

Relationship Skills

Personal Characteristics

How to effectively relate to others is essential for the spiritual leader. This study deals with improving our relationships and explores how we can maximize the positive impact we have on others. However, the starting point for positive relationships is submission to the Lordship of Christ. If we are unwilling to take this step, our relationships with others can at best only be strained and incomplete.

Significant Personal Characteristics

Spiritual leaders must try to relate with everyone within their sphere of influence in a general sense, but also, they must be able to relate in specific situations. Each setting is different but all require a relationship that involves some knowledge of the other's basic characteristics. In general, the more there is mutual understanding the better the relationship will be and the easier it is to function when mentoring, coaching, counseling, confronting, encouraging or working side by side in ministry.

The characteristics discussed below are a compilation from a variety of personality tests and are not necessarily all inclusive.

1. **Open or Closed.** The depth of our relationships is affected by our willingness to be open with one another. When a person is open and above board there is less need for interpretation of actions or behavior and less likelihood of misinterpretation. This relationship is characterized by candor, openness and shared information. A closed person erects a protective barrier or façade that can interfere with mutual understanding. This is usually the result of an individual's distrust and fear. Attempts to confront or counsel a closed individual should be preceded by building trust and projecting openness.
2. **Thinking or Feeling.** Most people tend to be predominately one or the other. However, thinking and feeling should not be viewed as a single continuum where to be high on one is necessarily to be low on the other. Instead, it should be considered that everyone has both a thinking side and a feeling side, with one being more dominant than the other.

"Thinking" individuals tend to be objective, analytical, consistent and direct. They let their heads dominate their hearts. If we are trying to relate with someone who is predominantly a thinking person then we need to approach him or her in an objective logical manner.

"Feeling" individuals tend to be subjective, tactful and diplomatic. They let their hearts rule their heads. If we are trying to relate with someone who is predominantly a feeling person then we must relate in a manner that the heart can understand being tactful and sensitive.

What is clear is that the spiritual leader must learn to recognize the best way to relate to each individual. This means that we need to develop both our reasoning ability and our sensitivity to issues of the heart. Also, recognize that people fluctuate in their behavior based on circumstances and that thinkers can be warm and sensitive while feeling individuals can also think objectively.

3. **Sensing or Intuitive.** Again, most people tend to be predominately one or the other, but each characteristic should be viewed separately. Our predominate tendency should be developed while the other can also be made more effective.

Those that rely on their five senses for information tend to be realistic, practical, down-to-earth, analytical, detail-oriented and specific. However, their understanding of reality is limited to their five senses. Consequently, they tend to be reluctant to accept the logic of faith when analyzing situations and prefer not to accept solutions that can't be confirmed by practical analysis.

Intuitive individuals don't always look at things as they are, but as they could become. They place great value on imagination, opportunity and possibility. They tend to rely on hunches and "sixth sense" for information. They never seem completely satisfied, but are idealistic and visionary. They won't take "no" for an answer relying on faith to overcome.

The spiritual leader must learn to appreciate both realms and to communicate in terms appropriate for either the sensing or intuitive individual. Both aspects are necessary for the Body of Christ to function effectively.

4. **Controlling or Submissive.** Some people are just more comfortable when they are in charge of people while others prefer to be controlled. What is interesting is that circumstances may dictate a reversal of roles. Someone who is a follower in one setting may desire to be the leader in another, and visa versa. It should be remembered that we are all instructed in Scripture to "submit to one another" ([Eph 5:21](#)). It is therefore important that individuals learn submission before they become leaders.

Not everyone we try to relate with will have learned submission. Often their role in conflict is the reason why we are trying to resolve a situation. Headstrong individuals recognize power and authority but don't relate well with reason or persuasion. Our role is to help them understand that the process is just as important as the goal they are trying to achieve and that humility is a virtue.

Others are overly submissive and unwilling to take responsibility. There could be any number of reasons including laziness, fear or a lack of confidence. A different approach for relating would be required for each reason.

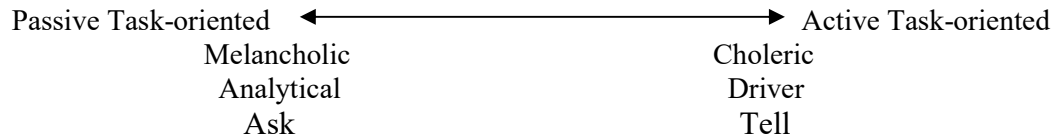
5. **Flexible or Rigid.** Some people prefer to live in a very structured, routine, and orderly manner where everything is carefully planned and organized. They are put in distress by spontaneity or being faced with information or situations that don't fit the orderly world of their making. Relating with such individuals during a crisis from a leadership perspective may involve helping them to understand that only God is capable of maintaining order and control and that they are in His very capable hands. He is far more capable of ordering their lives than they are. In fact, by their efforts of control they may be limiting what God can do in their lives. They may be missing His richest blessings.

Other individuals tend to be curious, adaptive, spontaneous and tolerant of whatever circumstances they are thrown into. They enjoy the process of exploring new things, but don't always finish what they start, having moved onto something else. They routinely are information gatherers but don't always put the pieces together to realize what it all means.

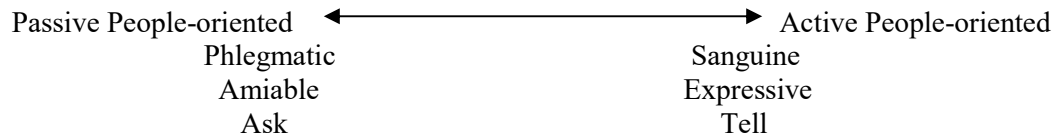
As leaders we need to help the flexible and rigid work together. Contributions from both are necessary to maintain stability and discipline while exploring more effective ways to accomplish our mission.

6. **People-Oriented or Task-Oriented.** Task-oriented people are not all the same. Some are detail oriented and analytical, being cautious, careful in their task. Often these are gifted individuals, sometimes

described as melancholic, who are idealistic, sensitive and self-sacrificing with a measure of perfectionism. On the downside they may be self-centered, moody, critical, impractical or rigid. Other task-oriented individuals are more choleric and likely to dominate, direct and control the efforts of others. These tend to be strong-willed, practical leaders who are independent and determined to accomplish goals and objectives. However, they can also be domineering, inconsiderate and unemotional in their efforts to achieve.



People-oriented individuals also come in two varieties. First, there are those who are outgoing, talkative and enthusiastic. They tend to be warm, personable, compassionate and friendly. They can be very inspiring and influential in the lives of others, but can also be loud, fearful, egocentric and undependable. Other people-oriented individuals are more reserved and passive in their relationships. They tend to be calm, conservative, easy-going and dependable, and can provide practical, efficient leadership. However, they can also be selfish, unmotivated, indecisive and fearful.



7. **Extroverted or Introverted.** Extroverted individuals tend to be motivated toward people and activity and find less reward in time spent alone. They want to be included in group activity and want others included as well. They are socially confident and easy to get to know. They are predominantly concerned with and obtain gratification from what is outside the self. When given the chance, an extrovert will talk with someone else rather than sit alone and think. In fact, extroverts tend to think as they speak, unlike introverts who are far more likely to think before they speak. Concepts just don't seem real to extroverts unless they can talk about them; reflecting on them isn't enough. Their ability to make small talk makes them appear to be more socially adept than introverts (although introverts may have little difficulty talking to people they don't know if they can talk about concepts or issues).

Introverts, in contrast, tend to be more reserved, less outgoing, and less sociable. They are not necessarily loners but they tend to have fewer friends. Introversion does not describe social discomfort but rather social preference: an introvert may not be shy but may merely prefer less social activities. *Introversion* is "the state of or tendency toward being wholly or predominantly concerned with and interested in one's own mental life". Introverts are people whose energy tends to expand through reflection and dwindle during interaction. Introverts choose solitary over social activities by preference, whereas shy people (who may be extraverts at heart) avoid social encounters out of fear.

Extroversion and introversion are typically viewed as a single continuum. Thus, to be high in one is necessarily to be low on the other. However, people fluctuate in their behavior all the time, and even extreme introverts and extroverts do not always act according to their type.

Questions For Thought & Discussion

- In what ways can you encourage others to be open?
- How will you improve your ability to relate to both logic and emotion?
- How can you effectively combine factual analysis and faith in decision-making?
- How can you function without conflict when multiple members of your group tend to be controlling?
- How can you effectively combine both stability and creativity?
- What roles are more suitable for people-oriented individuals?
- What roles are more suitable for task-oriented individuals?

Evaluate yourself and those you work closely with using the following chart. Indicate from 1 to 5 the degree to which your temperament matches the explanation for each of the categories listed. Based on your evaluation what would you consider to be your style of leadership and interaction with others? What would you consider to be their style of interaction and what adjustments do you need to make in order to successfully relate with them?

Characteristic	Degree 1-2-3-4-5	Explanation
Open or Closed		1=Closed 5=Very Open
Thinking		5=Head dominates heart
Feeling		5=Heart dominates head
Sensing		5=Complete reliance on 5 senses
Intuitive		5=Complete reliance on intuition
Controlling		5=Strong desire to lead
Submissive		5=Strong desire to follow
Flexible		5=Spontaneous, ignores rules
Rigid		5=Structured and organized
People Oriented		5=Motivated to minister to people
Task Oriented		5=Motivated to accomplish the task
Extroverted		5=Energized by being with others
Introverted		5=Energized by being alone

Principles Affecting Relationships

1. **We are all different.** Those you're trying to relate to are not wired the same as you. Therefore, don't expect them to think as you do or respond as you would.
2. **We are all complex.** Our complexity cannot be overstated. For millennium social scientists have attempted to reduce our understanding of human behavior into a simple pattern of personality or temperament types. While identifying various behavior characteristics there is no universal agreement for grouping these characteristics.
3. **We all have limitations.** Our areas of strength are marred due to our fallen nature and our weaknesses are just that. As leaders we need to help people serve in their area of strength. We all need to understand our weaknesses and let others lead in those areas.
4. **We are changed over time.** The Holy Spirit works in us to maximize our strengths and minimize our weaknesses. Over time we are better able to function in areas of weakness and our strengths are not as hindered by our character flaws. Our task is to let the Holy Spirit do His work in us and to encourage others to do the same.
5. **We must accept others as they are.** Our differences in personality were the choice of God. Consequently, we must come to recognize and appreciate the importance of what each one brings to the table...the perspective that is missing in our analysis. At the same time we cannot remove the weaknesses of others but our guidance can be helpful in their process of change and our mediation can lessen the consequences of their weaknesses. Acceptance is God's grace and love in action. If you want people to open up then you have to create an atmosphere where they feel safe.
6. **Respect the Wall.** People who feel threatened always build walls. We must honor their need to protect themselves. The person needs to know that his or her well being is the most important thing to you and that the wall can stay as long as it is needed. Over time they will start trusting you when they realize that they no longer need to protect themselves from you.
7. **Honor Others.** Honor the other person as valuable; someone made in God's image. When we recognize and affirm their value, we help create a safe environment that encourages relationships to grow. Consider their good qualities and try to see them as God does.
8. **Suspend Judgment.** Judgment causes people to feel unsafe and either withdraw or become defensive. Replace judgment with a genuine interest in the other person. Ask questions rather than condemn. They already know where they have failed and a safe environment will help them to open up and express themselves.