

Chapter One

THE ELEMENTS OF PERSONALITY

*Every woman who has given birth
to more than one child
would tell you that each comes
with a unique personality at birth.*

PERSONALITY IS INNATE

Every child is born with a unique set of personality traits. Ask any woman who has given birth to two or more children and she will attest to the fact that while still in the womb her children showed marked differences in their behavior. One “demands” more room to move, chews on the umbilical cord, and refuses to accept a variety of foods Mom selects. Another settles in quietly, pleased there is no bed to make or food to cook, and thinks, “Hey, maybe I can get a twelve-month ride out of the old girl!”

Everyone knows that no two sets of fingerprints are alike. How could we possibly believe that human personalities are any less individual than fingerprints?

There are psychologists who theorize that a child’s personality is not completely formed until the age of five. Others go further—they say personality develops slowly through a lifelong process of discovery and maturation. I disagree. I think when some of my colleagues use the word *personality* they really mean “personal history.”

I believe that each personality is complete at conception and comes in the soul of every child. It is present along with various genetically inherited traits, such as hair color and blood type, although personality itself is not inherited from one’s parents. Nor is it shaped by envi-

THE COLOR CODE

ronment. Science has not yet discovered all the factors that determine our prenatal makeup. But this should not deter us from using what we *do* know to improve ourselves and our relationships.

*Personality is a solid core of traits
reflecting the unique essence
of a particular human being.*

Personality is a solid core of traits reflecting the unique essence of a particular human being. Attempts by social scientists to explain personality in terms of genetics or environmental influences merely limit our understanding of the true nature of personality. By confining themselves to the old nature versus nurture argument, such attempts to explain personality doom themselves to failure. Personality is not black and white. Personality is a kaleidoscope. We can understand personality—and ourselves—only by opening our eyes to a whole new kind of understanding.

Since the beginning of time, humans have been trying to learn what it is that makes them tick. Greek myths abound with spellbinding stories of men and women who were changed by their interactions with one or more of the gods. Such mythology was an early way of trying to explain personality. The suggestion was that people had unique strengths and limitations because of the influence of deities. Astrologers embraced the twelve signs of the zodiac as the determining factors in personality, substituting planetary power for the powers of the gods. Chinese tradition associated personality with the year a child was born.

Later theoreticians turned to the environment to explain personality differences. They categorized personalities according to four dominant aspects of nature—earth, air, fire, and water. This theory of the elements provides us with an interesting starting point from which to proceed in our understanding of personality. It is simple, it is memorable, and it is rooted in fertile historical ground. I'll expand on this idea later. For the moment, the important thing to understand is that, from my point of view, your personality is formed before you take your first breath.

Now let's explore the meaning of personality. What does it do? How does it affect our lives?

*Personality is not black and white.
Personality is a kaleidoscope.*

PERSONALITY IS AN INTERPRETATION OF LIFE

Some people see the world through rose-colored glasses. Others see it through dark glasses. But we can't try on personalities the way we try on glasses. Personality is built in.

Your personality determines whether you are easily depressed, casual, formal, careful, or carefree. It determines whether you are passive or assertive. Do you dash off at the last minute for an appointment, or always arrive with time to spare? Do you prefer deep, meaningful conversations, or would you rather dance the night away? Are you most comfortable being entertained, or do you prefer to entertain others? Your personality is the key to how you react to these and all other situations. Your personality is more than just an "attitude." It is what causes you to act and react the way you do.

PERSONALITY IS A CODE OF BEHAVIOR

Personality is that core of thoughts and feelings inside you that tells you how to conduct yourself. It's a checklist of responses based on strongly held values and beliefs. It directs your emotional as well as your rational reactions to *every life experience*. It even determines which type of reaction—emotional or cerebral—you're likely to have in any given situation. Personality is an active process within each person's heart and mind that dictates how he or she feels, thinks, and behaves.

*You can never change your core color.
Learn to nurture your strengths
and overcome your limitations.
Perhaps the greatest human tragedy of all
is watching someone abandon their innate personality
and simply discard themselves
along the side of life's road.*

Your personality watches over and guards you like a parent. Without clear-cut personality traits to mark our paths through life, we would become lost. This is what personality fears most. It is what makes you different from everyone else, and so it is rigid and quite resistant to change. Personality protects itself. It does not easily venture out to experience or understand other types of personalities. It accepts you—that is, itself—quite readily but is much less flexible

THE COLOR CODE

with others. And, as sometimes happens between parents and children, your personality may give you problems from time to time. But let an outsider do or say something threatening, and our personality, like a parent, reacts defensively and lashes out.

Personality points each of us in a particular direction and makes us feel uncomfortable when we deviate from it. The moment we stray from its prescribed plan, it makes us feel disoriented. When we try to deny or explain away unusual thought processes, we feel emotional fatigue and a vague sense of fear. We suffer spiritual pain that we cannot understand. We feel confused and overwhelmed by our inability to figure out our seemingly irrational behavior.

*I believe that life is the most entertaining journey of all.
It can be a better journey than you ever dreamed,
if you know where you've been and where you're going.*

For each of us, the core of our personality—its type, the direction in which it points us—is vitally important in explaining us to our ourselves. Without it, we would be truly lost. Each of us needs a personal code of behavior, a personality, but it makes for rough going if we want to change, to grow. And if we do not understand our personalities well enough to exert some control, we can never grow into healthier, happier human beings.

PERSONALITY IS A MYSTERY

Sadly, few of us really know the reasons why we think and act as we do—perhaps none of us ever finds *complete* answers. Still, we can try. For many people, their own personality is the greatest mystery of all. They are puzzled and frustrated when they do not understand the basis for their actions and reactions. Trying to understand our personalities is the only way to grow. Step by step, bit by bit, we can gather enough knowledge about ourselves to begin to take control of our lives. I believe that life is the most exciting journey of all. It can be a better journey than you ever dreamed, if you know where you've been and where you're going.

This book is designed to guide you in your journey of self-

*Trying to understand our personalities
is the only way to grow.*

PERSONALITY IN PERSPECTIVE

discovery. Knowledge is power. The knowledge you gain from this book will give you the power to change your behavior, if you so choose, and to understand the behavior of others.

PERSONALITY IS A RAINBOW

Let's return to the idea that the elements can be used as a metaphor for personality. Thousands of years ago, when the "known elements" were earth, air, fire, and water, it was thought that there were also four distinct personality types. In this book I will borrow and expand upon the ancients' metaphor. In my color code, fire becomes the color Red, Blue reflects the earth, White represents water, and air is symbolized by Yellow.

Each color stands for a collection of traits, strengths, and limitations. But far from being limited to explaining only individual personalities, this color symbolism also clarifies relationships between people and the impact that various personalities have on one another.

In order to understand the power of interactions among the four personality types, we can carry the nature analogy one step further. Earth without water is parched and desolate. And fire cannot exist without air. Symbolically, we see that each personality can best define itself through its relationships with other personalities.

You should understand that the four primary personalities identified with the four colors are the personality types found in every culture in the world, in every age group, in every religion, race, and sex. They belong to and describe everyone. They identify innate strengths as well as innate limitations. They influence every action and reaction.

Of course, every person develops unique strengths and weaknesses—this makes for numerous variations within the four primary color groups. Also, some behavior patterns are not caused by inherent personality at all but instead reflect cultural biases—such as, for instance, the submissive role played by women in some countries. We must always look beyond culturally induced behavior to see the innate, natural personality of any individual.

Despite variations and exceptions, however, we can each identify most clearly with only one of the personality colors. If we can each find our own personal color, learn its characteristics, and discover how to accentuate its strengths and work within its limitations, we will be better prepared to understand ourselves and cope with the everyday problems of life.

THE COLOR CODE

To help you accomplish this, a simple and enjoyable profile appears in the next chapter. It will enable you to discover your personality color. I urge you to take the profile now, before reading on, first, so that you can understand and identify with the material in the rest of the book and, second, so you can learn to harness the strengths of your personality and enhance the rest of your life.