

**ESTP**

*(About 4.3 % of the U.S. population)*

The ESTP is the ultimate *realist*. Their approach to life is often a bit unconventional and highly spontaneous. They truly live for the here and now, and their engaging, winning style attracts others. They thrive on getting things done more than on thinking and planning, and are often adept at solving practical problems.

**ESTP Personality Highlights**

- Their **Extraversion** directs their focus outward toward people and things.
- Their **Sensing** leads them to a concrete view of the world.
- Their **Thinking** allows them to assess information objectively and analytically.
- Their **Perceiving** gives them a spontaneous, flexible, and open personality

These four preferences combine to give the ESTP quick, exact, tactile, objective, externally expressed responses to any situation. Entertaining and gregarious, with a short attention span, the ESTP can often be found on center stage. Their quick banter and special knack for practical jokes makes them fun to be with. People are easily drawn to them. They have the capacity to tackle and complete tough jobs, will fearlessly try anything at least once, and have a keen sense of competition. This makes ESTPs the problem-solving, “go-to” individuals you can count on when an exciting challenge lies ahead. Not that the job will be done according to the rules. That’s part of the pride and cleverness of the ESTP. If a job becomes routine they will lose interest and become bored, leading them to move on or change settings.

Here are some other characteristics. ESTPs...

- Believe that time spent making plans and getting ready means missing what is going on right now. (E.g., going to school makes sense only as long as what’s taught is relevant and immediately usable.)
- Would always rather be doing something than nothing, with any consequences postponed to another day. Act now, pay later.
- May earn a negative reputation from other types by seeming to be exceedingly restless.
- Demand a return on every investment of energy they make. If something doesn’t seem worthwhile, they move on to the next thing.

**ESTPs in Personal Life**

In relationships, as in most other things, ESTPs demand center stage. While deeply committed in a serious relationship, their expression of commitment may vary from day to day depending on what is going on.

An ongoing dilemma for this type is that they are often oblivious to established norms and procedures. As a result, they can be in continual trouble with those in authority or even their partner. Some other types are specifically anti-authoritarian and enjoy testing its legitimacy, but not ESTPs. Looking at a project or problem, they immediately see a way to complete or solve the dilemma and leap right in – without checking first to see if there are established procedures for doing something (or if their partner thinks it's a good idea). As a result, what ESTPs may have intended to be good deeds can be seen as “meddling” by a “troublemaker.”

As ESTPs age, they still require new mountains to climb, although those mountains don't need to be quite as high. They may find they enjoy some time for reflection, although their preference will continue to be for challenges that test their common-sense skills and abilities. Without these challenges, retirement is nothing but drudgery for an ESTP.

### ***ESTPs at Home***

The ESTP lifestyle has a certain restlessness to it. There is always too much going on, with still more to do and never enough time. That, in itself, brings a lot of excitement to their lives. Almost anything can be the excuse for a party: an athletic event, the end of summer, a baptism, a new job, or a good grade. ESTPs can become quite involved in preparing and participating in these events, but their lack of orderliness can be extremely frustrating to those around them. Their need for center stage can, at times, make them seem abrasive to other types. The same is true with their impatience for theory, long stories, or explanations.

### ***ESTPs as Children***

As children, ESTPs are often misunderstood. They are one of the types frequently labeled as “hyperactive” or “slow learners.” There can be an ongoing battle between high-strung ESTP children and parents of a different type who think it's necessary to quiet down these apparent troublemakers. Actually, ESTP children are very creative and resourceful, often in the face of repeated attempts to get them to conform to more standard ways of behaving. With guidance instead of control, ESTPs do very well. They love family events but may do unexpected things. It's common for ESTPs to plan some special event and then forget to show up at the appointed hour. They find this perfectly natural behavior, but it can be very frustrating to others.

### ***ESTPs as Parents***

ESTP parents often have very realistic expectations of their children and mates. It may not be necessary for an ESTP's children to go to college or excel in something. But they simply must do something constructive and practical with their lives. Specifically, ESTP parents want their children to find something that will make them happy.

### **ESTPs in Professional Life**

The ESTP's overall work style is a potpourri of many things, largely driven by whatever works for the moment. Given the right incentives or deadlines, they may dig in and be productive and dynamic. But when the pace slows or the incentives disappear, it's time for them to put up their feet and shoot the breeze with colleagues. Rarely are they restrained by procedures or protocol. This leads to

unpredictability: when an ESTP is around, a spontaneous argument or a sudden burst of enthusiasm may lead the rest of the organization into some new adventure. Although this seems to be leadership of a sort, don't look to an ESTP for direction. They are less likely to take charge than to get wholeheartedly behind others' programs (although, like other SPs, they often step in to handle emergencies that occur).

### ***ESTPs as Leaders***

The ESTP is a risk-taking, entrepreneurial, give-it-a-go person – a type with a real flair for most things. They have a fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants attitude and are pleased to have everyone know about it. With a built-in restlessness, these are the hyperactive doers who like to keep their hands in a variety of pots, churning as much as they can to keep everyone on their toes and make life exciting.

The ESTP's leadership style is characterized by action-oriented, pragmatic risk taking. They are highly competitive and will pursue a task, whatever the barriers. With a hands-on orientation, they delegate only to those they perceive as sharing their competence and sense of commitment to get the job done. ESTPs are more concerned with current, practical results than long-term or strategic action. This strength, if overplayed, may become a weakness in situations where collaboration and strong interpersonal relationships built on empathy and mutual respect are essential.

ESTPs are masters at getting to the heart of matters. Don't try to baffle an ESTP with flowery ideas and words; they will not only see through it immediately, but your credibility will be lost with your own eloquence. They will appreciate it if you just get on with things. Giving something a try, even a less-than-perfect idea, is better than debating it endlessly or studying it to death. The Sensor (S) motto is, "Doing something is always better than doing nothing." And if you're a Perceiver (P), like the ESTP, you can always change horses in midstream if things aren't going well. As leaders, ESTPs are one of the few types who won't particularly care if you don't follow rules and regulations. If you get something done, the mere accomplishment will mend any people or policies that got bent along the way. For ESTPs, tomorrow is a new day and most of today's stuff will already be out of date or irrelevant.

ESTPs have an ability to bring new options to immediate situations and move beyond the routines that might otherwise stifle productivity. For them, all of life is an option and if you're willing to try almost anything once, something good is bound to come of it. Everything is negotiable, and there are always alternatives to whatever is hindering a particular situation or action. So ESTPs encourage others (and themselves) to try, try again. The trying not only gives you something to do, but it will inevitably create other options.

### ***ESTPs as Employees***

Because they are nonconformists by nature, ESTPs often tire prematurely of any structured workplace, sticking around only long enough to master some skill. Ultimately, in their impatience, they will take their skills from job to job or engage in some form of independent work, either of which will offer them more immediate rewards.

One of their significant contributions to the workplace is their appreciation of the present moment. If we learn anything from Sensing-Perceivers (SPs) generally, and ESTPs most of all, it's that the only moment we can be sure of is the present one. Guilt over the past won't undo what has already done, and fear or anticipation of the future is fruitless. ESTPs believe that focusing guilt, fear, or other such emotions on the past or future only tends to make us less effective in the present.

Another strength of ESTPs is the grounded pragmatism that surrounds them in the workplace. Working one project at a time is akin to living one day at a time, and that's where they believe the organization's energy should be focused. ESTPs have a sense of precision and attention to detail that is profound and can be very helpful when teamed up with another type whose absence of detail could stymie a project. Their social gregariousness also makes them good team players; they are quite willing to be sure the specifics of a job are covered.

### ***ESTPs' Workplace Stressors***

This same live-for-the-moment attitude can give ESTPs a laissez-faire mindset toward dependability and direction. Just when you are counting on them, they can be somewhere else, either physically or mentally. A classic ESTP excuse is, "I intended to be here to help, but at the last minute..." As a last-minute type, last minutes become excuses for ESTPs to be anywhere other than where they're expected to be. Such apparent flakiness is not only frustrating to more structured types, but it can result in reduced productivity.

Another weakness is the ESTP's tendency to get lost in the details of the moment. Their love of facts and figures can lead them to gather information for its own sake, ultimately inundating everyone with data for which there is no meaning or purpose. Thus, when a colleague or superior is seeking results, the ESTP's response could be, "I'm working on it" or "What's your hurry?" Both of these may be accurate, but decidedly unhelpful. At their worst, ESTPs can get so wrapped up in details that it becomes difficult for them to sort out what's necessary to complete a project.

ESTPs make fast decisions that are realistic and pragmatic. They rapidly take in currently available concrete information, and then move quickly to action. They base decisions on what is happening in the immediate, external world that is relevant to getting the job done. To influence them, let them experience the change, try a different angle, or shift their perspective. Let them know upfront when something is urgent. Abstract explanations aren't helpful; they need to understand the effect their actions will have.

ESTPs have a highly visible restlessness when it comes to routines and other mundane details of life. You can tell in a second when they are bored with something; they wear their restlessness and impatience on their proverbial sleeves. Feeling (F) types are apt to personalize this impatience, assuming it's their own problem. Other Thinking (T) types tend to dismiss ESTPs as hyperactive, immature, or someone who needs to be slapped aside the head for their own good. Because of this effect they have on others, ESTPs should attempt to lengthen their attention span. Similarly, other types should try to help them see that routines are either necessary evils or a challenging and productive way for getting through the day.

ESTPs have a love of the moment, and their “fly-now, pay-later” lifestyle can cause them trouble when dealing with a structured, deadline-oriented, follow-it-through, focused workplace. ESTPs typically receive inordinate pressure to conform to the overall organizational type. But they resent such pressures and may react with disdain and rebellion. In the end, ESTPs need to decide how much they’re willing to modify their approach to gain the rewards of the professional world.

### ***ESTPs’ Careers***

Work that is flexible, varied, and open to creativity can be enjoyable to an ESTP. Routine and predictability are considered a drag, leading to stress and low productivity. ESTPs want to learn as they go; they’ll read the instruction manual only when absolutely necessary (and then only the parts that are relevant to the moment). They prefer to trust themselves and to rely on common sense to accomplish whatever is at hand. They are adept at entrepreneurial activities, and there are many ESTP small-business owners. Sports, auto racing and repair, the maintenance or operation of special equipment, and anything else that changes from day to day or moment to moment and is unpredictable will have special appeal.

### **Summary**

The ESTP’s talent is in solving real problems in real time. While they have little interest in strategic planning, ESTPs will happily take on a difficult (or even “impossible”) task for the excitement of solving it. Like many SPs, they are often adept at handling emergencies. Their focus on the present moment can lead to a short attention span and a low tolerance for routine.

Adapted from the writing and teaching of Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen.

## **ESTPs On a Team**

### **Naturally Bring to a Team**

- Can be easy to get along with; their relationships are about mutual respect
- Good at getting people to follow along
- Provide tactical prioritizing, especially when responding to crisis situations or new opportunities
- Use their rich store of data to act as consultants
- Are great at finding key bargaining points to negotiate, and willing to compromise to get things done
- Are talented troubleshooters

### **Teamwork Style**

- Make things happen; are pragmatic and expedient
- Anticipate the actions and reactions of others
- Persuade others and get the group to follow and act
- Easily change their position as new facts are presented
- Understand opportunities don't last, so they push for action

### **Potential Blind Spots**

- May ignore people's needs in favor of expedient solutions
- Impatient when abstractions don't seem relevant
- Might ignore authority to focus on expediting

### **To Help Them Succeed**

- Avoid directly challenging their authority
- Allow them autonomy
- Help them see that the perspectives of others are factors to be considered before acting
- Confront them with a consistent, firm approach

Adapted from Quick Guide to the 16 Personality Types in Organizations by Sue A. Cooper, Roger R. Pearman, et al.

## Managing the ESTP

### WORK LABEL – PROMOTER

- Goes with the flow
- Adaptable realist
- Makes the most of every situation
- Highly observant
- Fun-loving

#### STRENGTHS

- Procuring
- Operating
- Situational
- Flexible
- Realistic

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Set goals and work toward them
- Set priorities and follow through
- Be open to the big picture
- See opportunities in input from others
- Become sensitive to others' needs

**TO FUNCTION BEST ESTPs NEED:** Challenge and excitement. They love to put out fires and to rally the troops. Lots of action and adventure. Don't tell them; they love to be asked.

**ESTPs ARE FRUSTRATED BY:** Restrictions. Being told how to do their work. Complex theory. Long explanations. Orders and demands. Too much structure.

**ESTPs IRRITATE OTHERS BY:** Not adhering to set priorities and structure. Preparing in haste and eliminating important details. Shooting from the hip (and getting away with it).

**ESTPs VALUE:** Flexibility, action, and excitement.

**ON A TEAM:** They fight fires or start them.