

## Thinkers vs Feelers

By Rachelle Bakke, 2001

© chelle eliason, 2020

### **“Feel, think, and believe are not interchangeable.” – George T. Arnold**

We all use language dictated by our thoughts or feelings. When speaking with anyone, it is easy to discern if a person is a “Thinker” or a “Feeler”; all you have to do is: listen. When asked a question, does your client use “think” or “feel” in the response?

I've researched the two and have identified major differences that are needed when coaching clients in one category or the other. Knowing when and how to adjust our own language during a session will be a key component in any coaching session. Let us review the major differences between “thinkers” and “feelers” and examine some tools we can use in our coaching sessions.

Dr. Carl Jung theorized psychological personality types. He studied human actions in response to every action, and why humans act a certain way. The purpose is to make his comprehensive theory of personality practical and useful in people's lives. Isabel Meyers, for 40 years, also worked on these types, now referred to as MBTI: Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator. According to PersonalityPathways.com, “the MBTI and psychological type enables you to use a non-judgmental language to talk about some serious issues...a dynamic way of representing who and what people are, and may become.” Today, we will use the Meyers-Briggs definitions.

Meyers and Briggs look at Thinkers versus Feelers in the third area of their categories: Extrovert or Introvert, Intuitive or Sensing, Thinking or Feeling, Perceiving or Judging. Based on specific questions, they have determined that our preferences can be associated with character behavior traits within each of us. They tend to be inherent in our genetic makeup and do alter some as we discover what preferences are natural for us. Typically people are strong in one or two of the areas, and closer to being “either-or” in another. The types have been analyzed for years, and have been used in psychology for analysis for just as long. It can be very useful in coaching also.

Let's look at some of the trait differences between the thinkers and feelers:

#### Thinkers

Objective  
Firm Minded  
Laws  
Firmness  
Just  
Clarify  
Critique  
Policy  
Detached

#### Feelers

Subjective  
Fair-Hearted  
Circumstantial  
Persuasion  
Humane  
Harmonious  
Appreciative  
Social values  
Involved

It is important to look at these characteristics in the decision making area. According to Type Talk by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen, “...in the decision making process, [Thinkers] prefer to be logical, detached, analytical and driven by objective values as

they come to conclusions. As a group, such individuals tend not to get personally involved with a decision and would prefer that the consequences of the action be the driving factor wherever possible."

Conversely for Feelers, "the decision making process is driven by an interpersonal involvement that comes from subjective values. Words like harmony, mercy, and tenderhearted come to mind with this group. The impact of the decision on people is extremely important to this group's final action. These people have a tendency to identify with and assume others' emotional pain, preferring to make Feeling decisions."

It is important to remember, however, that Thinking types do not have a corner on the intellectual market and Feeling types don't wear their hearts on their sleeves. We are discussing the types as a preferred method of decision making. It is also important to realize that more often than not, one does not understand the other and it can lead to disharmony between two people very quickly.

According to the Meyers-Briggs Foundation, two-thirds of American men prefer Thinking, and the same amount, two-thirds of females prefer Feeling. Society has categorized Feeling-males as weak, "cry baby" and spineless; while at the same time Thinking-females are often thought of as heartless, uncaring, and "man-eaters". Peter Geyer wrote on [www.personalitypathways.com](http://www.personalitypathways.com), "Thinking judgment can be incorrectly associated with intellect, or intelligence, while Feeling judgment can often be incorrectly confused with emotion, which is not an ordered process." We must remember, as coaches, to remove our judgment.

What does all of this mean to a coach? A coach must be sure to listen to the language of their client to better understand the motivation and processing they prefer. Does the client use think or feel in their language? Are they dictated by their head or by their heart?

A thinker, who comes with emotional issues, may not recognize their feelings immediately. As a coach striving for an "ah-ha" moment, it can be disheartening if the client doesn't get there until the whole discussion is analyzed – possibly over and over. Conversely, a feeling client discussing a "minor" area may break down in tears one moment and be laughing the next. I have studied using Powerful Questions in regards to each type also, and find similar reactions to the results from each.

Expect, as a coach, Feelers to dream big, creating lists of action items that they feel are imperative to moving forward. Feelers can get overwhelmed by this, so prepare to illicit focused and fewer steps. While coaching my clients, I found that Feelers who have big lists have a hard time getting anything done, and then become "disgusted" with not accomplishing anything. The need to hear praise and acknowledgement for each step is just as important. I've also found Feelers commit to actions before they fully think through an action or outcome. Goals change frequently and "broken promises" are certain. Feelers may want to please the coach and may not recognize that they are doing things for others and not themselves.

Thinkers who have surface issues coming into coaching may not realize or want to face that there are areas that are heart-sent to look into. One of my clients, a thinker, came for business planning. During the second session, he realized that he was harboring some anxiety that he hadn't recognized. That emotion opened up a whole other area of focus in our sessions, where he was able to dig deeply into how he felt about becoming a business owner...not just what he thought about owning one. It was a very interesting result.

For thinkers other areas that I've identified are to be brief and concise, logical, don't ramble, have critical and objective views, be calm and reasonable and present feelings as facts. Feelers want to get to know intimately their coach, personable and friendly, show agreement and look at how their decision affects others, and what their personal impact is. Feelers want harmony and will do just about anything to get it.

### Coach Type

I have argued during the course of training with ICA that coaches need to have the flexibility and awareness to change our own language while working with each type of client. I listened carefully in my own sessions and during class how people reacted to language. I was intentional in choosing one thinker and one feeler client from ICA, and found two feeling and one thinking external clients to coach. I tracked close the conversations that we had during our twelve-plus sessions. In coaching my feelers, I was careful to be aware of adding in "thinking" to the conversations, and with thinkers, the opposite was true. During sessions where I used "opposite" language, I found it to be more of a struggle for the client to process the discussions. Frustration often became apparent if the client was challenged on their own personality trait. When listening, I also observed that sessions were more difficult for those who didn't "speak the same language". After all, how we communicate is just as important as what we are communicating.

Coaches who are feelers want the client to succeed and really become personally involved with the actions. Coaches who are thinkers may become frustrated if a feeling client is not "getting there" fast enough. It is imperative for us to remember to remove our own processing, decision making and judgment in our sessions.

More tools to bring into coaching session, on top of the ones learned in classes, include: listening closely, adjusting if necessary, powerful questions based on the needs or wants of the client, flexibility, and accountability differences. With these in mind, a coach will have the ability to create space for thinking and feeling clients.

Another key thing is to realize as a coach that your style or model may have to be adjusted according to the clients' preference. If you have a model that is very goal oriented, expect the feeler to take time to complete tasks, especially if there are many. On the other hand, a client lead by thinking may possess the ability to do everything immediately and move quickly from one area to another. The key here is to make sure to address the feelings behind what is happening, as they may not be digging deep into their heart for an answer.

If you are a thinker, you may want your sessions to be limited to specific targeted areas, timelines, and understanding a Feeler could be difficult for you. Taking enough time to build the relationship and trust may become arduous. Getting stuck in one place could be detrimental also. You may need to create extra time in a session for feelers to express themselves fully.

For a feeling coach, you may not understand the thinkers. You may need to adjust to "getting the job done" and working through issues from the outside. Process is very important to thinkers, so having a strong model and full understanding of the goals are necessary to work with thinkers. Listen closely to the words being used to decipher feelings that are stated as facts.

As a feeling coach, it has come to my attention repeatedly that I really throw myself into the client's world. I want so much success for my clients that I have to retrain my core to allow for removing myself from any influence, instruction or agenda. I have to observe and listen to the language to determine factors about each. I have to not take it personally when a client is late, or cancels an appointment. These things are easily remedied, when awareness of them becomes natural.

In Type Talk, an area of focus is goal setting differences in thinkers and feelers. They state that thinkers are "word nitpickers", in other words, they will spend a lot of time working and reworking the goal descriptions. Thinkers may find themselves facing perfectionism, or may not even get to the end product because it is never "good enough". Feelers must view their goals as being beneficial to others; growth of people is focused on. They are "suited well to sell the goals to the rest".

Thinker to Thinker/Feeler to Feeler

Even when we speak the same language as our clients', we need to pay attention to things. Thinkers to thinkers can get so bogged down in perfecting everything, the momentum may be lost, the initial goal may have changed, or the continual focus on any one area may not allow for movement. Feelers to feelers have the temptation of falling into the boundaries of over-emotional-attachment. (My favorite quote I am aware of and rarely use anymore, "I know how you feel...") Feelers beware of sympathizing too much, letting things go because of some other "drama" happening, etc. Benefits of speaking the same language: no adjustments needed.

Conclusion

Whether you as a coach are a Thinker or a Feeler; whether your client is a Thinker or a Feeler; the key is to build belief in our clients: a belief in themselves.

. . .