



A COLLABORATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Exploring personality types and cooperative culture

In his book *Surrounded by Idiots*, Thomas Erikson offers a detailed breakdown of four primary human behavior types. He gives each type a name based on a color choice. Erikson emphasizes that each personality brings value and explains how they can engage and complement one another.

Despite its provocative title, the book is really about learning to understand others — accepting, adapting to, and appreciating different perspectives. Most important, it is about how we work more effectively with people. Sound familiar?

To make belonging, equity, diversity, and representation (BEDR) meaningful on another level, we must dig deeper into how relationships are built and sustained within our schools and districts. The school environment is a microcosm of broader society — full of work relationships, teaching relationships, and daily social dynamics.

Since we interact with so many people each day, it stands to reason that if we want to get the most out of our time with students, we must recognize that every participant in the educational process comes with his or her own personality, perspective, and work style. These traits deserve to be considered, accepted, respected, and valued. To best serve students, we need to stay aware of these social dynamics and learn how to function constructively as a team.

The goal, always, is to benefit the students. To keep students front and center, all participants must build productive working relationships with all stakeholders. That starts with finding common ground and developing meaningful rapport with each of the four personality types that Erikson describes.

There are individuals who prove to be ambitious, relentless, and driven. These individuals are powered by their ambition, and Erikson refers to them as Red. They push forward relentlessly, believe in hard work, and rarely back

down from a challenge. These folks like to win. They take initiative, speak up, take risks, and are generally fearless. Red colleagues may be blunt, express their truths freely, and move quickly toward the finish line.

To work effectively with driven stakeholders, consider also being direct and efficient. Your dancing around an issue seems weak to these folks, as they would rather cut to the chase. Present your ideas and stay on topic. Understand that conversation with Reds is usually brief and to the point.

To work effectively you must deliver the message with clarity and confidence. Show that you work hard and that your results speak for themselves. Being organized and ready to demonstrate attention to detail is important, naturally aligning with Red personalities who respect initiative and grit. Reds will listen to you if you meet them on their fast-

paced, decisive, results-oriented terms.

Some of our other colleagues can be identified as easygoing, entertaining, and optimistic. These folks live in a world where the sun always shines. Therefore, Erikson refers to them as Yellow! Relationships come first for Yellows. They generally are the storytellers, the bright lights in the room — the ones who make people laugh, feel included, and keep the mood upbeat.

They are emotionally intuitive, led by feelings, and always seem to find the silver lining. Optimism and enthusiasm define their outlook. When a problem needs a creative solution, Yellows often toss out an imaginative idea that, while perhaps sounding lofty, can be shaped into something truly viable. These folks are often extremely valuable to the situation at hand.

To collaborate effectively with Yellows, consider creating an environment that feels positive and relaxed. Smiling is im-

"Our ability to serve students well is directly tied to ... our working relationships with colleagues"

portant. Be open and approachable. Consider meeting them where they are, emotionally and conversationally. Make space for their energy without letting it consume the conversation.

Imagery and visual cues may help ground the conversations. Yellows like to be asked not just what they think but also how they feel about a solution. Let them know that you also trust your own instincts. Yellows are inspired by what is exciting and new, and, therefore, consider bringing fresh, innovative ideas to the table. Yellows will likely get on board if you carefully guide the conversation with intention.

Folks who seem passive, balanced, and much less needy are referred to as Green. We all know and love the Greens! They are not the loudest or the most driven. But, they are steady, kind, and dependable. They are also polite, composed, tolerant, and often the easiest people to work with. They invest in relationships and will help without asking for anything in return. They are incredible listeners, and when no one else raises a hand, they quietly step up.

Teamwork matters deeply to them. That said, change does not come quickly for Greens. They need time, trust, and clear reasoning before they are ready to move forward. Because they aim to stay neutral, they may avoid taking firm positions.

When working with Greens, remember that they may not make the first suggestion in conversation, and you will likely need to lead. Offer feedback with compassion. If there is criticism to be shared, express it gently, with warmth.

Be patient with their pace and honor their preference for consensus. They are not likely to challenge you, but they need to see that you consider yourself part of the team. Respect that Greens avoid conflict and value harmony. You will not always get a definitive answer, but you will get someone steady, loyal, and in it for the greater good.

Then there are the ultimate perfectionists, referred to by Erikson as the Blues! We quickly recognize these folks in our profession. They are driven by accuracy and order. They are logical, cautious, and incredibly thorough.

Blue personalities want everything in its place and take pride in getting things exactly right. They are fact-driven researchers, slow to speak but ready with data when it counts. They are modest, don't seek the spotlight, and rarely act on impulse. Instead, they analyze every detail, check every source, and proceed only when confident of success. Blues often prefer full control, and if they do not have it, they may not engage at all (which clearly is a fault).

Consider being mindful that a Blue personality may seem emotionally distant if they do not find precision in the conversation. Honesty is important, but so is discretion. Therefore, consider choosing your words carefully, especially when giving feedback. It is imperative not to dismiss their concerns about accuracy; instead, show them how timeliness and flexibility can also serve the goal.

Blue personality types do not recognize gut feelings. They need facts and research. Consider helping them to move toward a decision. Encourage them to balance analysis with action, as we all recognize that there is value not only in thoughtful decision-making, but also in progress.

As music teachers we regularly interact with our departmental colleagues on a daily basis. We often share students and expect a certain commitment and work ethic. Additionally, we work with classroom teachers who must release students from their course(s) for music lessons.

We recognize that all students are charged with the responsibility to fulfill all of their teachers' expectations. Also, acknowledge that the vast majority of our students are probably not considering careers in music. Our ability to serve students well is directly tied to how effectively we understand and manage our working relationships with colleagues.

The educational process is at its strongest when stakeholders monitor and tend to the health of their social infrastructure. I hope you recognized yourself somewhere in these personality types and perhaps gained some insight into how to better balance, support, and collaborate with others as we strive to create the best possible climate for student success. ||