

### ISFP

(About 8.8% of the U.S. population)

The ISFP has a love and sensitivity for others, as well as serenity and appreciation for life. The combination of Introversion, Sensing, Feeling, and Perceiving puts ISFPs more *in touch* with both themselves and the world around them than any other type.

ISFPs have very little need to lead and control others, and yet are driven by a desire to see everything – plants, animals, and people – living harmoniously. Being so much in tune with the natural boundaries of life, it is difficult for them to understand why anyone feels the need to impose limits or structure on others. Unfortunately, in their genuine desire not to impose upon or influence others, they often give up expressing themselves and their wishes in favor of blending in. With this natural tendency and what appears to be a lack of direction, ISFPs can easily be overlooked or overpowered by others. In a sense, they may be the most invisible of the 16 types.

#### **ISFP Personality Highlights**

- Their **Introversion** leads them to be reflective and reserved.
- Their **Sensing** allows them to see the world around them as tactile and immediate; they are practical and grounded.
- Their **Feeling** encourages them to be warm and nurturing while making subjective decisions.
- Their **Perceiving** allows them to be open and flexible.

Put these four traits together and you have a type who relates to the world with little desire for change or control, but simply seeks to take it all in. ISFPs are usually not highly competitive by nature.

Here are some other characteristics. ISFPs...

- Are often creative and skilled in a variety of practical disciplines serving people and nature.
- Tend to be shy about offering their services.
- Often sell themselves short. As a result, almost any compliment an ISFP receives can be dismissed as “not really meant” or “just an accident.”
- May be unconventional in their approach to problem-solving. They see the clearest way to do something and then simply do it, often to the dismay of others who prefer to follow prescribed methods.
- Are sometimes oblivious to the “standard” way. They may be puzzled why anyone would consider doing something in a way that is obviously cumbersome and impractical.

### **ISFPs in Personal Life**

Family events for ISFPs are best when they just happen. Too much planning, work, and structure can block things from happening freely. Family rituals are worth attention, but only once they are underway. It's common for an ISFP to be doing something totally unrelated to an event minutes before it is supposed to begin. Somehow, ISFPs *know* that all will take care of itself if only they are sensitive to others' needs, in touch with their own feelings, and open to whatever happens. And the occasion will be great, or at least long-remembered.

Bedtime for ISFPs is when you're tired. If there are projects, people, pets, or other forms of life that need attention, then bedtime may take second place. Once these other things are tended to, *if* one is tired, it is time for sleep – whenever and wherever one happens to be. Others may find such behavior difficult, even “flaky,” particularly in more structured settings.

### ***ISFPs at Home***

The ISFP's living style is generally relaxed but active. Hands-on activities keep these Sensors busy. As Sensing-Perceivers (SPs), they usually prefer doing something to doing nothing, but the activity is often spontaneous and scattered rather than goal-oriented. While this can be a source of fun, the result may be a list of unfinished activities that can be frustrating – not only to others but to the ISFPs themselves.

To relax ISFP-style is to do something for the fun of it. Such fun things might include gardening, painting, needlework, or whittling. Some ISFP hobbies, such as creating miniatures for example, often demand high dexterity.

### ***ISFPs as Children***

ISFP children are often curious explorers who seem unhurried about getting anywhere in particular. Content with their own company, they see the entire world as a place for discovery. Often unaware of rules, time, and other family demands, they explore the world around them. Plants, animals, brothers, sisters, and parents are all part of that world.

As Perceivers (Ps), ISFP children march to a drummer that is somewhat different. They are likely to be playing when they are expected to be at meals, watching TV when everyone else is in the car ready to leave, or rearranging toys when company is about to walk in the door. Unfortunately, this means the message these sensitive types usually get is, “You never do anything right!”

As Sensors (Ss), ISFPs are very oriented to the present, so learning needs to be tactile and immediately relevant. They have little interest in the conceptual and abstract and are most responsive to what is pragmatic: “What does it look like?” “How does it feel?” “What can I do with it?” “How does it work?” Questions like these spark their interest in a project. The theoretical side of things is more difficult, less interesting, and often produces very negative responses from them. Such responses often lead to negative labels, like “slow learner” or “daydreamer.” These labels are inaccurate, but they contribute to the ISFP's tendency to avoid formal education, especially higher education.

***ISFPs as Parents***

Parenting is an opportunity for an ISFP to relate to children, not control them. As a result, children who also have strong Perceiving (P) tendencies are probably allowed to wander too much; they may not be given the basic sense of structure needed for later in their lives. Other types find it difficult to understand the ISFP's low need for control or influence. It is intended to allow their children to grow more freely, but their quiet, subtle style may never receive full credit.

Children learn that the ISFP parent is always near, very much in touch with their needs, and very supportive and loving of their development, but in a quiet and unassuming way. Love is not so much spoken of as displayed, quietly and in many ways. An ISFP's children know they are loved because love is demonstrated in kindly acts and gentle deeds.

**ISFPs in Professional Life**

For ISFPs, work must be rewarding; to be rewarding it must be personally gratifying and of use to others. Money is secondary. Their primary concern is for service. If a great deal of formal education or abstract theory is necessary for a certain career choice, then ISFPs will likely seek fulfillment elsewhere. Vocational education, however, is often appealing for ISFPs who desire to work in hands-on, practical trades and skills, including everything from car mechanics and repair to cosmetology, carpentry, and clerical tasks.

***ISFPs as Leaders***

The phrase ISFP manager is almost an oxymoron. Although they are a significant part of the work force, they are rarely in a leadership position. They are not above passing up a promotion so they can stay "where the action is." Although they can be capable leaders, they tend to be self-effacing.

ISFPs believe people work best when they are encouraged and helped rather than criticized. So they lead by quietly supporting and working with their subordinates and colleagues. In fact, they may have trouble separating themselves from those below them, setting themselves up to be taken advantage of. But this unaggressive management style can also build fierce loyalty among subordinates who appreciate the freedom to work at their own pace and in their own style.

ISFPs can be cajoled into accepting leadership positions, but it may not be the best use of their talents. They can lead effectively for a short time. But over the long term, to be under the constant fire of deadlines and other pressures will be highly stressful to an ISFP. If a position demands high accountability and high visibility, ISFPs can lose their motivation. They are at their best when they are working behind the scenes at something which has a significant service component.

ISFPs are masterful in gaining cooperation from others and in finding practical, concrete solutions to whatever issues confront them. Confident in areas where they have had extensive experience, they are likely to show initiative with a select few people and build a close-knit team of loyal associates. They influence through doing rather than telling and are guided in their actions by the values of pragmatic cooperation. They adapt quickly and quietly, making the changes necessary to work under new

conditions. Their strengths, if overplayed, can become a weakness in environments where social networks, long-range planning, and demonstrated analytical analysis are prized qualities.

### ***ISFPs as Employees***

The natural strengths of the ISFP in the workplace include:

- Supporting and helping others
- Finding alternatives to seemingly frozen projects or relationships
- Negotiating options to a problem so that everyone wins
- Troubleshooting difficult situations for more effective interpersonal communications
- Keeping people in touch with tangible, attainable goals

It's the ISFPs who best help us see the need to approach a project a bit at a time rather than being overwhelmed by the magnitude of a situation.

Even more than other Perceiving (P) types, follow-through and routine plague the ISFP. It's far more exciting to work on a new or non-routine project than just do the same old thing. It's much more stimulating to respond to some emergency than to work on the stated assignment. As a result, boredom and listlessness hover over ISFPs and can be their undoing if they aren't actively pushing things to completion.

The ISFP is the type that can get things done, although often unconventionally. Other types can find this stressful. But the ISFP is the type who quietly delivers the goods, knows the shortcuts, and can often make others feel very affirmed and worthwhile in the process.

### ***ISFPs' Workplace Stressors***

ISFPs are generally very easygoing, low-key types. Perceivers (Ps) in general are prone to second-guessing their decisions, often wondering such things as, "If we waited just a bit longer, would things have turned out differently?" When you couple this with internal, here-and-now subjectivity (ISF), most of life becomes a series of what-if, leave-it-alone, maybe-tomorrow-will-be-different experiences that lead the ISFP to self-criticism. This is unfortunate because their natural, unobtrusive, accepting manner is not only a great strength – and much needed at all levels of organizational life – but it is also refreshing to encounter in the workplace.

ISFPs experience stress when their loyalty to others and their own creative energies are at odds. Feeling pulled in opposing directions can result in a sense of being burdened and restricted. Often they are stressed when their creative efforts require structured follow-through and detailed maintenance. Chronic stress and burnout often leads to self-neglect; they may not take care of themselves very well, including taking unnecessary risks.

### ***ISFPs' Careers***

When they are enthusiastic about themselves and confident in their abilities, ISFPs' management style tends to be nondirective. They create an open and diverse environment, which can be fertile ground for subordinates capable of developing themselves.

Professions such as teaching (especially in grade school), the ministry, nursing, paramedics, and clinical and educational psychology are all natural careers for the ISFP. They are also found in the skilled crafts, happily finding a home as a butcher, baker, or tailor, and similar trades, as well as some high-tech occupations. Since prolonged education doesn't appeal to them as much as it does to other types (particularly INTPs), they often resist sticking with long, complex training or certification programs. This may limit their interest in careers that require advanced education, especially if it is delivered in a traditional classroom setting. They may, however, respond well to individualized online or e-learning training and education programs where they can work at their own pace and in tune with their own schedule.

Often, more demanding types set up ISFPs to live or work on the wrong turf, and then may even join in helping the ISFP's self-flagellation. For example, ISFPs who are skilled bookkeepers might be encouraged by others to strive for a CPA degree. But they may have little need for such ambitious achievements, being much more pleased to work responsibly where they are.

ISFPs are very special individuals who need to have a career that is more than "just a job." They need a career that is consistent with their strong inner values. Since they prefer to live in the moment, and take the time to savor it, they don't do well with some fast-paced corporate environments. They need a great deal of space and freedom if they are going to function in their natural realm of acute sensory awareness. If they give free reign to their natural abilities, they may find a wonderful artist within themselves. Almost every major artist in the world has been an ISFP.

In addition to the ones already mentioned, some potential professions that might be suitable for an ISFP include musician, composer, designer, child care or early childhood development professional, social worker, veterinarian, forest ranger, and pediatrician.

### **Summary**

ISFPs are very much "in the moment" in whatever they do. They are frequently drawn to creative or artistic endeavors as a vocation. While they are sensitive to the needs of others and are generally considerate in their approach, their love of flexibility and difficulty in making clear decisions may reduce their effectiveness in helping others develop.

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

## **ISFPs On a Team**

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

- Humane and easygoing; their relationships are about camaraderie and having fun interacting
- Resourceful and creative, with a unique gift of composing solutions to get quality results
- Great at getting others to work together
- Talented at creatively solving immediate and concrete problems
- Hardworking; often prepared with research data

### **Teamwork Style**

- Action oriented, pragmatic, and expedient
- Good at gently persuading others to get the job done
- Approach problem solving by listening to ideas, getting support, and persuading others
- Judge others based on their actions
- Give information to prompt action rather than directives

### **Potential Blind Spots**

- May ignore systems, policies, and procedures to achieve whatever needs to be done
- May have a passive response to anger or tension, leading to withdrawal from the team
- May lose track of time when absorbed in the creative moment

### **To Help Them Succeed**

- Provide an environment with opportunities, choices, flexibility, and a few familiar and friendly people
- Present a positive, harmonious work environment
- Recognize and compliment them soon after an accomplishment

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

## Managing the ISFP

### WORK LABEL – COMPOSER

- Quietly friendly and warm
- Modest about their abilities
- A loyal follower
- Guided by values
- Free spirit

#### STRENGTHS

- Sensitivity
- Adaptability
- Perfectionist
- Flexible
- Harmonious

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Set goals and keep them in mind
- Be more objective
- Be open to the big picture
- Stick to principles
- Take some action toward goals

**TO FUNCTION BEST ISFPs NEED:** Challenge and variation. Opportunity to act on their own values. Freedom to incorporate and internalize music, rhythm, color, and texture into their life.

**ISFPs ARE FRUSTRATED BY:** Restrictions. Being told how to do work. Limitations and time constraints. Social functions and being forced to conform.

**ISFPs IRRITATE OTHERS BY:** Not adhering to priorities and lack of follow-through. Insufficient and hasty preparation. Not asserting themselves. Avoiding conflict.

**ISFPs VALUE:** Variety, sensual experiences and challenge.

**ON A TEAM:** They are loyal and value driven.