

# ISTJ – Workplace Profile

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## *Life's Natural Organizers*

This is the quintessential dependable, responsible type — hence, the quintessential manager. Just like the work world itself, ISTJs are driven by accountability, productivity and the bottom line. It is a natural and often happy fit.

ISTJs see the world in terms of facts and tangible realities (Sensing), which they prefer to deal with in an objective fashion (Thinking). Their day-to-day living is driven by structure, schedule, and order (Judging) and their Introversion makes them appear somewhat cool and aloof. Appearances can be deceiving, however, because ISTJs often excel when it comes to achievement, accomplishment, and social skills.

ISTJ is a no-frills, work-hard, play-hard type. They are seen as compulsive, hard-charging, capable, and true to their word. They live by the bottom line and can be very cost-conscious. They can be slow to change but once they see the practical value in making a course correction, they can be quick to implement it and often become zealots of the new way of thinking.

Among the many strengths of the ISTJ is the ability to act quickly and, very often, correctly. They have a propensity for beginning projects and staying with them through completion. This drive is aided and abetted by their dogged determination for covering all details and staying specific. It is the ISTJ who has given the workplace so many of the "scripts" by which we operate: "An idle mind is the devil's playground." "Waste not, want not." "Work as hard as you can, save as much as you can." "Hard work never hurt anyone." "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." "A penny saved is a penny earned." Clearly, ISTJs work to live and live to work.

For ISTJs, work comes first, then family and community responsibility. When all of this is in order, then it is O.K. to schedule some play. These are the compulsive types who "bring the office home" at the end of the day. If it's a family-owned business, it is expected that the entire family will be involved. There is no choice in this matter; if everyone contributes, everyone will benefit.

The ISTJ is often very calm and cool, even somewhat inexpressive or undemonstrative. This can be a strength in some situations, particularly stressful ones, when ISTJs appear rock-solid. This makes them more effective in many of life's emergencies, from operating rooms to battlefields. Indeed, ISTJs predominate throughout the military, from enlisted personnel to general officers. While ISTJs themselves comprise only about 6 percent of the general population, they comprise about 30 percent of the U.S. armed forces. The ISTJ's four preferences are found overwhelming in the military: the combined Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines is 55 percent Introverted, 72 percent Sensing, 90 percent Thinking, and 80 percent Judging — ISTJ.

Excerpted from *TypeTalk At Work* by Otto Kroeger, with Janet M. Thuesen and Hile Rutledge

If anyone invented the chain of command, it would probably have been an ISTJ. Throughout the business world, whether a mega-corporation or a Mom-and-Pop shop, they establish a structure and work it most effectively, expecting others to do likewise. When they are lower on the organizational ladder, when given an order, being Judges, they may first complain, then obey by delivering the goods. Further up the ladder, they give orders and expect obedience. If they don't get it, they are prone to take names and kick ass. They live by "shoulds" and they impose them freely. They get the job done.

Unfortunately, they sometimes get carried away. ISTJs can be the personification of compulsivity, driven by such things as deadlines and bottom lines without regard to employee motivation, satisfaction, or well-being. Striving for efficiency they may instead produce a work force full of hostility, stress, and absenteeism. In the process, other types can get weeded out, resulting in an even more ISTJ-oriented organization. The result is compulsivity to the nth degree.

ISTJs not only drive others to the brink, they can also inflict severe damage on themselves. This comes partly from their combined control and compulsiveness, which can lead to an attitude of "If you want it done right, do it yourself." This sets them up for long, lonely hours of doing everything — or at least doing the same thing over until it's right. In fact, more than any other type, ISTJs are capable of literally working themselves to death.

ISTJs also can get tripped up by their high need for privacy and their low need to express themselves. As a result, others have trouble "reading" the ISTJ, sometimes creating serious communication gaps in an organization. Without saying a word, they may give off an aura of being impatient and even disapproving when that isn't necessarily the case. As a result, there's an unwitting "show me" or "prove it" stance to the ISTJ's demeanor: Show me how it will be cost-effective; prove to me that you're right. The ISTJ's inexpressiveness often results in others feeling frustrated, flustered, or on the defensive. It may come as no surprise that ISTJs frequently make good loan officers.

Their inexpressiveness extends to giving praise, something they do with difficulty. It is expected that work be done in a timely fashion, neatly, and correctly. Therefore, believes the ISTJ, why would one praise what should be done? Your paycheck is praise enough — and if you last twenty years we'll throw in a gold watch.

The ISTJ's no-frills style can lead to a workplace that is plain, austere, and conservative. Other types may find that it's not much fun to be working or spending time in such an environment. (Someone once quipped that ISTJ stands for "I Seldom Tell Jokes.") Such "amenities" as a comfortable chair, office decor, and extracurricular activities can often be seen by an ISTJ as a waste of time and money. In the long haul, their quest for efficiency can sap employee morale and motivation.

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The good news is that given good direction, ISTJs can make outstanding employees, managers, and leaders. That "good direction" usually comes in the form of a strict set of rules and regulations. ISTJs approach life much as a pilot approaches take-off: no matter the task, to be effective, it is imperative to have a kind of "pre-flight checklist" giving specific, tangible instructions about what to do in a given situation. So, if good managers say, "Good morning" and "How are you?" every day to employees (even though it may seem unnecessary for productivity's sake to do so), once on the checklist, such greetings become something that is done over and over until they are an integral part of the ISTJ's management style.

While many organizational activities can be scripted and included on an ISTJ's checklist, not everything can. Most critically, what cannot be scripted includes those things having to do with pondering the big picture (iNtuition) and coping with interpersonal dynamics (Feeling). The big picture represents the unknown to the ISTJ, and the unknown is often more bad than good. Hence, too much "strategic planning" becomes a waste of time and things that managers do to avoid what needs to be done today. There won't be any future — or even a plan to implement — if someone doesn't pay today's bills or stay on top of the current crises. So, it is far more effective to do something constructive and useful today than to wonder about tomorrow. As a result, the ISTJ can get blindsided by the unexpected, because the focus on today means that there is no contingency plan when surprises arise.

Subjective, Feeling-type decisions are another area in which the ISTJ can be found wanting. The entire world of interpersonal dynamics is difficult for this type because it is not predictable and can't be controlled. It is the epitome of the "soft" sciences that are abhorrent to the ISTJ because they cannot be researched and measured quantitatively. As a result, ISTJs would rather avoid, or even deny, the existence of seemingly "touchy-feely" situations, even though these could include such innocuous encounters as saying "Thanks for your help," discussing as a team some work project, or having a beer with the troops after quitting time. These things can actually frighten an ISTJ because they can include so many unknowns and a high risk of losing control. Even more frightening are genuine interpersonal situations — an upset employee, for example, or someone expressing frustrations with his or her job. A quivering lip or the possibility of a tear being shed can paralyze an ISTJ, who is afraid of losing control and feels totally incapable of managing such situations. Furthermore, the ISTJ sees such behavior as inappropriate and unproductive, to say the least. Inevitably, the ISTJ will react by tightening the control ("Stop that. Crying never solved anything") or simply denying the problem altogether ("Let's just forget this and get back to work.").

Compounding all of this is the fact that it's inevitable that an ISTJ will end up managing and working with at least a few Feeling types. These individuals respond to a whole different array of motivations than the ISTJ — fun, harmony, happiness, personal fulfillment, and social responsibility, among others. The more ISTJs can understand and accept these differences, the more they can realize that they needn't control or deny such seemingly unacceptable behavior, the freer

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they will be to let others behave true to their own type, with greater the productivity the inevitable result.

The same problems that confound ISTJs in the workplace can trip them up in the marketplace. Not understanding that half of the buying public is driven by such intangible things as appeal, looks, image, and just plain feeling good, ISTJs can create products that possess engineering perfection but lack marketability. Historically, great innovators have been plagued by this very dilemma: Henry Ford's Model T, which worked great but failed to keep up with fashions, is a classic example. From carpets to car parts, ISTJs can often overlook the personal appeal that the Feeling side of preferences brings to a situation. Fortunately, true to their type, ISTJs who fully understand this potential blind spot have the capacity to equip themselves to overcome it, either through greater self-awareness or by surrounding themselves with other types who can fill in this missing dimension. To an ISTJ, this can be just one more aspect of life for them to manage effectively.

The unknown, the future, and the unplanned are all stress inducers for the ISTJ. With their high need for accountability, they can become very edgy, if not angry, if deadlines are being ignored in favor of last-minute, seemingly hair-brained aspects of a project. Even relatively simple things can trigger stress. For example, if a meeting is scheduled to end at 4 o'clock, and someone raises a new concern at 3:57, the ISTJ will likely experience a rise in adrenaline, pulse, and anger. Anything that will help the ISTJ enjoy the sensory awareness — touch, smell, taste, and so on — without seeming too irresponsible can provide spurts of refreshment and stress reduction. For them, stopping and smelling the roses (or watering the office plants), while extremely difficult for them to do, is absolutely necessary for their good health.

ISTJs' excellence in completing tasks and organizing life gives them a natural edge as leaders at all levels of an organization. The various accountability and productivity demands of all organizations, from meeting deadlines to staying within budgets to achieving production goals, are natural areas in which ISTJs excel. In addition to the basic management of equipment and personnel, they are well suited for a variety of positions, including certified public accountants (who require a focused and objective attention to details, who must meet strict deadlines, and usually work alone), surgeons (who must be singularly focused, work by the book, and not get overly involved in their patients), and police and detectives (who must stick to "just the facts," stay objective, and work within the structures of the law).

**Workplace Contribution:** Establishes order dutifully and steadily and works within the system to manage and complete tasks on time and under budget

**Pathway to Professional Growth:** Must learn that both organizational change and people issues—things that may violate tradition and not be calculated into the work breakdown structure—can have powerful and positive roles in organizational life

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**Leadership Qualities:** Brings tasks to completion efficiently and dutifully while maintaining respect and order throughout the group or organization

**Team Spirit:** Teams, if well managed, are a good way to distribute tasks and complete projects, but the important work that is done is carried out by individuals when the team meetings are over

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