

ISTJ—Typewatching Profile

Doing What Should Be Done

Perhaps no type is more driven by a sense of responsibility and “bottom-line” behavior than Introverted-Sensing-Thinking-Judging types. In the name of responsibility, these Introverts have acquired social grace, ease with words, and all of the appropriate interpersonal skills demanded at any given moment. They can be so outgoing under clearly defined circumstances that they are sometimes mistaken for Extraverts. But make no mistake: as the most private of the sixteen types, these Introverts can don Extraverted clothing when the occasion warrants it without changing their essentially Introverted inner nature.

The ISFJ’s highly responsible nature is shaped by the Sensing preference of the information-gathering function. In other words, ISTJs focus inwardly, concentrating on data that are objective, immediate, concrete, and pragmatic. Their affinity for the here and now leaves them to assume nothing, to take nothing for granted. What they see they translate objectively and tangibly (I), which they immediately organize and schedule (J). Since this comes easily and naturally to them, they expect similar behavior of virtually everyone else. They are extremely demanding at home and work, even at play, engaging at times in very compulsive behavior. To some observers, these seem to be your classic Type A personalities—driven, impatient, and obsessive.

Like INTJs, with whom they share three preferences (I,T, and J), they often excel at school and work, rising to senior positions of responsibility as class presidents, school heroes, project managers, and community leaders—all of which may seem out of character for an Introvert. But for the ISTJs, this is not out of character at all; they are simply doing their duty—“doing what should be done” (though *not* what comes naturally. Indeed, *should* is a key part of the ISTJ’s mantra, as it is for all Sensing-Judgers, and in this context the result is that the preferred and more “natural” Introverted behavior is dutifully abandoned for the more difficult Extraverted style.)

While all Thinking females swim upstream in our society, this is particularly true for female ISTJs. The Responsible, driven nature of this type, while admirable, flies in the face of traditionally “feminine” traits. Moreover, as traditionalists at heart, ISFJ females are inwardly conflicted about trying to balance the conventional feminine roles—mothering and nurturing—with their objective, organized (IJ) nature. Male ISTJs, in contrast are “naturals” in conforming with this type’s attributes, so much so that ISTJ is often dubbed “the macho type”—a label with which few women would feel comfortable (but which doesn’t necessarily bother those ISTJ women.)

ISTJs have homes that are neat and they carry out their domestic activities with efficiency and dispatch. They like to eat breakfast at eight, lunch at noon, and dinner at six, no matter what. Holidays and other family affairs are extremely important, and become the focus of family life, no expense or inconvenience spared. Family members of other types who fail to fall in step may be subject to considerable grief and guilt. ISTJs’ homes and personal appearances tend to reflect their “like preferences in general” traditional and probably somewhat austere. You can often spot an ISTJ’s home from the outside: the yard is sparse—the few bushes and plants are neat and orderly—the house color is rather subdued, bikes and toys are put away, and the entire presentation can only be described as tasteful but reserved. A place for everything and everything in its place.

Excerpted from *Type Talk* by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen

For ISTJs, parenting is a lifelong responsibility that is undertaken seriously. They impose rules and regulations upon their children—and sometimes on their spouses—and expect them to be followed and not questioned. After all, when the ISTJ was a child, things were done in this way; now that they themselves are in authority, they expect things “should” continue to be done as they were before. Roles, for the ISTJ parent, are clearly defined: parents are parents, children are children, and each has appropriate responsibilities. It is not uncommon for an ISTJ to assign family duties for a whole weekend so that no time is wasted. To the ISTJ, an idle mind is the devil’s playground and “honest work” is good for all. Even relaxation is scheduled and dutifully executed.

These same driving forces define ISTJ children. Homework is done neatly and on time, and in general they are good students. Bedrooms are kept orderly. They show up on time for meals, expecting them to be served on schedule. Like their ISTJ elders, they live by a series of “shoulds,” which they often impose on their parents. For them, too, the parent-child lines are clearly defined. They can become stressed when they encounter a family member of a different type who resists their rules and regulations, or when a parent or other authority figure is working on a schedule different from theirs. Ultimately, they’ll give in to the adult, but not without considerable unpleasantness. Such unpleasantness may be a test to make sure the authority figure is being responsible to his or her role.

In an intimate relationship, an ISTJ’s word is as good as gold, and having once declared “I love you,” they can be trusted to be true to that sentiment for years to come—though they may not give voice to it often. The reason is simple: For the ISTJ, actions truly speak louder than words; the continued expression of love comes not in the saying but in the doing—being there day in and day out, providing unfailingly, being a veritable Rock of Gibraltar. This nonverbal style of affection often gets ISTJs in hot water because it can be perceived as uncaring; they are often described as having “ice for blood.”

But ISTJs do care—and show it through their strong sense of responsibility. (Indeed, they would rather die than be seen as irresponsible.) They are fiercely loyal, both to individuals and institutions, sometimes responding fanatically to the “shoulds” and “oughts” of their commitments. They make good soldiers, literally and figuratively. In fact, based on a sample of more than ten thousand of the U.S. military—from enlisted personnel through four-star generals and admirals—their predominant configuration is ISTJ.

Other professions to which ISTJs gravitate are similarly oriented toward achieving practical and tangible results, and include such careers as general surgery, law, and accounting. These careers have appeal because they frequently involve working alone (I), are very results-oriented (S), require objectivity (I), and generally have prescribed ways of doing things (J). While they may be successful at any career, ISTJs are less drawn to those that require abstract thinking and interpersonal spontaneity. Whether as supervisors or subordinates, with their work as with everything else they like to play by the rules. They expect those who follow the rules to win, those who don’t, to lose.

In their later years certain ISTJs may behave in somewhat bizarre ways. It is that period of their life when they wish to give in to the more subjective and spontaneous parts of their personalities. Suddenly the rather rigid parent may become playful, doting grandparent. The hard-charging executive tries on new hats—from the painter’s beret to the camper’s cap. Overall, the older ISTJ becomes aware that things that used to seem all-important aren’t quite as crucial in the bigger scheme of life.

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Some famous possible ISTJs include auto-maker Henry Ford (described as a man of few words who gave customers a “choice” of “any color, as long as it’s black”); George Washington (whose blueprint for the country comprised immediate practical procedures to be implemented); Johnny Carson (who calls himself an Introvert, sets a style for American male dress, and has maintained a constant program schedule for a quarter century); and Calvin Coolidge (who was austere, simplistic, and noted for his cryptic and terse remarks).

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