

## ISTJ

(About 11.6% of the U.S. population)

Perhaps no type is more driven by a sense of responsibility and bottom-line behavior than ISTJs. They believe in *getting it done*, whatever “it” may be. They can be so outgoing under certain circumstances that they are sometimes mistaken for Extraverts (Es). But as the most private of the 16 types, these Introverts can don Extraverted clothing when necessary without changing their essentially Introverted (I) nature.

### **ISTJ Personality Highlights**

ISTJs can be demanding at home, work, and even at play, engaging in behavior that appears somewhat compulsive to other people. ISTJs seem to be classic Type A personalities – driven, impatient, and obsessive. Their affinity for the here and now leaves them to assume nothing and to take nothing for granted.

- Their **Introversion** fosters inward reflection.
- Their **Sensing** helps them concentrate on data that are objective, immediate, concrete, and pragmatic.
- Their **Thinking** causes them to translate what they see objectively and tangibly.
- Their **Judging** ensures that they immediately organize and schedule information. Because this comes easily and naturally to them, they expect similar behavior from everyone else.

ISTJs 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 (I). But for ISTJs, this is not out of character at all; they are simply “doing what should be done” (though not necessarily what comes naturally). *Should* is a key part of the ISTJ’s mantra, as it is for all Sensing-Judgers (SJs). In this context, their preferred and more natural Introverted behavior is dutifully abandoned for the more difficult Extraverted style.

Here are some other characteristics. ISTJs...

- Are responsible, even driven, to behave in traditional, accepted ways.
- Prefer to deal with issues and challenges using established rules and procedures.
- Enjoy being organized and making decisions based upon logic to preserve the status quo.
- Tend to avoid personalizing situations, believing that everyone should be able to manage their own “issues.”
- Gravitate toward administrative, supervisory, or management positions.
- Follow through on their commitments, taking them seriously and responsibly.
- Are often perceived as somewhat rigid and unyielding, particularly around issues of right and wrong.

**ISTJs in Personal Life**

In an intimate relationship, an ISTJ's word is as good as gold. Having once declared, "I love you," they can be trusted to be true to that sentiment for years to come – though they may not say it aloud very often. The reason is simple. For ISTJs, actions truly speak louder than words. The continued expression of love comes not in the saying but in the doing – being there every day, taking family and personal responsibilities very seriously. This nonverbal style of affection often gets ISTJs in hot water because they can be perceived as uncaring. They are often described as having "ice water in their veins" or are criticized for being cool and distant. ISTJs do care, however, and they show it through their strong sense of responsibility. They are fiercely loyal, both to individuals and institutions, sometimes responding fanatically to the "shoulds" and "oughts" of their commitments.

***ISTJs at Home***

ISTJs usually have homes that are neat, and they carry out their domestic activities with efficiency. ISTJs' homes and personal appearance tend to reflect their life preferences in general: traditional and probably somewhat austere. You can often spot an ISTJ's home from the outside. The yard is sparsely decorated, 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 be described as tasteful but reserved. There is a place for everything and everything is in its place.

***ISTJs as Children***

These same driving forces define ISTJ children. Homework is done neatly and on time, and in general they are good students. 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. The parent-child lines are clearly defined. ISTJ children:

- Can become stressed when they encounter a family member of a different type who resists their rules and regulations.
- May experience confusion when a parent or authority figure works on a schedule different from theirs, thinking that the other's behavior is out of character for their role.
- Can be somewhat obsessed with the "right way" to play a game or activity, focusing on the rules and what they see as the correct way to behave.

***ISTJs as Parents***

ISTJ parents tend to impose rules and regulations upon their children, and they expect them to be followed without question. After all, when they were children things were done in this way. Now that they are in authority, they expect things should continue to be done as they were before. Roles are clearly defined for the ISTJ parent. Parents are parents and children are children; each has appropriate responsibilities. To ISTJs, an idle mind is the devil's playground and honest work is good for all. Even relaxation is often something to be scheduled and dutifully executed.

### **ISTJs in Professional Life**

This is the quintessential dependable, responsible type. ISTJs are driven by accountability, productivity, and the bottom line. They see the world in terms of facts and tangible realities (Sensing), which they prefer to deal with in an objective fashion (Thinking). Their daily life is driven by structure, schedule, and order (Judging), and their Introversion makes them appear somewhat cool and aloof.

ISTJs have many strengths professionally. One is the ability to act quickly and, very often, correctly. They tend to begin projects and stay with them through completion. This drive is helped by their dogged determination to cover all details and stay specific. For ISTJs, work comes first, then family and community responsibilities. When all of this is in order, then it is okay to schedule some play.

The ISTJ is often calm and cool, even somewhat unexpressive or undemonstrative. This can be a strength in some situations – particularly stressful ones – when ISTJs appear rock-solid. They are a dominant type throughout the military. While ISTJs comprise only about six percent of the general population, they make up a significant percentage of the U.S. armed forces.

If anyone invented the chain of command, it was probably an ISTJ. Throughout the business world, whether in a mega-corporation or a mom-and-pop shop, they establish a structure and work it effectively, expecting others to do likewise. When they are low on the organizational ladder and are given an order, they may initially complain. But then they will obey by delivering the goods. As they move up the ladder, they give orders and expect obedience; this is how they get the job done.

ISTJs drive others, but they also drive themselves. This often shows up in an attitude of “if you want something done right, do it yourself.” As a result, others may have trouble understanding 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. But the ISTJ’s lack of expressiveness often results in others feeling frustrated, flustered, or on the defensive.

Their inexpressiveness also extends to giving praise, something they do with difficulty. It is expected that work will be done in a timely fashion, neatly, and correctly. Therefore, believes the ISTJ, why would you receive praise for what should be done? Your paycheck is praise enough, and if you stay until retirement 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 work or spend time in such an environment. (Someone once quipped that ISTJ stands for “I Seldom Tell Jokes.”) In the long haul, although they are very effective in getting things done, their quest for efficiency can sap employee morale and motivation.

***ISTJs as Leaders***

ISTJs lead by being structured, persistent, logical, and focused on achieving concrete, realistic results. They would rather avoid, or even deny the existence of, “touchy-feely” situations – including safe encounters like saying, “Thanks for your help,” team discussions about a work project, or having a beer with colleagues after quitting time.

ISTJs may have difficulty 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 dilemma. Henry Ford’s Model T, which worked great but failed to keep up with changing fashions, is a classic example.

ISTJs’ excellence in completing tasks and organizing life gives them a natural edge as leaders at all levels of an organization. The demands for accountability and productivity required of all organizations – from meeting deadlines to staying within budgets to achieving production goals – are areas where ISTJs naturally excel. However, they are often more focused on getting the job done and efficiently achieving productive results rather than building mutually satisfying relationships. As a result, they risk being derailed by others who may perceive them as unempathetic, authoritarian, and uncaring about personal issues.

For the ISTJ it is far more effective to be doing something constructive and useful today than to wonder about tomorrow. As a result of these beliefs, the ISTJ can be blind-sided by the unexpected; the focus on today means that there may be no contingency plan when surprises occur. The entire world of interpersonal dynamics is difficult for this type because it is not predictable and can’t be controlled. Problematic interpersonal situations – an upset employee, for example, or people expressing frustrations with their job – are often stressful.

ISTJs make decisions quickly when they believe they understand the situation. When a situation is unfamiliar, they seek first to relate it to their previous experience and then make a cautious decision. Once a decision is made, it is not easily changed unless it is shown to be impractical. ISTJs like concrete facts more than hypothetical implications.

Their preference for handling a lot of details, being organized and intentional, and making decisions quickly based on logic means they are often seen as “management material” early in their careers. They are capable administrators and frequently are promoted to fairly senior levels. Nearly 20 percent of the CEOs and vice president-level managers in corporations are ISTJs.

***ISTJs as Employees***

Given good direction, ISTJs can make outstanding employees. For them, “good direction” means a strict set of rules and regulations. It is inevitable that an ISTJ will end up working with at least a few Feeling (F) 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 (and the more they realize they don't need to control or deny such behavior), the freer they will be to let others behave true to their own type – leading to greater productivity all around.

### ***ISTJs' Workplace Stressors***

The unknown, the future, and the unplanned all induce stress in 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 harebrained aspects of a project. Even relatively simple things can trigger stress. For example, if a meeting is scheduled to end at 4:00 and someone raises a new concern at 3:57, the ISTJ will likely experience a rise in adrenaline, pulse, and anger.

ISTJs find it most stressful to be in an organization where clear, detailed, concrete, and specific instructions and expectations are not stated. Any ambiguity or arbitrary changes in one's prescribed duties and responsibilities can generate much tension, anxiety, and a defensive reaction. Holding such a strong work ethic, coupled with their talents at logistical planning, they can wear themselves out by overworking and overdoing their duty. Believing that play and leisure time are to be earned by hard work, they can be easily frustrated when others aren't doing their job.

### ***ISTJs' Careers***

ISTJs make good soldiers, literally and figuratively. In fact, based on a sample of more than 10,000 members of the U.S. military – from enlisted personnel through four-star generals and admirals – the predominant type is ISTJ. Other professions to which ISTJs gravitate are similarly oriented toward achieving practical and tangible results. These include such careers as general surgery, law, and accounting. They have appeal because they frequently involve working alone (I), are results-oriented (S), require heavy objectivity (T), and generally have prescribed ways of doing things (J). Whether as supervisors or subordinates, with their work (as with everything else) ISTJs like to play by the rules.

### **Summary**

ISTJs are thorough, systematic, and careful in how they live their lives. They are often talented at regulating, administering, and managing tasks and projects, although they may have some difficulty understanding the big picture. They are realistic, sensible, dependable, and driven to conserve organizational and family resources. They plan ahead and are usually well prepared for most situations, unless the situation is new and unanticipated.

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

## **ISTJs On a Team**

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

- Highly organized and goal-oriented
- Focus on completing details of a task and meeting objectives in a no-nonsense way
- Thorough, systematic and careful; they work with a steady energy to follow through on commitments
- Feel responsible for others in the group; show caring through responsibility

### **Teamwork Style**

- Expect others to follow the rules and procedures without question
- Respect hierarchy and organizational structure
- Plan and monitor in a thorough, systematic, and careful way
- Tend to inspect work, comparing outcomes to a standard

### **Potential Blind Spots**

- May focus on their responsibilities to the neglect of personal relationships
- May be overly cautious, especially when roles are unclear
- May sometimes be seen as too serious and task-focused

### **To Help Them Succeed**

- Provide opportunities for time alone for reflection and planning
- Anchor incentives in reality, making them tangible, tried, and proven
- Present change in terms of usefulness or practicality
- Acknowledge their attention to duty and exceptional use of quantitative and standardizing skills
- Help them develop their interpersonal communication skills

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

## **Managing the ISTJ**

### WORK LABEL – INSPECTOR

- Serious and quiet
- Responsible and trustworthy
- Will see the job through to the end
- A no-nonsense person
- Task oriented

#### STRENGTHS

- Practical
- Careful
- Determined
- Dependable
- Organized

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Consider other possible solutions
- Be open to the big picture
- Listen more to others
- Be sensitive to others' needs
- Make time for fun

**TO FUNCTION BEST** Organization and structure in which to work. Projects to  
**ISTJs NEED:** complete and tasks to accomplish. Opportunities to organize and  
preserve data or materials. An understanding of their role.

**ISTJs ARE FRUSTRATED BY:** Unrealistic and emotional situations. Wasted time and  
broken rules. Permissiveness and a lack of respect for  
the system.

**ISTJs IRRITATE OTHERS BY:** Being too task oriented. Making decisions on an  
impersonal basis. Ignoring other peoples' wishes. Going  
like a steamroller. Looking only for the bottom line.

**ISTJs VALUE:** Responsibility, tradition, and accuracy.

**ON A TEAM:** They follow the rules and guard the process.