



Cycles of Success

**A Guide to Career Assessments
and Development Insights**





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Cycles of Success

Written by organizational trainer and career development coach Catherine Rains, this guide shows you how the MBTI® and Strong Interest Inventory® (Strong) assessments can help your clients—or you—to get on the right career pathway.

Whether starting out on a career or looking for a change, it doesn't matter. The aim is to give people the best chance of finding career fulfillment.

What you'll need

To get the most from these pages, it helps to be familiar with the MBTI and Strong assessments.

But if you're not, don't worry. Read the guide for the big ideas, then explore the assessments. We use a real case study to demonstrate the process and bring it to life.

The stories will inspire you to find out more about personality type and how it helps with career choices.

Good luck!



A common misconception is that career development stops when you finish school and set out on your career path.

But this just isn't true.

Introduction

To get ahead and thrive, we must constantly find ways to grow and further develop ourselves. Some of us are fortunate enough to work in our dream job, while others feel “stuck” in their job but need to pay the bills to support themselves or their family. Still others are ready to make a move but just aren’t sure how to take that first step.

You may also be lucky enough to have the support of your manager and/or an HR department that sees the value in talent management.

Many companies know that helping their employees grow increases the likelihood that they’ll become more loyal and motivated to stay at the company while performing at their best and, in turn, save the company thousands of dollars in hiring costs.

However, many companies, especially start-ups, simply don’t have the funds to allocate for employee development. It may not be a matter of caring about keeping employees but simply a budgetary constraint.

If you love what you do but don’t feel like your company is providing you with the resources to grow, it may be time to take matters into your own hands.



The career development journey: A lifetime endeavor

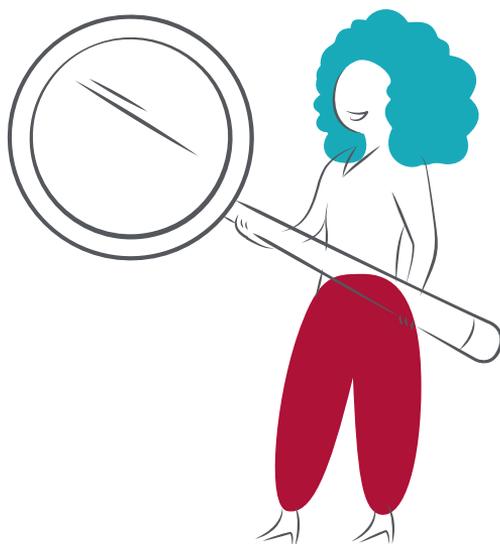
In this guide, you'll learn how you can support your employees through the process of enhancing, expanding, and/or changing careers, which will carry over to improve your talent management initiatives.

This includes how to support yourself when your company doesn't offer the resources you need to further develop your skills and expertise in your role (or to move beyond it).

My expertise lies in showing you how to use your results from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) and Strong Interest Inventory® assessments to do just that.

In addition, Priscilla Gardea, Senior Admissions Counselor at Adams State University, will be our real-life example of how this career development process looks from a personal perspective.

You'll see Priscilla's name appear as we use her MBTI and Strong results to guide her through the career development process. She'll be sharing her reactions and discoveries with us along the way.





Introducing the MBTI® and Strong assessments for career development

Let's start by introducing Priscilla.

Aged 30, Priscilla has been happily employed as a college admissions counselor for the past five years. Although she absolutely loves what she does for a living and the positive impact she makes working with students, she says it's very unusual to be in this type of job for longer than five years. She is beginning the process of planning her next career move.

Priscilla would like to advance within her current university but there are no positions in her area of expertise. So, to move up within the admissions field would most likely mean a move to another university and a new city.

Priscilla is considering all her options, including the possibility of getting her PhD, which would make her eligible for a wider range of college careers. However, this could result in her having to leave her current residence, which she'd prefer not to do as she is part of an established community.

So here is where we begin our journey guiding Priscilla through the career development process.





Getting started

The first step in working with Priscilla was to administer both the MBTI® and Strong Interest Inventory® assessments. This is so we had a comprehensive picture of both her personality and interests in terms of how they relate to potential career choices.

MBTI® and Strong results

With the MBTI assessment, Priscilla verified clear preferences for ENFP.

Her Strong assessment results revealed interests in the **Artistic, Social, and Enterprising** Themes (in that order).

ENFPs and ASEs (Artistic, Social, Enterprising) have a lot of overlap in terms of the types of careers they are interested in, which helped her begin to focus on the types of fields that most intrigued her.

Need an MBTI® or Strong refresher?

If you can't remember what ENFP stands for, get a short [MBTI refresher](#) and [extra information](#).

If you're not familiar with the Strong assessment, use this [video](#) to catch up.





Priscilla's Strong Profile

During our initial session, in which I interpreted Priscilla's Strong Profile, we reviewed potential patterns emerging from her highest Basic Interest Scales (BISs) and Occupational Scales (OSs).

Basic Interest Scales (BIS)

On the BISs, her highest scores were on the following scales (also known as career fields or functional tasks):

- Culinary Arts
- Counseling & Helping
- Human Resources & Training

These were followed by Performing Arts and Office Management (here's a link to a [sample Strong report](#)).

Since BISs reflect both vocational and avocational interests, the first step was to sort out which of these fell into each category.

Beginning with Culinary Arts, I first asked her to tell me about that score and where she thought it might have come from.

Finding where Basic Interests come from

Since people's interests are learned from their environment, most people can identify the origin of a high-scoring BIS.

Priscilla was quick to explain how she is into "food culture" and loves to learn about food and cooking. When clients don't know how to readily respond to this inquiry, I usually ask how this interest is currently expressed in their life. If it's not something they engage in on a regular basis, how could they incorporate more of it into their life?

As stated, Priscilla is very enthusiastic when talking about food/cooking. But when I asked her a third question—Is this a vocational or a personal interest?—she was very clear that this was a hobby and that she had no interest in pursuing Culinary Arts professionally.



Then I started the process again on her other top BISs, using the same line of inquiry. She revealed that:

- **Counseling & Helping** reflects what she currently does for a living, and she still loves this component of her work.
- **Human Resources & Training** was also intriguing to her, but since she had never had a job in this field, she did not yet have the confidence to pursue this area.
- **Performing Arts** certainly plays a part in her current job, and again is something she really enjoys.

Applying Basic Interest Scale Results from the Strong Assessment

What are your (or your client's) three highest ranking BIS scales?

For each of the highest-ranking BISs, ask:

1. Why do you think you scored so high on this scale?
2. Where do you think this interest came from?
3. Is this a vocational interest (a possible career) or a personal interest (not a possible career)?

Occupational Scales

Next, we reviewed Priscilla's highest-scoring Occupational Scales. These show how she responded to the items compared with other people who work in each occupation.

The job titles that initially piqued her interest included:

- Career Counselor
- University Administrator
- Human Resources Specialist
- Community Service Director

Rather than focus solely on the very highest-scoring occupations, however, I asked Priscilla to look at all occupations in the top two-thirds of her list.



What the OS scales show

Applying Occupational Scale Results from the Strong Assessment OS scores indicate that a person answered in a similar way to people who have already chosen certain occupations. This includes positive and negative responses.

The person could have a lot in common with people who've already chosen those occupations. They might like those kinds of work environments.

Seeing as Priscilla answered similarly to people who had already chosen these occupations, in both positive and negative responses, she could have a lot in common with them. Therefore, she might also like those environments.

Homework for you/your client:

- Look at the **pattern of the highest BISs**. See what the pattern says about the types of career fields and tasks you most enjoy.
- Examine the **OSs where you scored above 40**. Describe the kinds of patterns you notice and what types of work environments they suggest you might prefer.
- Explore what your **highest BISs and OSs together** could indicate about the types of career fields and work environments you're most interested in.

Priscilla's perspective

"As I neared college graduation, a mentor brought up the option of going into the field of higher education. I was actively involved as a student leader, so it instantly clicked and felt like a perfect fit.



"Since then, it's been the career choice that punctuated my undergraduate education, led me through my graduate degree, and has given me five years of job satisfaction.

"With the Strong being such a prominent tool for career planning, and my being in a job that I already loved so much, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. When I first saw my Strong results, most of them were not a surprise, but a few of them seemed to come out of left field. Here are my top four of five interest areas as indicated by my results on the Strong Basic Interest Scales:

- Culinary Arts
- Counseling & Helping
- Human Resources & Training
- Performing Arts

"Counseling & Helping and Human Resources & Training came as no surprise at all, since these areas basically comprise my current role.

"For a split second, Culinary Arts shocked me, but then it made complete sense. Over the past two years, I've learned a lot about food culture, which has led to all sorts of discoveries. Through that journey, I've adopted a largely local, organic, and plant-based diet; learned how to cook; learned more about our food systems; joined a CSA (community shared agriculture) chapter, and integrated those ideas into other parts of my life.

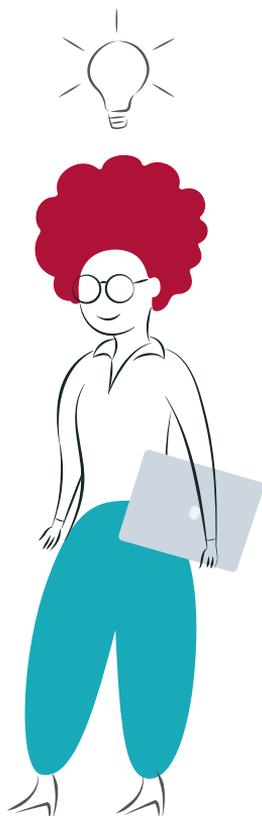
"While it is a very exciting and joyful part of my life, it's not one that I want to turn into a career. I can definitely get my food culture fix through my personal life, rather than my professional life."



“Performing Arts is another one that initially threw me for a loop. I’ve never considered myself to be a performer. I have always had a strong appreciation for the arts but didn’t think I was inclined to perform them myself.

“But Catherine, who was helping me understand my assessment results, asked just the right questions to bring this interest into a different and clearer light for me.

“I thought about a few instances in college that allowed me to grow my confidence and skills through various class presentations. Then, as an admissions counselor, talking to groups of students, families, and counselors. Sometimes, I am scheduled for a high school presentation and I don’t know if it will be to a group of five students or a hundred.”





Writing a career mission statement in 3 steps

A career mission statement can be an extremely helpful tool for determining the best and most fulfilling direction for your career.

There are many methods of writing a career mission statement. The one below specifically incorporates MBTI® and Strong results. It has three steps.



Step 1

The middle two letters of your four-letter MBTI type describe what you most value. They represent the core of who you are.

Check the two-letter combination below that matches your MBTI preferences and **circle the description beside it.**

ST

Getting it right, accuracy, precision, efficiency, pragmatic use of details

SF

Providing practical service to others, making people's lives better in concrete ways

NF

Making a meaningful difference in people's lives, helping people to fulfill their potential

NT

Developing global systems, mastering knowledge, high standards of competence



Step 2

The Strong assessment features six General Occupational Themes (GOTs). They're the RIASEC themes listed below. They describe primary motivators or values that are important to you.

Check which themes come up on your Strong Profile. Then the **circle the statement beside each theme that appears on your profile.**

Realistic (R)	Using hands-on skills to produce tangible results
Investigative (I)	Analyzing information to probe questions of intellectual curiosity
Artistic (A)	Expressing yourself in the creation of art or appreciation of beauty
Social (S)	Helping others know, grow, change, and get along for the betterment of humanity
Enterprising (E)	Persuading others of the merits of an idea or product; being dedicated to organizational goals
Conventional (C)	Organizing information and bringing order to data/things to make decisions

Step 3

Combine the statements you've circled above.

Choose the one from your MBTI® preferences and one, two, or three from your Strong themes. Combine them into one sentence which answers these three questions:



What is most important to you about work?



What do you value most about what you do?



What do you want to accomplish through your work?

Note to practitioners

The key to this exercise is giving your clients or students only a short amount of time. Give them around **5 minutes** to write their statement. You're looking for the first thing that comes to them.

How to use this activity

I've seen this exercise incorporated into many parts of the career counseling process, from beginning to end.

For instance, it can be used as a starting point for bringing together clients' or students' MBTI and Strong results. It reveals how their interests and personality fit together to describe where they want to focus their search and/or professional development.

Clients or students can also use the statement they create as a three-minute elevator speech when describing what they offer to potential employers. Or they can use it as a jumping-off point for writing their summary statement for their resume or for professional networking sites such as LinkedIn.

It can also be used as a tool to support freshmen and sophomores during the process of choosing a major.

So many possibilities! How do you think you'll use it?

- Write a 3-minute elevator pitch
- Write a statement for a resume or networking site
- Choose a college major

Priscilla's career mission statement

"I started out by jotting down words that resonated and then—BOOM. The statement formed, and it was perfect. It makes me very happy. Here it is:

I want to inspire and motivate people to grow, in an authentic and meaningful way, in order to build community and make the world a better place."



When Priscilla and I met the following week, we talked about how this statement reflects her current occupation, as well as where she sees herself five years from now.

Not surprisingly, Priscilla's statement is an accurate description of what she does now in her current position as a college admissions counselor. We talked about how to use this statement moving forward as the guiding force to make sure that any new opportunities she considers also fulfill this primary motivation.

Overall, Priscilla said that although it was hard to get started writing her statement, it helped her realize that she has more clarity and focus than she originally thought.

As you would expect of someone with ENFP preferences, she is considering many options, but they are actually very focused: she wants to help/counsel, motivate, and inspire others.



Follow-up questions for your career mission statement

Does your career mission statement reflect what you're doing right now in your career?

What about in 5–10 years?

If not, how can you use this statement as guidance for your future career opportunities?

Can you see any connections between:	
Your MBTI® preferences and your career mission statement?	Your Strong Interest Inventory® profile and your career mission statement?
Explain...	Explain...



Getting more from your career

Ideally, we want to spend a lot of time doing activities that reflect the middle letters of our MBTI® type—ST, SF, NF, or NT.

As we said earlier, they define what is most important to us. They represent the core of who we are.



MBTI® type and stages of life

In the first half of life, assuming our middle two letters are affirmed by the outside world, we pursue careers and avocational interests that reflect them.

Then, even if we're extremely happy with our career and/or life, many of us start to long for something more—something undefined that seems to be missing.

In very simple terms, there are two basic strategies to pursue during this period of reflection. They can be done at the same time and repeatedly over a lifetime.



Strategy #1

The first strategy relates to our preferred type. We need to look at:

- What we need to do to be our best
- What types of activities in our current role make us feel the most fulfilled or enable us to use the skills we deeply enjoy. How much of our day is spent in these types of activities? How can we add more of them?

These types of activities are usually reflected in the two middle letters of our type.

Strategy #2

The second strategy is to explore the parts of ourselves in which we haven't spent nearly as much time—**the opposites of our middle letters**.

For example, if your middle letters are S and T, you will explore their opposites, N and F.

According to Jung, our preferences represent those things that come most easily and naturally to us, but it's not all of who we are. To become whole, we need to develop all eight preferences, especially the 'middle' preference pairs: Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling.

We need to know when it's appropriate to use each.

Therefore, when we start to get the "What else is there?" bug, many times it's a call to look at the parts that need development. And they are usually reflected in the opposites of our two middle letters.

How can you add activities, either in your career or avocational life, that help you develop the other side of you?

From assessment insights to career action plans

Since my last session with Priscilla, she's been busy exploring the four options we discussed. They were:

- **Moving up within her current profession** as an admissions counselor at her current university
- **Becoming better connected professionally** in her community by joining the chamber of commerce and other organizations that would give her exposure to professionals in her target careers
- **Conducting informational interviews** over coffee and/or lunch with people in her target careers
- **Pursuing a PhD** in higher education administration

Since that time, Priscilla has gotten involved with her local chamber of commerce, helping with one of its annual festivals.

Although this activity hasn't yielded job offers, it is putting her in the position of knowing many types of people who could be in the position of guiding her next steps or introducing her to people who might be hiring down the road.

Since staying in her current area is a top priority for her, this is an excellent job search strategy, even though it's an indirect one.

Soul-searching and making a decision

While still open to career options such as human resources, Priscilla has done some serious soul searching about the types of work she most enjoys. She has realized that working with students is on the top of her list.

The turning point in this realization was a recent experience at the graduation ceremony for one of her favorite students. Over 50 family members from around the country came to see this student graduate, as he was the first from this family to graduate.

Priscilla had been very close to the student during his years at the university, and the student and many of the family members told her how she had made a profound impact on this young man's life. Priscilla realized that higher education was a deep love for her, and she wasn't sure she really wanted to consider leaving it for another career path.



A new opportunity?

Fast-forward to a couple of weeks later when Priscilla was socializing with a few of her friends.

One friend casually mentioned a job opening that would be perfect for Priscilla involving a program that supported at-risk, first-generation college students, increasing their chances of graduating. Priscilla immediately knew this was a job made for her and sprang to action. She sent her resume the next day and got invited for an on-site interview the following week. All looked very promising.

Alas, in the end she didn't get the job. But she did get valuable insight into what was really important to her about her next career move, reaffirming the career path she was already on—with a twist.

Priscilla is now even more interested in pursuing opportunities locally that directly affect the development of college students, which could include increasing responsibilities with her current employer.

Not always about changing direction

Discovering the career path that best matches your interests, values, and personality doesn't always mean changing course.

Sometimes it's about reaffirming and re-energizing the path you're already on, as is the case for Priscilla. Although she didn't get the job she interviewed for, she got something even better—she got clarity around what she wants as the focus of her work.

No doubt, one day very soon she will be the one offered the job. Until then, Priscilla is living in "excited expectation," keeping her arms wide open for the next perfect job opening.



A personal story: How I answered the “Is this all there is?” call



In my mid-thirties, I was in a career that mostly matched the primary motivators of the middle letters of my MBTI® type: NF.

I had been a career counselor for the past decade and, at that moment, was managing a university career center that provided me with the opportunity to do what NF types love to do most—inspire, motivate, create, strategize, brainstorm, and envision.

But something still felt missing.

Finding what’s missing

Not realizing my answer was hidden in personality type, I did a classic career development exercise where I listed everything I loved to do as a child without being told to do it. On the middle of this list was written, “create collages out of magazines.”

So, one Sunday afternoon, I pulled together a pile of catalogs and magazines, ripped them up, and created my first collage in 25 years. I had so much fun doing this that I continued collaging almost every day for the next three years.

Just to clarify, I was considered the “artistic nerd” in my family, not having the ability to draw or paint. So, these collages weren’t “good.” In fact, when I showed them to students and colleagues, their first response was to ask whether I had children (I don’t).

The first success

However, this didn’t deter my passion because each of my childlike creations gave me so much joy to create and reflected my personal inner journey to answer the “Is this all there is?” call.

Somewhere along this three-year journey, I took one art class (my first ever) and learned how to make my collages look more professional.

One day soon after, I photocopied a new collage and sent it to a friend in California, who in turned framed it and displayed it on her office wall. When one of my friend’s clients saw my collage, she offered to buy it, and I gleefully sold her the original!

Jump forward to the present day. I have turned that initial sale into many sales, including showing my work in many galleries and juried fine art shows, winning many awards along the way.

How making collages complements my career

For every collage I create, I pull together somewhere between 100 and 500 little magazine pieces, moving them around a board to form a picture that looks more like a painting than a collage, a process that is like finding the perfect piece to complete a puzzle.

Each collage takes up to a year to complete. To say the least, my art form is extremely detailed oriented (ST), and in order to sell my art I have had to learn many detailed business skills (ST), which at times has been a struggle.

Yet, doing this art form, including the selling of it, almost feels like a compulsion, something I have to do to feel whole, satisfied, and complete.

More complete—but still the same core

Even when developing the preferences opposite to our middle letters—and for me, ST type activities—we never leave our “heart,” or middle letters, behind. Quite the contrary: our middle letters still run the show.

For me, this is reflected in the theme of my art, which is intended to inspire people to pursue their heart’s desire—all NF!





Career development resources from **The Myers-Briggs Company**

Find out more about how to get certified to administer and use the [MBTI®](#) and [Strong](#) assessments at <https://asia.themyersbriggs.com>

If you're a practitioner or counselor who delivers career training, watch our free webinars, read our blog or access our free resources via our website for further education and support.

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