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***Understanding the
ISFP***

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding any personality type is no easy task, especially not if we want to arrive at any sort of deep understanding. Nevertheless, it is possible to make steps in that direction.

This book aims to be just that: a step in the direction of understanding. It represents my views, based on the books and articles I’ve read, the talks I’ve had, the observations I’ve made, and also not in small measure my own intuition, and should be taken as such.

This is not the end all be all absolute Truth; it is just an informed point of view and the result of my own experience and my own creativity. Nevertheless, I do hope this book can constitute a little help in knowing, understanding but also accepting yourself better.

One of the things I’ve observed throughout the years is that not all people manage to accept or love themselves for who they are. There are (or at least there were around me) quite a few people with less than stellar views of themselves.

Often, these were people who I admired and respected, but who seemed to have less of a good opinion of themselves than I had about them. I don’t know if I understood them better than they did, after all no amount of knowledge can guarantee understanding.

But certainly, the patterns I saw playing out based on my intuition of their psychological functions helped me understand

PART I – THE 8 FUNCTIONS

By now, you may want to dive right in and start reading about the ISFP personality description, after all, that is what this book is about. But running the risk of upsetting your expectations, dear reader, we're not going to do that just yet.

You can skip ahead to the chapters that are about the ISFP if you really want that, but I would encourage you to take the time to go through this section dedicated to the 8 psychological functions, because we will be referring to them a lot throughout the rest of the book.

Especially if you are an ISFP reading this, I would strongly understand you not being interested in pure theory and fluff which does not pertain to directly understanding yourself better. It is quite an ask to go through nearly 30 pages worth of theory without it being directly about the type this book is centered on.

If you take the time to go through it before moving to the parts which actually are about the ISFP, I hope you find the added perspective useful and helpful in better understanding yourself. But again, remember, you can go through the book in whatever order you choose. Nobody is forcing you to read the next part if you feel it holds no value to you.

Now, if you want to understand the origin of the 8 psychological functions we use today as part of the MBTI system, you need look no further than Jung's (1976) book on psychological types, you know the one we talked about previously, that started the whole thing.

What he describes when talking about the types are what the 8 psychological functions look like when they are fully developed and when they are running the show.

Of course, there have been other interpretations along the years, and I will attempt to bring my own take on them here, but let's give credit where credit is due. It all began with Carl Jung.

SENSATION (S) AND INTUITION (N) – THE IRRATIONAL FUNCTIONS

Jung (1976) distinguishes between two main categories of functions: Rational and Irrational. The Rational functions are the ones influenced by reason, while the irrational ones are not.

He describes four main functions: Sensation (S), Intuition (N), Feeling (F) and Thinking (T). Out of these, Jung identifies Sensation and Intuition as being the irrational functions, while feeling and thinking are rational.

If you look at how rational and irrational are defined in this context, it makes perfect sense why Sensation and Intuition are irrational while Feeling and Thinking are rational.

Sensation and Intuition are what we now call "Perceiving" Functions. They gather and organize data about the world around us, looking either at the Past, Present, or Future. And while you can give structure and order to the data gathered, the actual reasoning (i.e. decision making) process is not really done through either sensing or intuition.

Rather, regardless of their internal or external orientation, Sensing and Intuition act as support functions for decision making. They are not here to make the decision themselves, but they are here to provide the data to the functions that are making the decision, informing them and enabling them to make better, more precise decisions.

In that sense, we can say Sensing and Intuition are Irrational functions, in the sense Jung understood the concept.

Extroverted Sensation (Se) – Observing and acting in the present moment

Extroverted Sensing (Se) is the Auxiliary function of the ISFP. It is the main function for taking in sensory information about the world around us.

Being an extroverted function, it goes wide and extensive rather than deep or focused and intensive. It is in essence a purely empirical function, it is here to both observe and act on the observation it makes with little to no delay between the two.

Extroverted Sensing (Se) is not the most patient and planned function. Rather, it's more of a "act first, ask questions later (or never)" function, and it's more likely that they will ask forgiveness for doing something they shouldn't have done than permission to do something they want to do.

There is tremendous physical, kinetic energy contained in this function. Being extroverted, this energy is not inward focused, but goes out into the world, often in bursts.

From the outside, especially by persons who do not have this function in the Dominant or Auxiliary position (that is first or second in order of importance), people for whom Se is a priority may seem restless and unable to stay still. This is by design.

Extroverted Sensing is the function of the Present Moment, of observing it in as many details as possible, and of acting in the now, but it is also the function of Change and Transformation in the present moment.

The Present is eternally changing, eternally fresh and in a sense eternally young, carrying something of the energy of hyperactive teenagers that are always trying something new. While Extroverted Sensing is not really the function of a long-term planner, people who have it high in their stack can be quite great tacticians. Dutch Author Max Euwe said

"Strategy requires thought, tactics requires observation". And that is what Extroverted Sensing does – it observes, then, with the help of either introverted thinking (Ti) or introverted feeling (Fi), it formulates a decision which it rapidly proceeds to act upon.

Generally speaking, Extroverted Sensing sees the world as discrete observations, as a series of separated data points about what is being observed. Its role is not really to organize the information it gathers, but to gather as much information as it can.

How much information Se gathers depends on the position in the function stack. If for example we find Se in the first position, such as it is for ESFP's and ESTP's, being the leading process of the psyche, it will gather lots of information on the environment, not being restricted or directed by other functions higher in the stack.

In fact, if this is the case, it is the observations and passion for exploration of Se that drives the other processes. If however, as is the case of ISFP's or ISTP's, Extroverted Sensing is relegated to the 2nd (or Auxiliary) position in the cognitive stack, its focus will be more narrow.

Taking the case of the ISFP, Extroverted Sensing will be mainly directed by the interests of Introverted Feeling (Fi), which in this case is the leading function. So Extroverted Sensing will still play a role, it will still explore, seek beauty, seek pleasure, and change the environment around it to fit its vision, but instead of being completely free to go wherever it wishes, the energy will be directed to what is of interest to Fi.

If you take it one step lower, in the tertiary position, it means that the second function in the stack has to be Introverted Intuition (Ni), the function of long term planning, foresight, strategy and conjecturing. In this position Extroverted Sensing still retains some of its characteristics, but its role and function is even more niche.

If it's in the 2nd position, Introverted Intuition (Ni), is the auxiliary function for either Extroverted Thinking (Te) or Extroverted Feeling (Fe). If it's Te, then we're more likely than not dealing with some sort of technical or organizational system. If it's Fe, the focus usually falls more on communities or groups of people.

It's the Introverted Intuition's job to look to the future, chart a course and make a plan to get to a future that is desirable, according to what the dominant function is focusing on.

But as good as a plan is, it can often fall flat when it encounters reality. Introverted intuition is a brilliant and very powerful function, but by its nature it often works in a vacuum, using its powers of deduction to infer patterns and future trends based on available data.

So any plan of going forward must eventually be put into practice. This is where Extroverted Sensing comes in. It's a great "enforcer" function. But it's not merely the function that puts a plan into action and that's it. Se actively gathers information pertaining to the plan it is trying to execute and enables one after processing the information and making course corrections to rapidly implement those changes in the present moment.

It still retains its curiosity and adaptability, but in the third position it's a far-cry from what those same tendencies look like when Se has the driver's seat.

There are a lot of things to be said about all functions, Extroverted Sensing included, and maybe the description here is overly simplistic, but I would rather have it be overly simplistic than overly complicated. So when thinking about Extroverted Sensing, some things to keep in mind are the double nature of it – it's both an eternally curious explorer and information gatherer, but also carries the energy to act,

change, move things around and rearrange the world around it to fit a certain vision.

Also, even though it is an extroverted function, it should be understood that Extroverted Sensing energy is not necessarily the most sociable of energies. While it's not moving inward, as introverted functions do, Sensing is not necessarily interested in all things human, but in all things natural and tangible.

Sure, people who value Extroverted Sensing can be sociable and can make good entertainers, entrepreneurs and other professions, but they can also be not necessarily interested in other people but in going out into nature, visiting other countries, climbing mountains, running marathons and generally pushing their limits and challenging themselves.

Introverted Intuition (Ni) – Drawing conclusions and planning for the distant future

Wherever there is Se, there will always also be Ni (Introverted Intuition). There are four perception functions: Se (Extroverted Sensing), Si (Introverted Sensing), Ne (Extroverted Intuition) and Ni (Introverted Intuition). And they will always be found in pairs of two.

If you want to understand why, you need to understand that functions are in competition with each other for control of the psyche.

Each function is in competition both with the same function, but of the different orientation (introverted or extroverted), and with the opposing function of the same orientation. This may be confusing if you're not familiar with the system, so let me explain it in a more descriptive, less abstract way.

Let's take Extroverted Sensing, because we just spoke about it in the previous chapter. Extroverted Sensing (Se) is