

Which traits pulled you to practice?

You're responsible, efficient, productive, and focused on results—all of which make you a great doctor. Now, use these strategies to make sure those traits are working for you—not against you.

By Jessica Harper, Managing Editor

You've been practicing veterinary medicine for several years now. When's the last time you thought about how you got where you are? If you're like most veterinarians, this career pulled you in because you're an animal lover; at least that's why 67 percent of those responding to a recent survey say they joined this profession.

When asked if there was a specific rea-

quick fact

Veterinarians spend their free time in much healthier ways than the average U.S. adult, according to a comparison of DataZone's numbers with a Gallup Poll study. **74%** of veterinarians engage in athletics and sports in their free time, while only **39%** of U.S. adults do.

son or incident that prompted their career choice, 35 percent of respondents said they were drawn to the profession by a desire to help animals and people, and 33 percent indicated an interest in science. Of those respondents loving the science side, many said they may have chosen human medicine if it weren't for insurance and malpractice issues. Friends, family members, and mentors also exerted a strong influence on 21 percent choosing veterinary practice. And the influential person cited was often a veterinarian.

So you chose this profession for its ability to help animals and people, for its scientific roots, because someone close to you was a doctor, or a combination of all three. What does that say about you now?

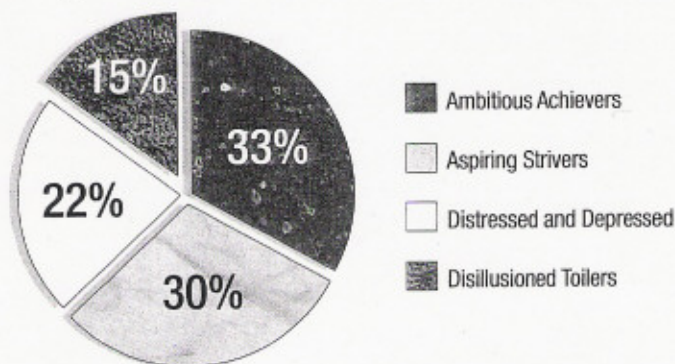
Believe it or not, it says that you're likely an Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, Judging (ISTJ), at least according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. (For more, see

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC FORTUNE

figure 1

Who's who

DataZone gathered data on 439 veterinarians to determine their profile types. They then identified four main types of veterinarians.



Source: Profile of the U.S. Small Animal Veterinarian produced by DataZone Research and Consulting Inc.

employees better understand themselves or their colleagues.

How can this type of assessment help you? Armed with this knowledge, you can consider whether your personality traits are helping or hurting your career and your relationships with clients and team members.

Tracking the traits

Of course, every personality type has strengths and weaknesses. In the case of an ISTJ veterinarian, Hart says, "What may seem like compulsive behavior to others, the veterinarian thinks is just a matter of doing what's right. This difference in perception can make a veterinarian seem like the classic Type-A personality to team members."

Not convinced that this assessment describes you accurately? To find out what personality type you are, take a quick, unofficial online test at www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp or at www.personalitypathways.com/type_inventory. These tests are only based on the Myers-Briggs typol-

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After determining your type, you can get a better idea of how you interact with people. For example, check out these ISTJ traits and the possible staff member reactions to them:

- **Responsible, bottom-line oriented, no-nonsense workers**, these veterinarians were good students. However, team members may perceive these qualities as being inflexible and lacking imagination, Hart says.

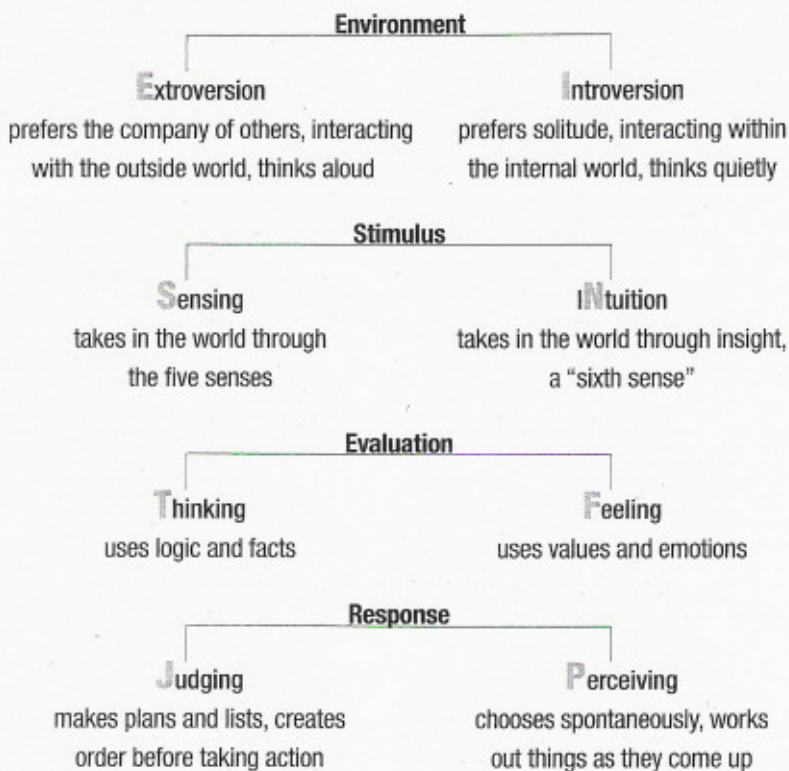
- **Clean and efficient but austere**, these veterinarians enjoy a well-organized clinic and reserved staff members. The staff members may think they're stuffy.

- **Productive and orderly**, these practitioners use checklists and follow well-established routines.



How Myers-Briggs works

Developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine Briggs in the 1950s, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is based on the work of psychologist Carl Jung. It's designed to identify people's preferences and relate them to their career choices. Specifically, the assessment classifies people in four categories shown below. Then, they are profiled as one of 16 different personality types, formed by the different letter combinations. For example, you might be an Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, Judging (ISTJ), and knowing that can help you relate to others—and help them relate to you.



"How Myers-Briggs Works" above.) In fact, a small animal veterinarian is almost twice as likely to be an ISTJ as the average American adult, says Rebecca Hart, co-founder of DataZone Research and Consulting Inc. in Atlantic Beach, Fla., and sponsor of TheVetZone.com.

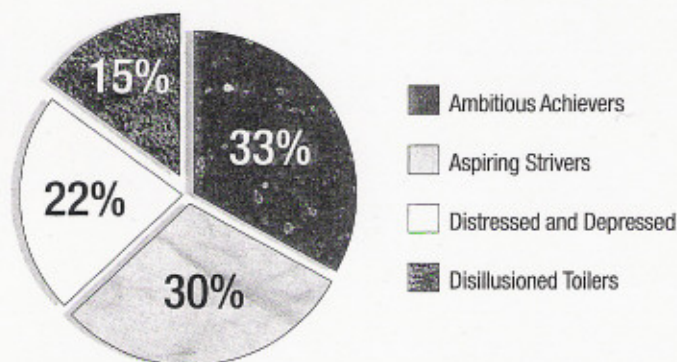
Earlier this year, DataZone released *Profile of the U.S. Small Animal Veterinarian*, a study which

used the Myers-Briggs indicator to define profile types of 439 responding small animal veterinarians. The indicator has become increasingly popular with businesses across the country. According to the Sept. 20, 2004 *New Yorker* article "Personality Plus," 89 percent of the Fortune 100 companies use results from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for hiring and to help

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- **Clean and efficient but austere**, these veterinarians enjoy a well-organized clinic and reserved staff members. The staff members may think they're stuffy.

- **Productive and orderly**, these practitioners use checklists and follow well-established routines.

While efficient, some routines can cause friction in a clinic, Hart says. Realize that your way, which seems perfectly logical, may not be the best way for your staff members.

- **Internalizing disagreements** is a common approach for introverts, so they likely have reflected and rehearsed the dialogue internally to resolve the issue. "When it comes time to deal with the conflict, introverts may have already resolved the problem for themselves," says Hart, "leaving the people around them hanging with no resolution."

In the case of an ISTJ, the veterinarian is a Thinker. Paired with Introvert, these types often find themselves conflicting about expectations and style.

"Thinkers have exacting ideas about how things should be done

quick fact

31% of veterinarians responding to DataZone's survey said they had enough time to do the things they wanted to do. This compares with **52%** of U.S. adults surveyed in a recent Gallup Poll.

and expect that people around them will see the logic of what they decide," Hart says. The result: Feeler staff members may feel left out, and they're more likely to personalize conflicts. The key is to address conflicts before tensions build and threaten a blowout.

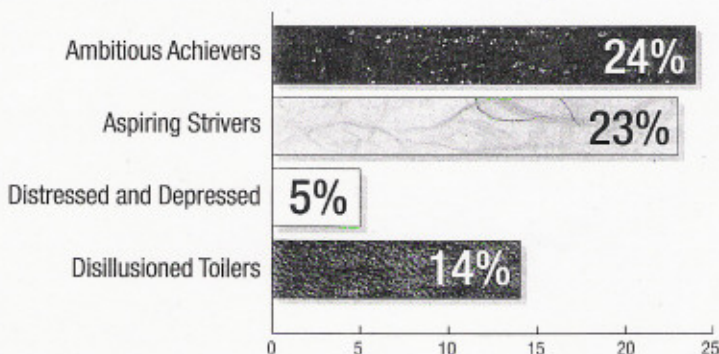
No matter what your personality type is, you could make a similar analysis, determining how

figure 2

Structuring a business

Unfortunately, traits that make you a great doctor aren't always the same ones you need to run a successful business. In fact, only a small number of the most ambitious veterinarians identified in the recent DataZone study use a structured business plan that includes promotions and marketing. Here's more:

Our clinic has a structured business plan that includes promotions and marketing.



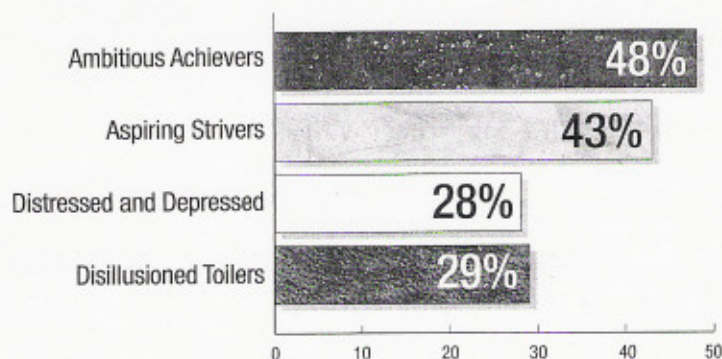
Source: Profile of the U.S. Small Animal Veterinarian produced by DataZone Research and Consulting Inc.

figure 3

Monitoring investments

The most successful veterinarians monitor practice profitability and return on investment more closely than their peers, according to DataZone. Not surprisingly, almost half of the Ambitious Achievers track their numbers. Here's more:

Our clinic closely monitors profitability and return on investment.



Source: Profile of the U.S. Small Animal Veterinarian produced by DataZone Research and Consulting Inc.

team members may see your qualities. You could even have everyone take the profile assessment and hold a team-training exercise to discuss the results and communication strategies that help build bridges between different types.

The bottom line

Despite feeling torn by traits that make you good at medicine and often not so good at business and team-building, most of your colleagues find the opportunity to help animals and people is worth the struggle. In fact, 69 percent of veterinarians said knowing what they know now, they'd choose to become a veterinarian again.

The breakdown

DataZone also paired its study results with other business and economic factors, including size of client base, practice revenue, and length of average client visit. They then identified four main types of veterinarians: Ambitious Achievers, Aspiring Strivers, Distressed and Depressed, and Disillusioned Toilers. Not to be confused with the Myers-Briggs personality types, these groupings are specific to DataZone's survey. Here's a breakdown.

Ambitious Achievers are the most satisfied and successful veterinarians. They have the largest client base, spend the most time with their clients, report the second-highest gross annual practice revenue, are high income earners, and have the highest average client transaction

(ACT). These veterinarians are also detail-oriented, ambitious, and optimistic.

Aspiring Strivers are also high performers, though they enjoy a significantly lower ACT and tend to spend less time with their clients. They feel less comfortable managing employees and plan less than Ambitious Achievers; however, they're still enthusiastic about their work.

Distressed and Depressed veterinarians say they provide the best medical care possible, while balancing good medicine with affordability. Interestingly, they have the largest average client base, spend the least time with each client, and have the lowest ACT. They're slower to make decisions and significantly less ambitious than members of the first two groups. They also appear to be dissatisfied, according to DataZone analysis. These veterinarians were the least likely to say that knowing what they know now, they'd still become veterinarians.

Disillusioned Toilers have "good intentions coupled with lack of a driving ambition or large-scale success," accord-

figure 4

Profile breakdown

To get a better idea of what makes Ambitious Achievers stand apart from the rest, DataZone compared their characteristics with the other profile types. As you look at these numbers, keep in mind that it's difficult to attribute cause and effect. You can't know for sure whether these qualities make Ambitious Achievers successful or they developed these qualities because of their success.

	Ambitious Achievers	Aspiring Strivers	Distressed and Depressed	Disillusioned Toilers
Plan my work carefully	60%	49%	36%	35%
Detail person	47%	24%	40%	35%
Comfortable managing employees	55%	34%	27%	40%
Ambitious about career	54%	39%	27%	32%
Quick to make decisions	32%	33%	22%	35%
Risk taker	32%	18%	21%	14%
Sophisticated business skills	24%	20%	13%	14%
Optimistic about my future	73%	66%	53%	49%
Enthusied about work	67%	51%	41%	41%

Source: Profile of the U.S. Small Animal Veterinarian produced by DataZone Research and Consulting Inc.

ing to DataZone. As you might expect, they have the lowest annual gross practice revenue, though their ACTs are average. They were among the lowest earners, working fewer hours and seeing fewer patients than other groups. They aren't as likely to develop a business plan, or monitor profitability or return on investment, and they're among the least ambitious.

Figure 1 on page 66, Figure 2 on page 67, Figure 3 on page 68, and Figure 4 above show some defining characteristics of each group and offer insight into the changes you'd need to make to move from one group to another. For example, if you want to change from an Aspiring Striver to an Ambitious Achiever, try developing a structured business plan.

Taker beware

While these profile assessments help you see your areas for improvement, hold off on making any sweeping changes based on their results. Why? First, what's true in one instance isn't always true in another.

The tests force you to make choices during the assessment, deciding whether they fall into one category more than others. Of course, each person has a little bit of all these characteristics.

Second, people perform different roles in different parts of their lives. Your profile when you think of your role as a parent, for example, might be different than your profile as an associate or as a business owner. The same is true for the other doctors and staff members in your practice.

The bottom line: Profile assessments are a tool that can help you become more aware of the different ways people think and work. Understanding type differences gives you valuable insight into how another person operates. And it helps you better understand your inner workings, so if you tend to rely heavily on logistics and facts (Thinking), you can make a concerted effort to consider values and emotions (Feeling) when making decisions. You'll feel more balanced—and your team members may reap the rewards, too. ♦