

### ISTP

(About 5.4% of the U.S. population)

ISTPs are often described as reserved, aloof, and cautious in their relationships. But they are *skilled operators* in the ways of the world and are ready to try a wide variety of things.

#### **ISTP Personality Highlights**

- Their **Introversion** encourages inward reflection.
- Their **Sensing** gives them a concrete view of the world.
- Their **Thinking** means they are objective decision makers.
- Their **Perceiving**, combined with the open-ended way in which they relate to the outside world, means they take an active, spontaneous role in situations.

The ISTP's nature is to be quietly observing, always collecting data. Other types can have difficulty "reading" them because they are slow to share in public. They do not think of themselves as watching in order to do something with the information they gather. They are merely scanning the universe because they want to take in everything that is going on. The often dramatic outcome of this tendency is that when an emergency occurs, they can move swiftly to the core of the problem and correct it. What seems like instinctive action is the result of long periods of observation that enabled the ISTP to be aware of all the details involved.

Here are some other characteristics. ISTPs...

- Are especially skilled with their hands and often get satisfaction from accomplishments that are tactile and immediate.
- Use their acute powers of observation (related to their Sensing and Perceiving preferences) to plunge into a task without feeling it necessary to follow procedures or read directions.
- Are flexible, adapting easily to unscheduled events that may unglue a more structured type.
- Welcome interruptions, as long as they can see the work progressing, because they keep things from becoming dull or routine.

#### **ISTPs in Personal Life**

Relating to ISTPs can be both fun and confusing – fun because of their spontaneous, easygoing view of life and confusing because of their mixed messages. ISTPs alternate between enthusiasm over things that interest them at the moment and quiet reserve about other things, so no one can predict their reaction.

ISTPs can often be enigmas, especially to Extraverts (Es) and Judgers (Js), who find their unpredictability and apparent social indifference so disturbing that they may try to change them. But

ISTPs not only resent this, they may get an inner thrill from not behaving according to expectations, always remaining somewhat mysterious.

### ***ISTPs at Home***

The hands-off, laissez-faire style that characterizes the ISTP can lead to isolation. ISTPs think everybody should have their own space and should enjoy or use that space according to individual tastes and desires. At home, this emphasis on individual rights is much more important than neatness, orderliness, or routine.

When they aren't involved in an enterprise or adventure that demands all of their attention, ISTPs relax. They don't unwind by engaging in the kind of routine chores that other types find relaxing and worthwhile. As a result, life is a relaxed journey for the ISTP, frequently interrupted by various exciting hands-on challenges to repair, understand, improve, or experience.

### ***ISTPs as Children***

Judging (J) parents can have a lot of trouble understanding ISTP children. ISTPs' yearning for new adventures and their fascination with the mechanical and sensual often separates them from other members of a family. By other types' standards, ISTP children always seems to be heading for trouble – taking things apart to understand and learn about them, plunging in and trying things without first getting approval. They are often drawn to motorcycles (both to ride and repair), which can cause concern about their safety.

Learning is most enjoyable for the ISTP child when it is relevant and experiential. ISTPs believe that the only way to learn is by doing. The more abstract and removed from everyday life education is, the more restless and uninterested they become. Hands-on projects, experiments, and other practically oriented experiences keep ISTPs involved and the coursework palatable.

### ***ISTPs as Parents***

ISTP parents tend to wait and see what each day brings, then do what is needed at the time. They try not to get excited, become emotional, or lose their cool, and for a good reason: if they “waste” energy on these emotions it could make them less than ready for whatever happens next.

ISTP parents tend to have a low need to impose themselves on their children. They value individualism, space, and different levels of interest and development for each person in the family. They will put a lot of effort into living up to these values in both word and action. When a conflict erupts, ISTPs may react with loud, explosive demands. But once they have cooled off, these demands will give way to a calm presentation of several alternatives to solve the problem.

### **ISTPs in Professional Life**

ISTPs' interests may take precedence over assigned tasks that are perceived as dull, boring, or not practical. They can become so engrossed with their own projects that other obligations take second place or may be abandoned or forgotten. In situations that excite them, ISTPs work with great

accuracy and precision, often to the amazement and envy of others. They thrive on and prefer “working on the edge,” even putting themselves at risk if that’s what it takes to get the job done.

Work that is routine (e.g., administration) or too open-ended (e.g., basic research) is of little interest to them. This kind of work is an energy drain. The new, the unexplored, and the unexpected, however, are energizing – not work at all.

There are dramatic gender differences between male and female ISTPs. Much of the ISTP’s drive and gratification is related to activities traditionally associated with men. Contact sports, heavy equipment, auto racing, carpentry, and other adrenaline-driving occupations are exciting and rewarding for ISTPs. As a result, female ISTPs who are drawn to these occupations may find themselves viewed as unusual, although not necessarily unfeminine.

Another strength of ISTPs is their ability to amass technical data without needing to create outcomes, schedules, predictions, or any of the results often demanded by the workplace. This makes them excellent research analysts, although they may be somewhat slow to publish results. This is not in conflict with their need to do rather than think or plan. In their endless gathering of data it is the doing – the pursuit of information – that is exciting. It is the next steps – analyzing and processing data – that may not appeal naturally to the ISTP.

ISTPs will engage in an inward, tough-minded analysis of their fit with the current environment while considering other options that might meet their need to solve practical problems and be independent. Their responsiveness to the needs of the moment and their realistic approach to problems are pluses. They may have short-term tangible goals, but no long-term plan, and may postpone decisions.

Often when Introverted-Thinking (IT) is combined with Sensing-Perceiving (SP), one finds a loner who loves the tactile world of craftsmanship. At the turn of the century, for example, the ISTP was typified by the tool-and-die makers, the self-taught engineers, and the tinkerers who played with early automobiles – racing them, refining them, constantly handling each part until it was as finely tuned as possible. The grease monkeys, the athletic perfectionists, the oil barons and drillers, the early pilots who flew unpredictable crafts over uncharted courses – all of these typify the ISTP spirit. Several institutes of technology were born more than a century ago to sharpen the skills of this craft-oriented type.

### *ISTPs as Leaders*

Frequently, ISTPs view the process of getting others involved in a project as a waste of time. Participative management can be very difficult for this type. They aren’t opposed to it philosophically so much as psychically. Such a management style requires too much energy and effort to accomplish what to them is simple and obvious. It’s not that they’re lazy; quite the contrary. It’s just that they’d rather be doing than planning. They would rather be producing results than bogged down in what they view as bureaucratic red tape. They would rather be putting out fires than designing fire drills. The tougher the problem and the quicker they can get to it, the better. ISTPs are the type that best

embodies the slogan of World War II's Seabees, a group of engineers that accomplished so much against so many odds: "The difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer."

In the same way that they disdain management theories, ISTPs are uncomfortable with most management practices. The ISTP's overall management style can be abrupt, direct, and often unorthodox. It's a "let's just do it, not talk about it" approach to motivating others. The problem, of course, is that many other types *need* to talk about a project before doing it. (Extraverts may want to talk about it *ad nauseam*.) So when ISTPs climb the management ladder, it is only for as long as it seems to be an exciting game. As the game wears thin, so does their patience; they will move on at the slightest provocation. And if they stick to it, they'll eventually find some way to upset the apple cart, if only for the thrill of it.

ISTPs pride themselves on expedient and efficient responses to situations. Their passion for precision and focus means that they like to roll up their sleeves and help get the job done. In fact, they would rather show you than talk about how to achieve certain tasks. They are more concerned about precision, immediate action, and competence in a given situation than they are with planning or developing partnerships. They are often flexible as leaders until they are forced to deal with emotional situations. Then their strength as action-oriented leaders can become a weakness if they are perceived as shortsighted and disinterested in the interpersonal needs of their employees and colleagues.

### ***ISTPs as Employees***

ISTPs have the ability to self-start and work independently, which is an asset in almost every organization today. They are better independent workers than team players. Their perfectionism combined with their personal integrity results in a job well done with minimal supervision. Generally, projects that allow some scheduling flexibility are readily accomplished. They'll get the job done on time, but not necessarily on your schedule. Don't expect ISTPs to do well with PERT charts.

### ***ISTPs' Workplace Stressors***

Things that stress ISTPs at work can be summed up in three words: routine, administration, and paperwork. Such statements as "We've always done it that way," or "We've never done this before," or "This is the way it should be done" are just invitations for ISTPs to break the rules or bend the routine just for the thrill of it. While any of the perceiving (P) types can become bored with administration, ISTPs in particular have trouble seeing the need for such boring work. For the ISTP, files are where you put things you'll never use again, ledgers are for figures you'll never need again, and Day-Timers<sup>®</sup> are where you keep data you never really wanted in the first place. "Life is easy," says the ISTP. "Live it one day at a time, and don't sweat the small stuff. Use your time and energy wisely today, and tomorrow will take care of itself."

Being gifted at solving practical and factual problems, ISTPs can easily become anxious when there are no problems to solve, when others prevent them from immediately solving those problems, when they witness inefficient attempts to solve something, or when they have to wait for others to solve the obvious. Within all organizations, they have very little patience for incompetence, inefficiency, and

illogical or unreasonable behavior.

### ***ISTPs' Careers***

The ISTP may gravitate toward occupations that involved the hands-on exercise of complex, detail-oriented tasks. Their practical orientation makes data-rich jobs attractive, such as computer programming, systems analysis, engineering, and piloting aircraft. The criminal justice field is ripe with ISTPs; police, fire, corrections, parole officer, and other professions that involve lots of detail and an occasional emergency to handle are particularly attractive. They also are found in various construction-related occupations, such as carpentry, masonry, and mechanical engineering. In fact, if they can survive higher education, with its theory-focused courses, ISTPs may pursue some aspect of engineering. Unfortunately, many ISTPs are so turned off by academics, they may stop going to school before completing a formal course of study.

### **Summary**

ISTPs thrive in situations that are challenging and allow them to create clever, practical solutions. They acquire skills and relevant information almost effortlessly and pride themselves on being able to quickly solve problems. With their orientation toward action, they often respond immediately to emergencies or crises and act independently. They have difficulty understanding the interpersonal needs of others. They are likely to ignore “that’s the way we do things around here” in order to solve the immediate problem at hand.

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

## **ISTPs On a Team**

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

- Focus more on the task to be completed than on the individuals doing the work; their relationships are about taking action
- Good at helping people with problem solving
- Talented at troubleshooting using tools and instruments
- Resourceful, using whatever resources are at hand
- Analytical, observational, and skilled at using frameworks for solving problems

### **Teamwork Style**

- Want to make a contribution; thrive on challenging situations
- Prefer action-driven problem solving
- Are egalitarian, pragmatic, expedient, directive
- Do whatever is necessary to get the job done

### **Potential Blind Spots**

- May be uncomfortable with “social stuff” or talking through interpersonal problems
- May miss implications of their actions
- May appear to ignore authority to remain autonomous
- Tend to enjoy personal achievement more than group or team accomplishments

### **To Help Them Succeed**

- Allow autonomy and individual contributions
- Provide opportunities to solve specific, concrete problems, especially “hands-on” contributions
- Help them check their natural impulse to avoid long-range planning
- Avoid direct confrontation; it may result in their insistence on what they think is appropriate and what they want

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

## **Managing the ISTP**

### WORK LABEL – OPERATOR

- Quiet and reserved
- Cool observer of life
- Usually interested in impersonal principles
- Interested in the how and why of things
- Does not waste personal energy

#### STRENGTHS

- Spontaneous
- Objective
- Independent
- Concretely analytical
- Skillful

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Develop a sensitivity to others
- Push to have ideas understood
- Be open to the big picture
- Set long-term personal goals
- Communicate more

**TO FUNCTION BEST** Variety, skills, and techniques to master. The challenge of  
**ISTPs NEED:** problems to solve and something to fix. Freedom to work  
independently. A sense of bringing about something new and  
important.

**ISTPs ARE FRUSTRATED BY:** Restrictions, emotional situations. Being told how to  
work. Anything slow. Social requirements.

**ISTPs IRRITATE OTHERS BY:** Not communicating. Shooting from the hip. Lack of  
follow-through. Appearing anti-social, cold, and distant.

**ISTPs VALUE:** Flexibility, challenge, and adventure.

**ON A TEAM:** They do their own thing.