

INFP– Typewatching Profile

Performing Noble Service to Aid Society

If there is a single word that defines this type, it is *idealist*. As Introverted Feelers, they discover their ideals through a subjective interpretation of the world, and put those ideals to use to help others in a variety of ways. They are often the “Joans (or Johns) of Arc” who seek fulfillment through performing noble service to aid society.

INFPs have their own self-imposed “codes” for life, and while they have little need to share or impose them on others, they can be very strict with themselves about following these regimens. But in general, INFPs tend to be easygoing and congenial. They would prefer to “fit in” harmoniously rather than to create waves—as long as they can do so without violating their ideals. Yet when others do trample on INFPs’ codes, INFPs can become very demanding and extremely aggressive, often to the surprise of both themselves and others. This tendency may be best illustrated by the mother who feels her child has been treated unjustly by his or her school. The normally quiet INFP mother leaves no stone unturned in full pursuit of rectifying the injustice and creating a better environment—not only for her child but for others, who will also benefit from the change.

Male INFPs can be seen by others, particularly macho traditionalists, as too gentle, even wimpy. The INFPs’ generally passive, live-and-let-live exterior, however admirable, may lack the take-charge quality often associated with maleness—until they feel that their value system is threatened, that is. Then, the easygoing ways (of male and female INFPs alike) can give way to harsh rigidity. For staff, friends, and mates who don’t understand the characteristic, the INFP can seem, at best, a source of mixed signals—pliant one moment, rigid the next—and, at worst, a deep, complex, even somewhat melancholy person who is hard to understand. When a male INFP marries an Extravert, society may view his mate as domineering and demanding. In actuality, for the marriage to succeed, the mate must quickly learn the limits of her mandate to take charge.

These very same qualities in an INFP female are more socially acceptable, even admired. While the INFP male’s quiet stubbornness can make him seem simultaneously unforceful yet rigid, the INFP female may be respected for her inner strength. Her determination conveys power and makes others feel secure.

INFPs resist being labeled and are often driven to do things that shake the way others view them. This can on occasion lead INFPs to act unpredictably, even outrageously. A docile INFP we know was invited to a staff costume party where guests were instructed to dress as “who you really are.” She came as Madonna, the eccentric eighties rock singer, bedecked in jewelry and silky clothing. Her colleagues were shocked by her display—but she wasn’t.

Like all iNtuitive-Feelers, the INFP strives for self-identity, self-knowledge, and self-definition. “Who am I?” is an all-important question. More so than all other NFs, however, the INFPs find in their preferences further material and inspiration for this never-ending quest. Their Introversion fosters inward reflection, their iNtuition ensures an endlessly ramifying sense of the possibilities inherent in the self, their Feeling guides them to reflect on how such potential could benefit both themselves and their relations with others, and their Perceiving keeps them open to a

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constant flow of new data. It's not unusual for an INFP to get out of bed reflecting (Introversion), "Who am I and where's my life going today?" There may be a number of possible answers (iNtuitive)—"I'm a father," "I'm a mate," "I'm a teacher," and the like—as well as a consideration of how those attributes might be deployed in the service of self and others (Feeling). Deciding these are all interesting issues to contemplate, the INFP may then, in the search for more information (Perceiving), set off for school or work, there to start the process again. Even if these questions are not consciously raised, the identity issues are always percolating. The INFP's reflective, open-ended approach to life produces far more questions than answers.

The INFP's home and work area may be rife with little piles of "to-do's"—reading, ironing, artwork, writing. These things will always be there. In fact, they will increase as the INFP's interests and concerns grow throughout life. It's helpful for INFPs to learn to live with this rather than punish themselves for seeming "failures." In general, home and family relationships are more relaxed than rigid; schedules are always subject to change because of others' immediate needs. Neatness often takes a backseat to interpersonal warmth and affirmation, except when company is expected, in which case perfection is the name of the game in the desire to serve others. INFPs prefer to give in to others rather than to argue points that may lead to disharmony. Still, all of this may fly out the window if an INFP's "codes" are "violated," and then a relaxed home gives way to strict rules and schedules.

The same dynamic applies to parenting. An INFP parent may focus on a few carefully cultivated values. If these are respected, the INFP parent is typically easygoing and quick to meet a child's needs. In general, the INFP parent is positive and affirming and a child will find in that parent a friend in whom they can confide. If there are parenting weaknesses, they are probably related to INFPs' first preference, Introversion: INFPs may be slow to give overt, positive strokes, not because they don't feel approval, but because they find it difficult to express; and to their last preference, Perceiving, which may cause them to avoid providing the structure and organization that a child may need.

Introversion may also plague INFPs' relationships: they may feel far more love and warmth than they are able to express. In any relationship involving INFPs, there will be growth, affirmation, and self-fulfillment for both of the parties involved, but sometimes the combination of the Introversion and Feeling preferences causes them to avoid discussing issues that they fear may cause disagreement. For example, an INFP may, after much inner debate, conclude that some kind of change is necessary, and may then spring this conclusion on an unprepared partner. Thus, the INFP's decision to quit a job and go to graduate school (or convince the mate to do so) may be presented as a *fait accompli*, not a subject open for discussion, and the unsuspecting mate may be shocked into a new view of their relationship when a formerly pliant INFP shows new drive, determination, and rigidity, far out of proportion to the issue involved.

This INFP complexity—an easygoing exterior making a compulsive interior—may make for inner stress. The result can be a variety of serious health problems: ileitis, colitis, and other stomach or intestinal problems. They may be particularly prone to such ailments when the needs of others prevent them from being able to relax and enjoy themselves. INFPs can easily make martyrs of themselves.

As children, INFPs' deceptively easygoing natures may cause others to take them for granted. INFP children have a high need to please parents—and be stroked for it. Generally, they are tender and sensitive to the world around them and, like their INFP elders, often give in to others at the expense of their own needs. If such self-sacrifice is not appreciated or, even worse, is criticized, the INFP child can become sullen or self-critical, often over-

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personalizing each remark. The potential for martyrdom begins early. INFP children spend a disproportionate amount of time daydreaming and being preoccupied with inner thoughts. They are often good students and expend a lot of energy pleasing their teachers. They tend to do well in high school, and often excel in college. To please others, they may take courses they do not like—and even succeed in them. The potential for self-doubt and self-criticism, however, is always close to the surface. Even when told they have done a “good job,” INFPs know the only true judge is themselves, and may punish themselves for work they consider less than perfect.

In general, while INFPs love to learn, grow, excel, and please others, they are always their own worst critics; they often remind themselves that they could have done better. It is a lifelong struggle between self-approbation and self-depreciation. In the end, INFPs almost always tend to sell themselves short.

Family events for an INFP are expressions of the essentials of life, and a lot of energy can be directed to celebrating such family rituals as birthdays, anniversaries, or graduations. Loyalty and service to the family can keep an INFP a “child” at any age and always close—psychologically, if not physically—to parents and family.

The values that shape INFPs’ family life and personal growth patterns highlight their career choices: integrity, hard work, idealism, sensitivity, and concern for other people. INFPs also bring their self-criticism and perfectionism to the workplace, which can sometimes hamper their natural skills. An INFP may be an excellent musician or a superb teacher, but even if showered with accolades, INFPs may never quite be satisfied. Their high learning abilities may lead them to careers in which they excel academically but for which they are typologically somewhat miscast. The daughter of an engineer may pursue that career to please her father—and find it academically very attainable and challenging—although as an INFP, she may find the world of engineering foreign, even hostile, turf.

Those careers that involve human service are the ultimate home of the INFP: psychology, teaching, family medicine, and church work, for example. In the long haul, what INFPs choose as a career must serve their own idealism. If it doesn’t, they can become restless and stressed and their work can become sloppy and counterproductive.

Retirement tends to be relished by INFPs because the little piles of to-do’s they have been amassing for years can be rearranged, pondered, and finally tackled. They tend not to “slow down” in later life, approaching their post-career hobbies with the same intensity they once reserved for children and careers. They may approach retirement with a particular joy if it allows them to leave a traditional career or job that imposed the kind of structure and rigidity that INFPs resist. Still appearing externally relaxed, they tend to continue to be internally driven by a call to serve humanity—in the form of children, grandchildren, organizations, causes, or any other local or world issues.

Abraham Lincoln quite possibly personifies the INFP. As a young man, seeing slaves loaded into a boat, he took the cause of freedom into his heart, ultimately imposing his crusade on the entire nation. Isabel Briggs Myers, another INFP, carried on her mission—that people learn how to use their personality differences more constructively and creatively—throughout her entire life. From age twenty to eighty, she endlessly created, researched, and refined the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Carl Rogers, one of the pillars of American modern psychology, saw the need for a therapeutic model that enhanced individual self-development—itsself, an INFP cause—and spent his life developing nondirective counseling.

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