

## IDEATION

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

It's very likely that you spontaneously tune in to what others think of you as a person and as a professional. As a result, you intentionally commit to memory complicated and intricate words as well as specialized terminology. You use language to your advantage in situations when you desire to influence, confront, make demands of, or issue orders to people. Your vocabulary allows you to speak with authority. Instinctively, you have a rich vocabulary upon which to draw. The words you choose often expand and challenge your listeners' or readers' thinking. Chances are good that you frequently question whether others regard you as aloof or standoffish. Those who have this impression need to understand how hard it is for you to initiate discussions or casual conversation. Driven by your talents, you are highly knowledgeable about special topics and activities. This explains your natural inclination to invent innovative and unusual ways of performing tasks. You grow bored when forced to follow the same series of steps day after day. Your boredom is likely to become frustration when your suggestions for change are dismissed without further consideration. By nature, you often are the originator of fresh ideas for brand-new campaigns, business ventures, initiatives, or special events.

### Ideation sounds like this:

Mark B., writer: "My mind works by finding connections between things. When I was hunting down the Mona Lisa in the Louvre museum, I turned a corner and was blinded by the flashing of a thousand cameras snapping the tiny picture. For some reason, I stored that visual image away. Then I noticed a 'No Flash Photography' sign, and I stored that away too. I thought it was odd because I remembered reading that flash photography can harm paintings. Then about six months later, I read that the Mona Lisa has been stolen at least twice in this century. And suddenly I put it all together. The only explanation for all these facts is that the real Mona Lisa is not on display in the Louvre. The real Mona Lisa has been stolen, and the museum, afraid to admit their carelessness, has installed a fake. I don't know if it's true, of course, but what a great story."

Andrea H., interior designer: "I have the kind of mind where everything has to fit together or I start to feel very odd. For me, every piece of furniture represents an idea. It serves a discrete function both independently and in concert with every other piece. The 'idea' of each piece is so powerful in my mind, it must be obeyed. If I am sitting in a room where the chairs are somehow not fulfilling their discrete function -- they're the wrong kind of chairs or they're facing the wrong way or they're pushed up too close to the coffee table -- I find myself getting physically uncomfortable and mentally distracted. Later, I won't be able to get it out of my mind. I'll find myself awake at 3:00 a.m., and I walk through the person's house in my mind's eye, rearranging the furniture and repainting the walls. This started happening when I was very young, say seven years old."

### Ideas for Action:

- Seek a career in which you will be given credit for and paid for your ideas, such as marketing, advertising, journalism, design, or new product development.

- You are likely to get bored quickly, so make some small changes in your work or home life. Experiment. Play mental games with yourself. All of these will help keep you stimulated.
- Finish your thoughts and ideas before communicating them. Lacking your Ideation talents, others might not be able to "join the dots" of an interesting but incomplete idea and thus might dismiss it.
- Not all your ideas will be equally practical or serviceable. Learn to edit your ideas, or find a trusted friend or colleague who can "proof" your ideas and identify potential pitfalls.
- Understand the fuel for your Ideation talents: When do you get your best ideas? When you're talking with people? When you're reading? When you're simply listening or observing? Take note of the circumstances that seem to produce your best ideas, and recreate them.
- Schedule time to read, because the ideas and experiences of others can become your raw material for new ideas. Schedule time to think, because thinking energizes you.
- You are a natural fit with research and development; you appreciate the mindset of visionaries and dreamers. Spend time with imaginative peers, and sit in on their brainstorming sessions.
- Partner with someone with strong Analytical talents. This person will question you and challenge you, therefore strengthening your ideas.
- Sometimes you lose others' interest because they cannot follow your abstract and conceptual thinking style. Make your ideas more concrete by drawing pictures, using analogies or metaphors, or simply explaining your concepts step by step.
- Feed your Ideation talents by gathering knowledge. Study fields and industries different from your own. Apply ideas from outside, and link disparate ideas to generate new ones.

## STRATEGIC

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

By nature, you customarily pinpoint the core problems and identify the best solutions. You artfully and skillfully eliminate distractions. This helps people gain a clear understanding of what is happening and why it is happening. You frequently identify ways to transform an obstacle into an opportunity. Driven by your talents, you analyze the lessons of the past to find clues for handling future situations. Piecing together the causes and effects of historical events allows you to discover alternate routes to your goal. You are seldom taken by surprise. Why? You probably have studied your options and crafted innovative solutions. It's very likely that you normally find just the right words at the right moment to express whatever you are thinking and feeling. Many people are likely to appreciate your fine speaking abilities. You can present your ideas in a reasonable, sequential, and methodical way. Moreover, you generate lots of options for others to consider. Chances are good that you select the right combination of words to convey your ideas or feelings. In the middle of discussions, your vocabulary provides you with precise phrases and terminology. You probably express yourself with ease and grace. Because of your strengths, you thoroughly examine many of the problems you face in your life. For simple difficulties, you probably discover the right solution early in the process. When handling complex matters, however, you frequently labor long and hard to identify what is actually causing the predicament. Often you can pinpoint fundamental glitches or missing steps. Eventually, an economical, efficient, or diplomatic remedy becomes apparent to you.

### Strategic sounds like this:

Liam C., manufacturing plant manager: "It seems as if I can always see the consequences before anyone else can. I have to say to people, 'Lift up your eyes; look down the road a ways. Let's talk about where we are going to be next year so that when we get to this time next year, we don't have the same problems.' It seems obvious to me, but some people are just too focused on this month's numbers, and everything is driven by that."

Vivian T., television producer: "I used to love logic problems when I was a kid -- you know, the ones where 'if A implies B, and B equals C, does A equal C?' Still today, I am always playing out repercussions, seeing where things lead. I think it makes me a great interviewer. I know that nothing is an accident; every sign, every word, every tone of voice has significance. So I watch for these clues and play them out in my head, see where they lead, and then plan my questions to take advantage of what I have seen in my head."

Simon T., human resources executive: "We really needed to take the union on at some stage, and I saw an opportunity -- a very good issue to take them on. I could see that they were going in a direction that would lead them into all kinds of trouble if they continued following it. Lo and behold, they did continue following it, and when they arrived, there I was, ready and waiting. I suppose it just comes naturally to me to predict what someone else is going to do. And then when that person reacts, I can respond immediately because I have sat down and said, 'Okay, if they do this, we'll do this. If they do that, then we'll do this other thing.' It's like when you tack in a sailboat. You head in one direction, but you jinx one way, then another, planning and reacting, planning and reacting."

### Ideas for Action:

- Take the time to fully reflect or muse about a goal that you want to achieve until the related patterns and issues emerge for you. Remember that this musing time is essential to strategic thinking.
- You can see repercussions more clearly than others can. Take advantage of this ability by planning your range of responses in detail. There is little point in knowing where events will lead if you are not ready when you get there.
- Find a group that you think does important work, and contribute your strategic thinking. You can be a leader with your ideas.
- Your strategic thinking will be necessary to keep a vivid vision from deteriorating into an ordinary pipe dream. Fully consider all possible paths toward making the vision a reality. Wise forethought can remove obstacles before they appear.
- Make yourself known as a resource for consultation with those who are stumped by a particular problem or hindered by a particular obstacle or barrier. By naturally seeing a way when others are convinced there is no way, you will lead them to success.
- You are likely to anticipate potential issues more easily than others. Though your awareness of possible danger might be viewed as negativity by some, you must share your insights if you are going to avoid these pitfalls. To prevent misperception of your intent, point out not only the future obstacle, but also a way to prevent or overcome it. Trust your insights, and use them to ensure the success of your efforts.
- Help others understand that your strategic thinking is not an attempt to belittle their ideas, but is instead a natural propensity to consider all the facets of a plan objectively. Rather than being a naysayer, you are actually trying to examine ways to ensure that the goal is accomplished, come what may. Your talents will allow you to consider others' perspectives while keeping your end goal in sight.
- Trust your intuitive insights as often as possible. Even though you might not be able to explain them rationally, your intuitions are created by a brain that instinctively anticipates and projects. Have confidence in these perceptions.
- Partner with someone with strong Activator talents. With this person's need for action and your need for anticipation, you can forge a powerful partnership.
- Make sure that you are involved in the front end of new initiatives or enterprises. Your innovative yet procedural approach will be critical to the genesis of a new venture because it will keep its creators from developing deadly tunnel vision.

## RELATOR

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

It's very likely that you bond with and work well with people who tell you what they want to accomplish in life. Because of your strengths, you typically do your best work when you can bring your expertise to an enterprise. You prefer activities that keep you busy from start to finish. Driven by your talents, you trust your intuition about what someone is thinking, feeling, or needing. You realize that the answers and solutions to many problems spontaneously reveal themselves to you. Your friends frequently ask what you would recommend. They often seek your guidance. Instinctively, you thoughtfully select your friends. You avoid rushing into relationships. Once you trust and care about someone, the individual probably seeks your counsel. Chances are good that you routinely reduce elaborate or intertwined ideas, processes, legal documents, and/or action plans to their basic elements. As a result, people usually turn to you for plainspoken, easy-to-understand explanations.

### Relator sounds like this:

Gavin T., flight attendant: "I have many wonderful acquaintances, but as for true friends that I hold dear, not very many. And I'm real okay with that. My best times are spent with the people I'm tightest with, like my family. We are a very tight-knit Irish Catholic family, and we get together every chance we can. It's a large family -- I have five brothers and sisters and ten nieces and nephews -- but we all get together about once a month and yuk it up. I'm the catalyst. When I'm back in Chicago, even if there is no birthday or anniversary or whatever, I become the excuse for getting together and hanging out for three or four days. We really enjoy one another's company."

Tony D., pilot: "I used to fly in the Marines, and, boy, you had better be comfortable with the word 'friend' in the Marines. You had better feel good about trusting someone else. I can't tell you how many times I put my life in someone else's hands. I was flying off my friend's wing, and I'd be dead if he couldn't get me back safely."

Jamie T., entrepreneur: "I'm definitely selective about my relationships. When I first meet people, I don't want to give them very much of my time. I don't know them; they don't know me -- so let's just be pleasant and leave it at that. But if circumstances make it so that we get to know each other better, it seems like a threshold is reached where I suddenly start wanting to invest more. I'll share more of myself, put myself out for them, do things for them that will bring us a little closer, and show that I care. It's funny because I am not looking for any more friends in my life. I have enough. And yet with each new person I meet, as soon as that threshold is reached, I feel compelled to go deeper and deeper. Now I have ten people working for me, and I would call each of them my very good friend."

### Ideas for Action:

- Find a workplace in which friendships are encouraged. You will not do well in an overly formal organization. In job interviews, ask about work styles and company culture.

- Deliberately learn as much as you can about the people you meet. You like knowing about people, and other people like being known. By doing this, you will act as a catalyst for trusting relationships.
- Let it be known that you are more interested in the character and personality of others than in their status or job title. This is one of your greatest talents and can serve as a model for others.
- Let your caring show. For example, find people in your company to mentor, help your colleagues get to know each other better, or extend your relationships beyond the office.
- No matter how busy you are, stay in contact with your friends. They are your fuel.
- Be honest with your friends. True caring means helping the other person be successful and fulfilled. Giving honest feedback or encouraging your friend to move out of a role in which he or she is struggling is a compassionate act.
- You probably prefer to be seen as a person, an equal, or a friend, rather than as a function, a superior, or a title. Let people know that they can address you by your first name, rather than formally.
- You might tend to withhold the most engaging aspects of your personality until you have sensed openness from another person. Remember, building relationships is not a one-way street. Proactively "put yourself out there." Others will quickly see you for the genuine individual you are, and you will create many more opportunities to cultivate strong, long-lasting connections.
- Make time for family and close friends. You need to spend quality moments with those you love in order to "feed" your Relator talents. Schedule activities that allow you to get even closer to the people who keep you grounded and happy.
- Make an effort to socialize with your colleagues and team members outside of work. It can be as simple as lunch or coffee together. This will help you forge more connected relationships at work, which in turn can facilitate more effective teamwork and cooperation.

## MAXIMIZER

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

Driven by your talents, you may be able to figure out what makes each person special. You might talk to, observe, or study individuals who produce nothing less than excellence to identify what inspires them. You might prefer to associate with those who insist on taking something good and making it better. When you understand what drives a person, perhaps you can motivate him or her to transform whatever was made better into something superb. By nature, you have a reputation as a hard worker. You probably help people understand your talents and areas of excellence. They frequently observe you practicing the use of your talents, skills, and knowledge. You sense you can do various things much better tomorrow as long as you refuse to take your abilities for granted today. It's very likely that you recognize you have a soothing effect on many kinds of people. Frequently you listen to and talk with individuals who are experiencing sadness, agitation, anxiety, frustration, fear, anger, excitement, loss, or emptiness. Because of your strengths, you are aware of what you do naturally and well. You prefer to leverage your talents rather than spend time trying to overcome your shortcomings. You expect excellence from yourself and others. Being average at best and mediocre at worst is unacceptable to you. Instinctively, you may be aware that you are more persistent and determined than many people are. Perhaps this is most evident when you have established a clear goal. You direct most of your attention to the task. You avoid being distracted by irrelevant, time-consuming, and/or nonproductive activities.

### Maximizer sounds like this:

Gavin T., flight attendant: "I taught aerobics for ten years, and I made a point of asking people to focus on what they liked about themselves. We all have parts of our body that we would like to change or that we would like to see differently, but to focus on that can be so destructive. It becomes a vicious cycle. So I would say, 'Look, you don't need to be doing that. Instead, let's focus on the attribute you like about yourself, and then we'll all feel better about expending all of this energy.'"

Amy T., magazine editor: "There is nothing I hate more than having to fix a poorly written piece. If I have given the writer a clear focus and she comes back with a piece that is completely off the mark, I almost can't bring myself to write comments on it. I'm more inclined to just hand it back to her and say, 'Just please start again.' On the other hand, what I love to do is take a piece that is so close and then refine it to make it perfect. You know, just the right word here, a little cut there, and suddenly it's a brilliant piece."

Marshall G., marketing executive: "I am really good at setting a focus for people and then building a sense of team spirit as we all march forward. But I am not so good at strategic thinking. Fortunately, I have a boss who understands that about me. We have been working together for quite a few years. He has found people who play the strategic role, and at the same time, stretches me to be even better at the focus and team-building role. I'm so lucky to have a boss who thinks this way. It's made me more secure and made me charge ahead much faster, knowing that my boss knows what I am good at and what I'm not good at; he doesn't bother me with the latter."

### Ideas for Action:

- Once you have identified your own greatest talents, stay focused on them. Refine your skills. Acquire new knowledge. Practice. Keep working toward strength in a few areas.
- Develop a plan to use your most powerful talents outside of work. In doing so, consider how your talents relate to the mission in your life and how they might benefit your family or the community.
- Problem solving might drain your energy and enthusiasm. Look for a restorative partner who can be your chief troubleshooter and problem solver. Let that person know how important your partnership is to your success.
- Study success. Deliberately spend time with people who have discovered their strengths. The more you understand how marshaling strengths leads to success, the more likely you will be to create success in your own life.
- Explain to others why you spend more time building on great talent rather than fixing weaknesses. Initially, they might confuse what you are doing with complacency.
- Don't let your Maximizer talents be stifled by conventional wisdom, which says you should find what is broken and fix it. Identify and invest in the parts of your organization or community that are working. Make sure that most of your resources are spent in the build-up and build-out of these pockets of excellence.
- Keep your focus on long-term relationships and goals. Many make a career out of picking the low-hanging fruit of short-term success, but your Maximizer talents will be most energized and effective as you turn top potential into true and lasting greatness.
- See if you can make some of your weaknesses irrelevant. For example, find a partner, devise a support system, or use one of your stronger talents to compensate for one of your weaker ones.
- Seek roles in which you are helping people succeed. In coaching, managing, mentoring, or teaching roles, your focus on strengths will prove particularly beneficial to others. Because most people find it difficult to describe what they do best, start by arming them with vivid descriptions.
- Devise ways to measure your performance and the performance of others. These measures will help you spot strengths, because the best way to identify a strength is to look for sustained levels of excellent performance.

## LEARNER

### Shared Theme Description

People who are especially talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

### Your Personalized Strengths Insights

*What makes you stand out?*

Because of your strengths, you yearn to be inspired by your work. You want experience to be your teacher. You need to feel enthused by your work or studies. You constantly acquire knowledge and skills. Whenever you study facts, ponder concepts, test theories, or sharpen your skills, you feel most alive. You are inclined to avoid people and situations that prevent you from expanding your mind. Driven by your talents, you frequently examine the factors leading up to an event. Therein you discover the reasons why things happened the way they did. A number of individuals and/or groups probably appreciate your logical thinking style. By nature, you may ignore distractions to concentrate on your assignments. Sometimes you keep reading, researching, experimenting, or writing until you know all you need to know about a particular subject. You might not rest until you have mastered certain concepts, committed important information to memory, or completed specific course requirements. Instinctively, you likely are an individual performer. You usually channel your mental and physical energy into things that really intrigue you. Chances are good that you generally rely on reason to determine how an event, decision, or condition led to an outcome. You usually desire to understand how things converge to produce the final result.

### Learner sounds like this:

Annie M., managing editor: "I get antsy when I am not learning something. Last year, although I was enjoying my work, I didn't feel as though I was learning enough. So I took up tap dancing. It sounds strange, doesn't it? I know I am never going to perform or anything, but I enjoy focusing on the technical skill of tapping, getting a little better each week, and moving up from the beginners' class to the intermediate class. That was a kick."

Miles A., operations manager: "When I was seven years old, my teachers would tell my parents, 'Miles isn't the most intelligent boy in the school, but he's a sponge for learning, and he'll probably go really far because he will push himself and continually be grasping new things.' Right now, I am just starting a course in business-travel Spanish. I know it is probably too ambitious to think I could learn conversational Spanish and become totally proficient in that language, but I at least want to be able to travel there and know the language."

Tim S., coach for executives: "One of my clients is so inquisitive that it drives him crazy because he can't do everything he wants to. I'm different. I am not curious in that broad sense. I prefer to go into greater depth with things so that I can become competent in them and then use them at work. For example, recently one of my clients wanted me to travel with him to Nice, France, for a business engagement. So I started reading up on the region, buying books, and checking the Internet. It was all interesting and I enjoyed the study, but I wouldn't have done any of it if I wasn't going to be traveling there for work."

### Ideas for Action:

- Refine how you learn. For example, you might learn best by teaching; if so, seek out opportunities to present to others. You might learn best through quiet reflection; if so, find this quiet time.
- Develop ways to track the progress of your learning. If there are distinct levels or stages of learning within a discipline or skill, take a moment to celebrate your progression from one level to the next. If no such levels exist, create them for yourself (e.g., reading five books on the subject or making three presentations on the subject).
- Be a catalyst for change. Others might be intimidated by new rules, new skills, or new circumstances. Your willingness to soak up this newness can calm their fears and spur them to action. Take this responsibility seriously.
- Seek roles that require some form of technical competence. You will enjoy the process of acquiring and maintaining this expertise.
- As far as possible, shift your career toward a field with constantly changing technologies or regulations. You will be energized by the challenge of keeping up.
- Because you are not threatened by unfamiliar information, you might excel in a consulting role (either internal or external) in which you are paid to go into new situations and pick up new competencies or languages quickly.
- Research supports the link between learning and performance. When people have the opportunity to learn and grow, they are more productive and loyal. Look for ways to measure the degree to which you and others feel that your learning needs are being met, to create individualized learning milestones, and to reward achievements in learning.
- At work, take advantage of programs that subsidize your learning. Your organization may be willing to pay for part or all of your instructional coursework or for certifications. Ask your manager for information about scholarships and other educational opportunities.
- Honor your desire to learn. Take advantage of adult educational opportunities in your community. Discipline yourself to sign up for at least one new academic or adult learning course each year.
- Time disappears and your attention intensifies when you are immersed in studying or learning. Allow yourself to "follow the trail" by scheduling learning sessions during periods of time that will not be interrupted by pressing engagements.