

## WHY MEN FAIL—OR SUCCEED

Personality Analysis and Improvement as a Means of  
Occupational Adjustment

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*Many other factors than measurable abilities, aptitudes, and interests enter into the question of success in vocational life. There is growing recognition of the rôle of personality traits in vocational adjustment and success. Some of these traits are measurable, or at least subject to test methodology, and are found to bear a determinable relation to performance and satisfaction on the job. Moreover, personality is improvable. Here Professor Hoopingarner describes a project which he has conducted with adults in the field of Personality Analysis and Improvement, and gives along with his findings certain implications for education and vocational guidance. This article has been adapted from an address delivered by Professor Hoopingarner before the Psychology Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.*

FOR the past eleven years the School of Commerce, New York University, has offered a credit course for normal adults in Personality Improvement and Vocational Orientation. The general methods employed in the course and some of the conclusions reached as a result of experience to date will be of interest to those who appreciate the vital relationship between personality and vocational adjustment.

The course was undertaken as an experiment to try to work out a practical means of giving the student definite help in developing his personal qualities and in making a more satisfactory adjustment to life. The course is in reality a "laboratory" in which the student analyzes and studies, under supervision, his own abilities in relation to different types of occupations and professions; and in which he not only is helped to decide more intelligently what to undertake for his life work, but is guided also in how to go about planning to develop himself—his personality—so as to assure

himself of a reasonable chance of success in the field of his choice.

In organizing this work as a credit course and a definite part of the curriculum, it was assumed that purely advisory methods for personality development were not adequate, but that intensive work under supervision, such as might be accomplished through the means of an organized course, would furnish a proper nucleus around which to build such work.

In starting this Personality Improvement Course there was no precedent. The idea was to take available knowledge and methods, put them into operation—make a "road test," so to speak—and improve the methods through actual, practical use, with the end in view that eventually we might be able to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of equipping the student to make effective use of the knowledge he receives.

The need for such a course was evident immediately. In 1924, with nothing more than a simple announcement in our

catalog of a day and a night section (the course is purely elective), the night enrollment filled to capacity; and almost every year since we have had to turn away students because of inadequate facilities. The students are of a highly satisfactory type. They are not abnormals or "industrial cripples," but are conscientious individuals who feel the need of help.

## II

Of approximately 1,500 people who have taken the course, more than 50 per cent are mature men and women already out in business and the professions, who come in to the night sessions. The range in age is from 18 to 65 years; practically every type of business and profession is represented—lawyers, doctors, surgeons, dentists, engineers, teachers, accountants, business executives, etc.; the income range is up to \$50,000 a year; and in one group of 106 students, there were enrolled former students and graduates of 43 different schools and colleges.

The general method followed in giving the course is as follows:

1. Lecture and discussion each class period dealing with personality, personality improvement, traits, development of the right attitude, courtesy and conduct, methods of study and work, how to use the library, concrete cases of successful performance in business and professions, etc., etc.

2. An analysis of the student's personality, including interests and aptitudes, as a basis for recommendations for a program for improvement. The basis for this analysis is the "Personality and Business Ability Analysis," which is discussed later.

3. Moving pictures and voice record of each student, so that he may see for himself any peculiarities or mannerisms which might unfavorably affect his dealings with other persons.

4. Personal conference with each student to discuss the results of the analysis and to make recommendations.

5. Assigned readings.

6. A term paper on the topic, "My Vocational Aim and Program for Continuous Personality Improvement," required of each student as a major project of the course, in order to crystallize the results of the study. Plans for at least five years in advance must be made. This report covers the four main requisites of personal development as we have been able to conceive it, and is outlined for the student as follows:

Section I. An investigation of the possible occupations or fields of activity in which the student is interested, or into which he feels that he is most likely to go. A first-hand study is urged in addition to the obtaining of information from competent written sources where available. This investigation covers fourteen points which include an analysis of advantages, disadvantages, opportunities for advancement, etc., to be found in the occupation.

Section II. A study of the human requirements for performance in the different occupations, in terms of physique, mental alertness, skill, aptitudes, and temperament—the five major factors in ability.

Section III. The matching of himself, his abilities and capacities, both latent and expressed, against the human requirements for successful performance, so as to select the field most likely to give him his best outlet. The same five major factors in ability are used, thus forming a common denominator between the occupational requirements and the individual's capacities.

Section IV. Starting with his present equipment, the mapping out of a definite schedule for developing personal qualities, so as to assure a reasonable chance of success in the field selected. This schedule of development centers around the twelve traits of business personality in which the standing of the student has already been estimated with the aid of the Personality Analysis.

If the course did nothing more than bring the student to a consciousness of his need of personal improvement and interest him seriously in getting a more definite aim in life, I believe it would justify itself. The fact that he is given something in the way of a method, point of view, and attitude, and that he has

more clearly "objectified" his goal, is in itself of positive value.

### III

Taking up more specifically the analysis and diagnosis procedure used in the course, it is desirable first to consider the fact that the science of personality has lacked clear underlying principles.

One factor which has definitely hampered general progress in the study of personality has been the tacit assumption that the same statistical procedure is sufficient for individual work as for group work. The concept of norms was a step forward in our understanding of group and individual differences, but it has become increasingly evident that if further advance is to be made, emphasis must be put upon trying to understand the exceptions to the norms. For, just as unfavorable conditions of health may be fatal or not, depending upon environmental factors, and just as persons of inferior intelligence may adjust themselves or not, depending upon whether or not what they try to do is within the grasp of their understanding, so personality differences depend upon whether conditions permit traits to develop to an extreme degree or tend to inhibit them. The same or equivalent abilities, for example, may result in aggressiveness or meekness, according to whether one is superior to his group, how he is regarded by his group, and whether he can easily and with credit do the things which his ambition activates. It is becoming more and more obvious that there is little of practical value to any individual seeking helpful advice in being told that he does or does not offer a striking exception to expectations made known by complex statistical manipulations. And yet some such statement has often been the only contribution which could conscientiously be offered.

We must not overlook the fact that personality is a resultant of the relations and interrelations between a person's various physical and mental abilities, his ambitions, his training and experience, as well as to his reactions to the abilities and personalities of his associates. A firm foundation for effective personality improvement cannot be built up unless, besides knowing where a subject stands in the normal distribution of traits, we also know whether he has enough or too much for the field in which he wants to succeed. That is, there can be no personality advice of value unless it is related both to ability and to ultimate goal, no matter how hazy and inexact that goal may be.

A sound working basis for personality analysis and improvement must take into consideration all of the major factors in human ability; that is, one's physique, mental alertness, aptitudes, skills and temperament—factors which are necessary in varying degrees to the performance of every type of work, and which can be improved; for unless all these factors are taken into consideration together the picture of the individual's ability is incomplete and the basis for improvement is inadequate.

In recognition of the fact that purely advisory methods based on tests given by a third person fail to stimulate subjects so as to make them mentally receptive to advice, the analysis we use is self-rating and requires much thought on the part of subjects, and at the same time provides them with an idea as to the relative strength and weakness of their various traits.

The procedure assumes that everyone has "personality"—not meaning by this word the possession of peculiar or charming traits, nor referring to something metaphysical and intangible—and it as-

sumes that if everyone has a personality, it can be evaluated with some degree of accuracy.

The procedure admits that personality undergoes continuous adjustment and continuous improvement—or the opposite; that one's personality is not a final matter and that in controlling its development, if one cannot add to innate capacities, one can at least modify the goal to one within possible reach, and change habits of response.

It recognizes that the majority of persons seeking advice are neither abnormal nor pathological, and so it does not emphasize the discovery of such traits. In fact, it carefully avoids the suggestion of anything pathological.

"Personality and Business Ability Analysis" is in the nature of a self-analysis designed to be administered under non-controlled conditions. Not only objective tests of mental ability and subjective tests, but also surveys of experience, skills, and interests are incorporated.

While not outwardly and directly organized around the five major factors of ability (for practical purposes, twelve personality traits are used), actually the underlying basis for the analysis is an evaluation of each one of these factors: physique, mental alertness, skill, aptitudes, temperament.

The twelve personality traits taken into consideration are tested as follows:

1. Impressiveness, "the combination of personal and physical qualities which influence favorably those with whom one comes in contact," including physique, energy, personal appearance, manner, and presence, is tested by 30 questions, most of them indicating behavior patterns.

2. Initiative, "a combination of originality, determination, perseverance, and enthusiasm . . . having ideas and getting things done," is tested by 24 questions.

3. Thoroughness, "involving accuracy and dependability in performing any task—

not taking things for granted—and reliability in the assumption of any duty," is judged by two timed tests which require thoroughness, and a question test about one's habits of thoroughness.

4. Observation, "involving both memory and perception," is tested by the ability to see and to remember details of a picture which is observed for a definite length of time.

5. Concentration, "the ability to disregard other problems and to focus attention on the particular task at hand," is tested by two timed tests which, while easy to understand, require close attention.

6. Constructive imagination, "the ability to apply present knowledge and experience toward the solution of new problems . . . the ability to see the relationship of what you already know to new situations, which is the basis of originality," is judged by a test which demands the recall and use of data already known, as well as the definite statement of the subject's goal and his plans to reach it.

7. Decision, "involving quickness of comprehension, the ability to think through a situation and to arrive at a conclusion, and the ability to put a problem aside and to go on to the next, once a line of action has been decided upon," includes, in the test of this trait, questions about habits of decision; also the matching under a time limit of proverbs which have similar meanings, the ability to do which promptly is differential of ability to come to a decision quickly and efficiently.

8. Adaptability, "the inherent ability to adapt oneself to new problems easily and quickly, which involves mental alertness, speed of thinking, and facility in changing mental set," is measured by short timed tests which require abstract intelligence and by questions about habits which are associated with ability to adapt well. Both social and mental adaptability are here given consideration.

9. Leadership, "the ability to get others to do willingly what you want them to do, to get results from men rather than from tools and machinery," is measured by questions which furnish indications of mastery, control, fairness, and tact.

10. Organizing ability, "the ability to see the elements of a problem and to keep them in their proper relationship, and to be re-

sourceful in planning methods for their solution," is measured by timed tests which require ability to analyze and synthesize data.

11. Expression, "the ability to think clearly and to convey one's ideas to others—to know and let others know you know," is measured by an antonym-synonym test and by questions about ease of expression, tact in arguments, etc.

12. Knowledge, "knowing facts and having ability to use them, that is, to recall them when wanted," is measured by two tests—one on general knowledge and the other requiring knowledge of business.

#### IV

Following the survey of personality traits, there is a section in the analysis which deals with the subject's life history, training, experience, vocational tendencies, and ultimate goal—questions which indicate both natural aptitudes and those acquired skills and personal hopes which adults cannot afford to discard unless they interfere with the integration of the personality.

The individual who is to receive personality advice takes about two hours to complete the Personality Analysis, scoring the various tests himself and from the results making a profile which gives him an indication of his own best and weakest traits.

After this the analysis book goes to an assisting psychologist who, after interpreting and summarizing the results in the light of the individual's potential and actual goals, prepares constructive suggestions showing how the student can capitalize abilities by strengthening weak points and improving poor habits which detailed answers to the questions have brought to light. The summary also attempts to point out in which of four general types of personality the student belongs as an aid in determining aptitudes.

This report then goes to an inter-

viewer, who is also psychologically trained and who, in addition, is familiar with business and professional demands and opportunities in terms of the same five factors in ability and is thus competent to interpret and supplement the analyst's advice in a private interview with the student.

The regular class lectures furnish a psychological background to enable the student to understand how to put recommended changes into effect, and to motivate him to begin doing so.

Class papers, especially planned to make the students think through their particular problems, are also requirements of the course.

Supplementary to this is a psychological laboratory in which other special tests are given as needed, and where individual voice records and moving pictures are made so that the student may see for himself any peculiarities or mannerisms which unfavorably affect his dealings with other persons.

No part of the procedure is allowed to become mechanical, and this is a most essential point. Each student is considered individually. It is recognized that apparently equivalent scores are not necessarily equal and that though the examination is self-analyzing it cannot be self-interpreting. The psychologist who summarizes the student's analysis has to consider what factors contribute to making a trait seem high or low—whether it is raised or lowered by good concentration and relatively poor understanding; whether differences in age are a factor, since youth with its speed and overconfidence tends to raise some scores while age through failing confidence and lessening speed tends to lower them. Each separate answer in the subjective tests must be considered on its own merits for it either tells of a good habit which is an

asset or a poor one which one should have help in changing. Weakness in mental function is detected by comparing with the norms the tests which particularly depend upon clear thinking and ability to concentrate. The parts which particularly show abstract intelligence must also be considered in relation to the goal and the advice to be given. There are many chances for error in judgment.

As to the reliability coefficients of the Personality Analysis, the subjective part has .905, and the objective part has .953.

#### V

Further study indicates some interesting results on the question of controlled and uncontrolled conditions in testing, and the honesty of subjects in making the self-analysis. A comparison was made between young students in day classes and mature adults in night classes. The evidence, which we cannot adduce here, leads to the conclusion that the young day student under non-controlled conditions tends to cheat to an extent that invalidates his score on the objective part of the examination. The more mature student, who more clearly recognizes the need for self-improvement and who desires help, is honest in examining himself, and the control factor is not significant.

A comprehensive statistical study of data furnished by the Personality Analysis procedure administered to several hundred New York University students during the last several years is in the process of completion. Results and implications will be available soon.

While figures on validity are as yet inadequate, some interesting results have been obtained. In a study in a sales organization in connection with which the employes were later followed up, the criterion of validity employed was the ac-

tual success of the individuals in their work six months after the examination. The predictions of the sales supervisors with their greater opportunity for observation were found to be from 49 to 50 per cent right—not greater than chance; while the opinions based on the Personality Analysis, which considered past experience, personality traits and habits, and native ability in relation to the work to be done, predicted 75 per cent of the successes and 69 per cent of the failures. In the cases in which success was predicted, probable weak points were pointed out and constructive advice was given about how to deal with them.

In another study, fifteen new salesmen were selected in the usual way, five of them through advertisements and ten of them because of their own selling ability. These were college men thirty or more years old who had had experience so that it was thought by those hiring them that each one had more than a chance of making good. Each of the fifteen men was given the Personality Analysis, the results of which were reported under five headings as follows:

1. General aptitude for the particular type of salesmanship
2. Ability to grasp technical features
3. Probable temperamental reactions
4. Receptiveness to leadership and supervision
5. Probable difficulties as shown in the five factors of ability

Of the five of whom it was predicted on the basis of the analysis that they would fail because of unfitness for the particular kind of work, four failed utterly, though they had had standard college education and one had given every promise of success from surface indications. The failure of another was due to temperamental difficulties. Of the favorable prognoses, the report based on the analysis was accurate as to the difficulties

the employes might encounter, and the statements made on this score proved helpful to the employer in training them. Six became successful salesmen; two became supervisors; and one became consultant to a trust company.

Such results could not be obtained by everyone, however. The whole procedure requires familiarity with the examination and an understanding of the purpose of every test and every subtest.

## VI

In summary, these are some of the conclusions growing out of giving this course over a period of eleven years:

1. Inability to get along with and deal effectively with people is one of the greatest obstacles not only to success but also to happiness. Schools, even professional schools—law, engineering, medicine, dentistry—are still woefully lacking in organized training to meet this need. The chief purpose of the study of psychology in the future, outside of professional training for the psychologist himself, will undoubtedly be directed toward the attainment of a better understanding of people and of how to deal with them.

2. There is a positive relationship between life planning and success, and the converse, lack of planning and failure.

3. Continuous personality improvement should be looked upon as a life process for every normal person. The need for vocational adjustment is related, but secondary, to the need for continuous improvement of one's personality.

4. The student should be assisted in

studying and analyzing himself intelligently as a basis for improvement, but the final judgment in selecting his life work should be his own.

5. Factors making for failure in different occupations are more readily determinable than factors making for success. Vocational planning can rather wisely proceed on the basis of determining in the beginning what occupational fields one should not enter and thus through a process of elimination reducing the chance of error in making choices within the general fields of occupational activity.

6. To facilitate the matching of individuals and occupations, insofar as possible, human ability and occupational requirements should be reduced to the same common denominator.

7. In all practical clinical or advisory procedure, tests and other data, even the most carefully standardized, are only aids to diagnosis. Trained practitioners, capable of interpreting results and making sound inferences, are essential. Test scores and statistical manipulations are sterile without such interpretation.

8. The traditional "cultural" and "vocational" division of subject-matter, which has led to the common practice of attempting to fit the individual into the curriculum instead of fitting the curriculum to the needs of the individual, should be abandoned. The time has come when the major elements of personality, and the requirements of improving these elements, should be the focal point around which the curriculum is built.



Some men are sharp, others dull; some soft and yielding, others hard and unbending; some eager after knowledge, others more anxious to acquire mechanical skill.—JOHN COMENIUS in *The Great Didactic*.