



## *Foundation Stone #6: People Skills January 2006*

### **Personality Temperaments in the Church: Practical Help for the Minister**

Hippocrates, the ancient physician for whom the “Hippocratic Oath” is named, speculated four basic types of personality: sanguine, choleric, melancholy and phlegmatic. Each was supposedly related to the four basic types of body fluids (blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm, respectively), creating a particular “temperament” or emotional state. Almost every modern personality theory has been built upon Hippocrates ancient wisdom. You should come to appreciate these different personality types, for you will certainly encounter them in ministry. *This simple insight into God’s design can radically transform your ability to get along with and minister to those God’s has placed within your sphere of influence.*

**Sanguine:** *On the positive side*, Sanguines are outgoing and rather talkative. They typically are described as “charming” by others and are natural story-tellers at parties because of their colorful ability to articulate. They prefer the company of others when possible and may even avoid aloneness more than others. They tend to be optimistic, which further draws others to them. Their energy is often channeled into play or entertainment and they love spontaneity. *On the negative side*, Sanguines have such a passion for colorful story they may neglect important details or even get their facts wrong. In fact, details and organization are among their worst skills. For some, their charming nature can become so strong they become self-absorbed and narcissistic. They can also be impulsive, driven by the feeling of the moment rather than logic or data. Actually, managing their emotions is perhaps their most difficult task.

**Choleric:** *On the positive side*, Choleric are also by nature outgoing. However, they are confident, goal-oriented people who are the natural leaders of the world. They can impose structure on the most chaotic of circumstances. They aren’t afraid to take risks to achieve their goals and can be quite self-motivating. If they believe in something, they will do it independent of anyone else’s support. Their energy is often channeled into the direction of accomplishment. *On the negative side*, Choleric can be so determined they come off as aggressive and controlling. Their logical orientation often makes them unaware of the feelings of others, causing them to be labeled as “insensitive” or “critical”. Their patience may run thin causing impulsivity, especially when things don’t go as planned. Their need for structure may impede their ability to “go with the flow” of others. Anger management may be their greatest challenge.

**Melancholy:** *On the positive side*, Melancholies are more introverted and introspective. They are in tune with their own feelings and the feelings of others. Many become the great caregivers and humanitarians of the world. They are the most thoughtful of the temperaments. They are also quite organized and detail-oriented. Many have a penchant for the arts or music. Their energy is usually channeled into deep introspection or creativity. *On the negative side*, Melancholies can be critical and pessimistic people bent toward perfectionism. They can appear as private and even aloof. They are often moody and more likely to suffer from clinical mood disorders, such as depression or anxiety. In fact, their biggest challenge in life is typically related to stress management.

**Phlegmatic:** *On the positive side*, Phlegmatics are also more introverted types. They are by far the most easy-going, bringing a sense of stability to just about any situation. They are usually quite agreeable and adaptable to situations and to others, getting along with most everybody. They have the patience of Job and can be diplomatic in stressful situations. While Melancholies are deep feelers, the Phlegmatics are deep thinkers. *On the negative side*, Phlegmatics are frequently accused of being slow and passive. They rarely volunteer for things unless they are approached directly. Even then, extreme Phlegmatics will attempt to stay uninvolved when possible. They may also be accused of lack of leadership and unwilling to “take a stand” for anything. They are frequently unsure of themselves and can be quite indecisive at times. In fact, their most significant struggle is usually with their self-esteem.

#### **Thoughts to Ponder:**

- Which temperament is closest to **your own** personality? Your **spouse**? Your **children**? Those on your **ministry team**?
- How might you **adjust your expectations or style of relating** with others given their personality type?

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