

Gretchen: I got my first insight into the framework that became The Four Tendencies framework in a very inconspicuous moment of my life. I was having lunch with a friend. As my sister, Elizabeth, calls me, I am a little bit of a happiness bully. I was quizzing my friend about her happiness and her habits. She said something that set my mind on fire. She said to me, "Well, the weird thing about me is I know I would be happier if I exercised regularly. When I was in high school I was on the track team and I never missed track practice. Why can't I go running now?" I thought, "Well, why? It's the same person, it's the same behavior. At one time it was effortless, and now she can't do it. What's the explanation?"

I became determined to solve the puzzle of how people sometimes could or couldn't make important changes in their life. But I couldn't really understand what was going on in this pattern and in other patterns that I saw, like all the people who objected to New Year's resolutions because they thought that January 1st was an arbitrary date. I couldn't figure it out until I was looking at my to-do list one day. I was sitting at my desk and all of a sudden, I realized that the key was the idea of expectations, that this was at the heart of all these patterns that I had noticed. What I realized was that we all face two kinds of expectations: outer expectations, expectations that others place on us like a work deadline or a request from a friend, and inner expectations, the expectations that we place on ourselves like keeping a New Year's resolution or getting back into playing guitar.

Depending on a person's response to expectations, we will fall into one of four distinct types: Upholders, Questioners, Obligers, and Rebels. Upholders respond readily to both outer and inner expectations. They want to know what others expect from them, but their expectations for themselves are just as important. Next, Questioners. Questioners question all expectations. They'll do something if they think it makes sense. They'll only meet an expectation if it's justified. In a sense, they make everything an inner expectation because if it meets their inner standard, they'll do it. If it fails their inner standard, they will object. They tend to dislike anything arbitrary, inefficient, irrational.

Obligers readily meet outer expectations but they struggle to meet inner expectations. This explains the mystery of my friend on the track team. When she had a team and a coach expecting her to show up, she had no trouble showing up for track practice. But when she was trying to go running on her own, she struggled. Then finally, Rebels. Rebels resist all expectations, outer and inner alike. They want to do what they want to do in their own way, in their own time. They can do anything they want to do. They can do anything they choose to do. But if you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to resist.

Once I identified The Four Tendencies framework, I decided to conduct a nationally representative sample study in order to learn more about the Four Tendencies and how many of each Tendency is in the world. What I found is that 41% of people are Obligers. For both men and women, Obliger is the largest Tendency. Behind Obliger at 24%, Questioners. Then the smallest tendency, it's a very conspicuous Tendency but it is the smallest Tendency, is the Rebel Tendency at 17%. My Tendency, the Upholder Tendency, is only slightly larger at 19%. I also decided, just for fun, to give each of the Tendencies a color. I used the traffic symbol system as a way to give them all a color.

Obliger is green because Obligers are the ones who are most likely to go ahead, say yes, move forward. Questioners are yellow because they're the ones who are most likely to say, "Wait, what? Wait, hold up. Let's pause here." Rebels are red because they're the ones who are most likely to say, "Stop, wait, I'm not going forward." That leaves the Upholders. They don't fit into the traffic sign system but I gave Upholders the color blue. That just seems like the right-fitting color for Upholders. Are the Tendencies a product of nature or nurture?

I believe that the Four Tendencies are hardwired. They're a part of our personality. This is something that we bring into the world. It's not a function of our generation or our birth order or what country we're born into or how we're raised, it's just a part of our personality. Now, I also believe that the Four Tendencies doesn't necessarily correspond with other personality frameworks. I love personality frameworks. I love reading them. But I think that each personality framework has its own nuance, its own vocabulary, its own powerful insight into human nature, and I think that you lose some of that nuance if you try to say that this equals that. I will say, however, one framework that it definitely does not correspond to is the Houses of Hogwarts.

People often argue to me that they figured out which Tendency goes with which house of Hogwarts, but I say to you three words: Hermione, Fred, and George. They are all clearly Gryffindor, they are all clearly not of the same Tendency. One thing to keep in mind about the Four Tendencies is this defines a very, very narrow slice of your personality. Now, some personality frameworks try to paint a picture of the whole person. This does not. We could line 50 Questioners up in a row and depending on how ambitious they were, how considerate of other people's feelings they were, how analytical they were, how curious they were, how extroverted or introverted they were, how adventurous they were, a million different things, these Questioners would all look very different from each other.

But if you asked or told those people to do something, they would all respond exactly the same way. They would all say, "Why should I?" That is what makes a Questioner, is that when an expectation is placed on them, their question is, "Why should I?" Other things can be very different. That is what makes people of the same Tendency. Why are the Four Tendencies important? Why do we even need to study them? Why do we care about identifying them? There are two reasons. First, we're much better able to understand ourselves when we're feeling some kind of frustration, some kind of conflict, some kind of procrastination. We can be much more effective in figuring out, "What should we do differently? How can we tackle this problem?" Our stress goes down, our burnout goes down, our sense of frustration with ourselves and our limitations goes down because we see a lot of possibilities about how we can change things for the better.

We can figure out how to tweak situations to boost our chances of success. Just as we're better able to understand ourselves, we're also better able to understand other people. When we understand other people's Tendencies, we're more tolerant and more compassionate to them because as an Upholder, for instance, I now know that some things come pretty easily to me that don't come very easily to other people. Now I understand it's not that I'm right and they're wrong or they're right and I'm wrong, it's

just that we have different ways of approaching things. We understand the Tendencies; we don't take it personally. We can see, "Well, you're behaving this way, you're asking me question after question after question, I'm feeling drained, I'm feeling overwhelmed, I'm feeling like you're questioning my authority. But wait, hold on, you're a Questioner. You're not doing this just to me, this is the way you are with everybody in your life."

I don't have to be angry at it, I just have to figure out, "How do we create a situation where both of us can thrive?"