

May, 2020 *In The Know* Summary

The Four Tendencies

Gretchen Rubin

The notes below were prepared for the Chesapeake Bay Organizational Development Network (CBODN) Book Club. The notes are not intended to be a full book summary or review—rather they are highlights that guided the group discussion.

Book Notes Courtesy of [Mary Power](#)

The Four Tendencies is a book by Gretchen Rubin that describes the four motivational tendency profiles that are determined by how individuals respond to inner and outer expectations.

This is important for business and personal relationships as it explains what drives an individual and provides language to help more effectively motivate and support each type as well as be more tolerant of certain behaviors.

The book starts with a simple question, “How can some people stop smoking or lose weight just by committing to do it and others struggle greatly? The answer lies in your motivational tendency.

Unlike the more extensive personality profiles like DISC or Myers-Briggs, this profile looks at the single but important tendency of motivational drivers. This tendency does shape an individual’s perceptions and behavior in fundamental ways. The four tendencies explain why we act and why we do not act. Although each tendency is hard wired from birth, personalities and nurture also dramatically influence how each tendency is expressed.

Understanding the tendencies is valuable in helping individuals harness the strengths of their tendency, counteract the weakness and build lives and careers that work for them. It also helps individuals pinpoint aspects of a situation that causes them to succeed or fail.

The four types are as follows:

Upholders- respond readily to both outer and inner expectations.

Questioners- question all expectations; they meet an expectation only if they believe it is justified, so in effect they respond only to inner expectations

Obligers- respond readily to outer expectations but struggle to meet inner expectations

Rebels- resist all expectations, outer and inner

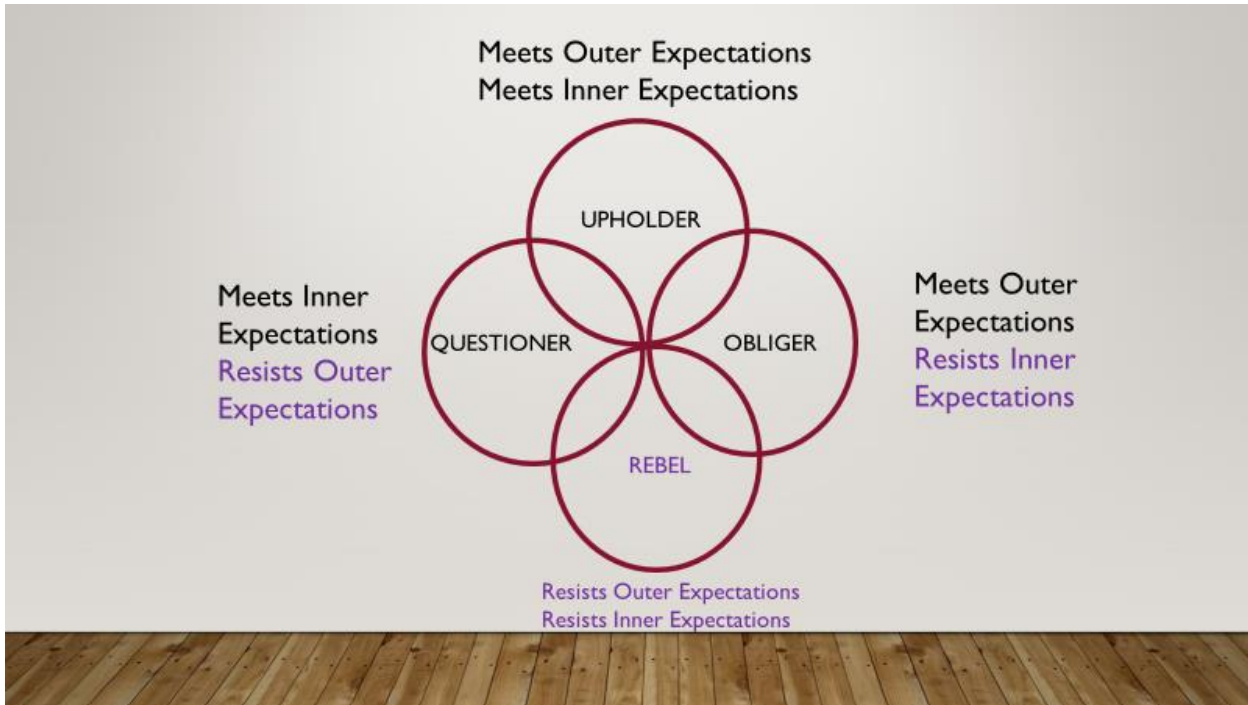
The distribution of each tendency in Gretchen’s research pool was as follows:

Upholder 19%, **Obliger** 41%, **Questioner** 24% and **Rebel** 17%.

The book begins with a quick quiz to help you identify your tendency.

To consider your tendency you need to look at many examples of behavior and the *reasons* for your behaviors. Both a Questioner and a Rebel may reject an expectation. The Questioner thinks, “I won’t do it, because it doesn’t make sense to me.” The Rebel refuses thinking. “You can’t tell me what to do”

File note: all of us meet an expectation when we don’t want to bear the significant consequences of ignoring it. (Even a rebel wears his seat belt after paying a few big fines)



All tendencies come in wide varieties. People’s personalities differ in many ways and impact how each tendency shows up. Also, each tendency interlocks with two tendencies and a person of a particular tendency often “tips” in the direction of a tendency that overlaps with their own. Nevertheless, they still remain firmly located within a core tendency. Gretchen speaks to variations within each tendency

Description of Each Type:

UPHOLDER

- I do what others expect of me and what I expect from myself.
- I take care of myself by finding the balance between the two.
- I do not understand why others can’t do the same.

QUESTIONER

- I do what I think is best according to my judgment.
- If it doesn’t make sense, I won’t do it.
- I resist outer expectations until I have made sense of them.

I meet inner expectations and expect others to do the same.

OBLIGER

I do what I must do. I do not want to let others down.

To do that, I may have to let myself down. Customer, team and family are always first.

I meet outer expectations and I resist inner expectations.

I expect to be appreciated for my sacrifice.

REBEL

I do what I want to do in my own way.

If you try to make me do something, even if it is something I want to do, I will not do it.

I resist both inner and outer expectations.

What drives me is passion and loyalty to a cause.

Strength and Weaknesses of Each Type:

UPHOLDERS

STRENGTHS

Self-Motivated and Conscientious

Need Clear Instructions and Minimal Supervision

Follow Rules and Sticks to Schedules

Reliable and Thorough

Eager to Understand and Meet Expectations

WEAKNESSES

Often Struggle When Schedules Change. May be Rigid.

Uneasy When Goals or Rules are Ambiguous or Undefined

Impatient with Others that Need Reminders, Deadlines, Discussion or Supervision

Can be Quite Demanding

May Have Trouble Delegating

QUESTIONERS

STRENGTHS

Value Reason, Research and Data

Put Great Effort into finding the Best Solutions and Minimizing Wasted Effort or Resources

Persistently Asks Questions to Seek the Best Option

Very Thorough and Detail Oriented

WEAKNESSES

Their Questioning May Sometimes Seem Uncooperative or Defiant

Follow Advice of “Authorities” Only if They Trust That Person’s Expertise

Hate Anything Arbitrary

Dislike Being Questioned Themselves

Often Continue Researching or Questioning When Others Are Ready to Make a Decision

OBLIGERS

STRENGTHS

Highly Responsible and Willing to “Go the Extra Mile” for Others

Put a High Value on Meeting Commitments to Others

Readily Respond to Requests, No Matter What Else They are Doing

Succeed When Given Deadlines, Supervision or Other Forms of Accountability to Others

WEAKNESSES

May Have Trouble Delegating Because They Feel the Some Expectations Attach to Them Personally

Have Trouble Saying No or Setting Personal Limits

May Burn Out or Feel Resentful

Need to Receive Positive Feedback for Their Efforts

If Pushed Too Far Go Into “Obliger Rebellion”

NOTE: Obligers are least understood by themselves and others

REBELS

STRENGTHS

Meet Challenges in Their Own Way and in their Own Time

Very Good at Delegating

Respond Readily to a Challenge

Put High Value on Choice, Freedom, Identity and Self Expression

Choose to Act Out of a Sense of Mission or Belief in a Cause

WEAKNESSES

Resist Being Told What to Do

Have Trouble Getting Themselves to Do Something When Deadlines or Limiting Factors are Imposed

Don't Respond Well to Supervision, Advice or Direction

Need Options and Choice

How could knowing the four tendencies help you in working with individuals and teams?

Effective Language in Dealing with Each Type:

UPHOLDER

"These are the specifics of what needs to be done."

"Here are the rules and guidelines we need to follow."

"Success for this project looks like this..."

"The Process that we usually use is..."

QUESTIONER

"The reason we have been asked to do this is..."

Data supports that the quickest way to accomplish ... is..."

Music to their ears is to ask them to research something. Just make sure you give them a deadline!

OBLIGER

"I am counting on you to..."

"The team needs someone to represent us at..."

"Please send me updates at the following intervals on your project."

"Our members need us to...Could you help out?"

REBEL

"There are several options to meet our goal. What do you think would work best for us?"

The challenge in the project is to....Can you do it?"

The result we need to achieve is...You can get there however you think best."

The mission of our organization is at the heart of this goal."

Scenarios for Dealing with Each Tendency

At work /With a Spouse/With a Child/ With a Patient or Health Client

Scenarios When the Four Tendencies Pair Up

Successful Career Options for Each Tendency

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