

## Three Assessment Thoughts for Leadership + Career Coaching

The challenges are endless for almost everyone today. Every profession, every industry – and every individual is facing the challenges. Burnout (Resilience – Stress), the Great Resignation or the opportunities of what often appears to be every organization hiring, plus challenges from just “keeping up” with changing technologies and customer demands – even this list doesn’t exhaust today’s challenges.

Coaching and assessment are two areas that have definitely expanded in this challenging environment. As an advocate of assessment for career decision-making, leadership, resilience, and the myriad of other challenges faced by everyone in today's world, assessment and coaching are definitely something to be pursued. In the spirit of my "212-Careers" philosophy, here are some points to consider, with sometimes a bit of a stronger view.

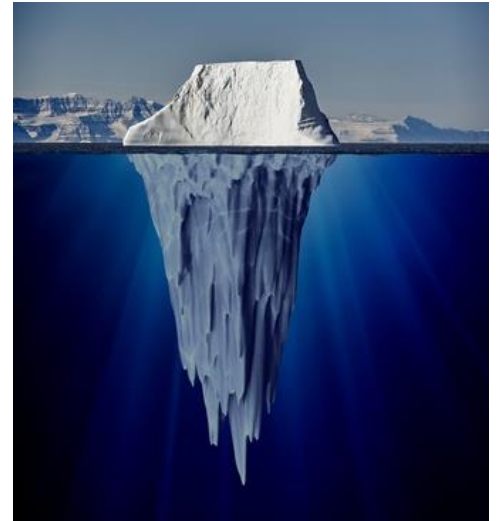
But first, a bit of context. I have been involved professionally in the assessment arena for decades. From graduate school courses to conducting full-day "psychological assessments" to introducing assessments into more than 20 different management workshops to making assessments a core element of my coaching practice, I have delivered – **and personally taken** – scores of assessments. Another point of context is the rise and fall and rise of "testing" in the career and workplace settings. Assessment has never been without its advocates and critics. Today, while perhaps some criticisms have become even louder, there has still been an explosion of new assessments and "classic" assessments delivered in new ways because of online platforms. The following points are worthy of consideration because of these factors. I offer the following three major points to consider within this context.

### #1 – Simplicity Rarely Enough

Today's plethora of testing alternatives also include many assessments with no cost other than the time necessary to complete the assessment. As noted above, I've taken scores of assessments over the years, including "new" ones in just the last few months. My advice for these options: "Go for it!" if you have the time and interest. If an assessment provides you with information, with insights, or perhaps provokes some new learning and thinking for you, the time invested is likely worth it. However, “free” can sometimes indicate value.

Perhaps one of the most widely assessed elements is "personality," or "style," or as more carefully defined by the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) "preferences." Interestingly, a recent Military.com article identified the MBTI as its #1 recommended test for careers. And the ability to identify your "type" is perhaps the easiest – and least expensive (including no cost) option for getting your four-letter, e.g., ENTJ, code.

But that leads to this first concern, just receiving your four-letter code, even if it's an accurate representation of your preferences, is just the tip of the iceberg if it is a one or two-page report or a graphic with a two-three sentence description on a website. The basic MBTI report is just a fraction of the in-depth information available with the MBTI Intensive, Stress or Career Report. Working with my coaching clients, I rarely find the key insights coming from the first few "introductory" pages – and never from just the four-letter code.



This point is equally important for another very popular assessment, CliftonStrengths (StrengthsFinder), taken by over 26 million people. While it is common for people to "know" their Top 5 strengths, maybe even posting them on a cubicle, on a LinkedIn profile, or referencing them on their resume, many do not understand the depth of the full 34 strengths, or like the MBTI comment above, the depth of information from their "Balconies and Basements" or the specialized management or leadership interpretations.

There's another message here. I'll argue that one reason there are so many assessments available today is that there are many different ways to look at your traits, skills, etc. If you go for your annual physical exam, it is highly unlikely you'll only be submitting to one test. From a "catalog" of options, I select the appropriate tools for the client and the situation. Right now, I'm frequently following the "Omne Trium Perfectum" strategy with three assessments including the MBTI, CliftonStrengths, and an Emotional Intelligence assessment. However, I'll also look at adding assessments for Learning Style, Decision-Making Style, or...

The point is simple: a good assessment will have a depth of information beyond the "first page" and beyond a single assessment. There will, of course, be a difference in the cost, but the investment is almost guaranteed to be worth it, IF...

## **#2 – Depth with Coaching**

The explosion of testing has been matched by a corresponding growth of the personal, leadership, or career coaching world. There are a variety of reasons for this and a lengthy list of benefits that could be cited for coaching, even to the argument posed by some that "everyone needs a coach!" For the purposes of this article, however, the argument for coaching will be limited to its value in interpreting/understanding assessment results.

One of the major assessments I facilitated to over 3,000 managers was promoted by its author with the Robert Burns quote, (in the original Scottish) "O wad some Power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!" In modern English, "Oh would some Power the gift give us, to see ourselves as others see us."

Similar to the comment on depth, rarely is an individual going to see everything in the results from an assessment with the same "eyes" as someone familiar with the finer points of an assessment. "I didn't see that," "I never thought about that," are just two of the very common, very frequent responses during a thorough review of results.

There's also a tendency for a superficial acceptance of the results. "I'm an INTJ," or even simpler, "I'm an Introvert," ignores more than just the depth of the information. It is likely to ignore the actionable information that goes beyond understanding. Many assessments, I'll argue the better ones, include information guiding the understanding of the results – and action planning to apply the understanding to improved behaviors for leaders, better decision-making for career issues, etc.

A good coach is guaranteed to improve the understanding of the assessment results and motivate (push – challenge) you to a better future, but only IF...

## **#3 – Acceptance Is Key**

Real acceptance is key. The problem with most assessments, or more accurately many individuals' responses to them, is that the simple results, even the "first-page" results of the better assessments, are easily accepted by the person completing the assessment. "That's me!" "That fits!" "It nailed me!" are just a few of the common first reactions. This can be more common with quick (and often free) assessments.

But it can't stop there. The acceptance needs to include agreement, disagreement, thinking, questions – AND ANSWERS! When I introduce the results, the full results, from the MBTI, CliftonStrengths, or any of the other assessments I use in a particular case, I recommend the recipient first read the report quickly, almost scanning it for the highlights, which will include

those “that’s me” type reactions. Then I recommend letting some time pass, letting the results “sink in.” And the next step: “a careful perusal of the text,” highlighting agreements, disagreements, questions. That leads to the discussion, to the understanding!

**A final thought:** In the training world, an oft-repeated argument, certainly easily posed today, is “What if we train them and they leave?” The response of course is: “What if we don’t train them, and they stay?” In this challenge of assessment and coaching, “I don’t have the time to take tests and work with a coach! I’m too stressed!” The response is again clear: “What if you don’t?”

James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR, has assessed and trained 1000’s of individuals. His assessment “tool kit” includes multiple options for customized assessments – coaching programs for individuals and organizations. His current “omne trium perfectum” (“everything that comes in threes is perfect”) is a combination of the MBTI, CliftonStrengths, and the EIQ-2 Emotional Intelligence Assessment. However, the tool kit includes assessments for learning style, leadership effectiveness, decision-making style, personality, career traits, etc. In the career coaching world, Jim brings the unique view of his “**Interview Audition for Your Next Job**” book to coach clients with their resumes, interviews, LinkedIn profiles, and... His [212-Careers](#) site offers several complimentary resources and learning opportunities.

