owes me happiness. In sum, I am responsible for my life, well being, and actions in all those areas and issues open to my choice.”
Ruth Lande Shuman is President and Founder of PubliColor, a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to “catalyze change in inner-city schools and neighborhood facilities though the power of color and collaboration. We not only transform the space but the people who use them as well.” Based on her concern for the growing rate of high school drop-outs, “The Paint Lady” has a passion for color and believes firmly in its ability to improve not only environments, but people’s lives. Trained as an industrial designer, she gives inner-city school children a feeling of ownership, responsibility and pride in their schools as she helps them choose colors that can have a lasting effect on students and teachers. Faced with adversity from custodians and nay-sayers, she has proven that with enough paint, a lot of passion, a strong will and some personal charm, you can do things you never thought were possible. She organizes paint crews of over 200 people and is able to paint a school in a day. She says, “In struggling schools the environment is often one of low expectations. When we complete a transformation there is always a sense of accomplishment and success, which hopefully will lead to future successes.” She has received a great deal of recognition for her work, including a President’s Service Award from the Points of Light Foundation, as well as an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey show.
What is not known however, is her personal story, which she shared with students during her recent visit to Pratt where she received her degree in industrial design. With a charismatic smile, she told the audience that it took her eight years to get through the program as a part time student at Pratt. As a student, she lacked confidence in her abilities. She looked at other students and thought they were so much better than her when it came to model making, mechanical ability and production methods. But because of her love for design, she refused to give up. She received a much-needed ego boost from Rowena Reed Kostellow, who noticed her natural affinity in the use of color, and asked Ruth to partake in one of her color classes.

Instead of becoming discouraged by concentrating on her weaknesses, **Ruth concentrated on her strengths and followed her passion.** She is a perfect example of how one can achieve great success by developing one’s strengths, which in this case, included extraordinary people skills as well. She is not only passionate about her belief in the use of color, but also in her commitment to **making the world a better place through design.**
Writer Leo Rosten believed that, “The purpose of life is not to be happy, it’s to matter, to feel that it’s made some difference that we have lived at all.” But in achieving this goal, would that not make us happy? In my interview with Henry Yoo, I asked him, “What brings you joy in life?” He responded by saying:

“I must ask you one thing before I answer this one. If you achieve the most important thing in your life, would it not be the most joyful thing? If there were no hope of achieving the most important thing in your life, would you feel true joy? Are they not the same thing?”

My thesis has taken me on a remarkable journey—and I continue down its path, inspired by those who share with me their personal stories. Answers and “hidden truths” arose in all kinds of situations where I least expected them. No one can say where success will be found; it is wherever, and whatever you want it to be. A truly successful person is simply one who recognizes success when they discover it, for it is not the destination, but the journey that is the true reward.

“Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward with your life. Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism. Confronting your fears and allowing yourself the right to be human can, paradoxically, make you a far happier and more productive person.”

—Dr. David M. Burns
Selected Bibliography


