
A Program For Improving
Leadership Insight - Communications
and Personal Strengths

LIFO - Life Orientations

A/MAP

Source:
Kentucky Educational Leadership Institute
University of Louisville

Introduction to Life Orientations - LIFO

The "*Life Orientations*" instrument was developed in late 1967 and modified through 1971. Designed and developed by Stuart Atkins, LIFO provides an opportunity to describe one's communication style under both favorable conditions and those of high stress and conflict.

The LIFO instrument has been used most often in the corporate or business setting although it has applications for all professions. Its applications include individual self assessment, team building, and corporate leadership training. The instrument was also used in self assessment and leadership training for educational leaders in the Kentucky Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) in the early 1980's. Educational leader profiles developed in this application did not show significant variance from their corporate counterparts.

The instrument, as previously mentioned, was developed for self assessment and understanding. It consists of two independent questionnaires of thirty-six items each. One section serves to identify preferred and support styles under non-stress (favorable) conditions. The other section identifies preferred and supportive styles under high stress and conflict (unfavorable) conditions. Subjects completing LIFO will also identify their least preferred style of communication under each of the two conditions (favorable and unfavorable).

Scores are reported as one of four types or profiles. These include: 1) *Supportive Giving*, 2) *Controlling Taking*, 3) *Conserving Holding*, and 4) *Adapting Dealing*. Type profiles are intended to be neutral descriptors with no type being perceived as superior or inferior to any other. Each communication style is described under two sets of conditions. Type profiles under moderate stress (favorable) conditions are positive in nature. Type profiles under high stress and conflict (unfavorable) conditions are negative in nature in that they represent traits carried to levels of dysfunction.

The premise under which the instrument was formulated assumes that high stress and conflict will ultimately result in an intensification of behaviors by type or a distinct shift of behavior from one type to another. Type profiles under dysfunctional high stress and conflict conditions tend to be non-productive. In other words, under stress your strengths can become your weaknesses if carried to extremes.

The LIFO may be used to help leaders identify and predict behavior patterns in themselves and others when things are going well or when crises occur.

Introduction to Life Orientations - LIFO

By becoming familiar with their own behavior patterns as well as typical patterns of others under a variety of conditions leaders can:

Raise their own levels of self awareness to recognize when they themselves are moving to dysfunctional stress behavior patterns.

Raise their awareness of other type patterns so as to recognize colleagues moving into dysfunctional stress.

Develop strategies to help others out of stress by approaching them and communicating from the other persons need base.

Improve communications with other LIFO types.

Raise understanding of how to be a more effective leader for each style.

Raise understanding on how to be an effective employee for leaders of differing styles.

Raise understanding of how to create the most productive work environment for each style.

Learn how to lead and engage others in mutual goal setting activities based on style preference.

LIFO - Explanation of the Stress/Performance Curve

Motivation is a Product of Stress

1. A person's capacity for complex thinking and solution seeking is altered in a curve like fashion as stress/tension increases
2. A person's *maximum* capability for integrating information, utilizing data, and generating alternative solutions occur at some *moderate* stress level.
3. Specific effects of a very high stress level include consideration of fewer alternatives, rigid and linear thinking, repetition, one-dimensional thinking, disconnection from reality-based solutions, high anxiety levels and can eventually lead to dysfunctionality.
4. High stress may produce an increased tendency to perceive the environment as a threat. This perception can result in the excessive and coercive use of power, breakdown in effective communication, and dysfunctional behaviors in management and leadership responsibilities.

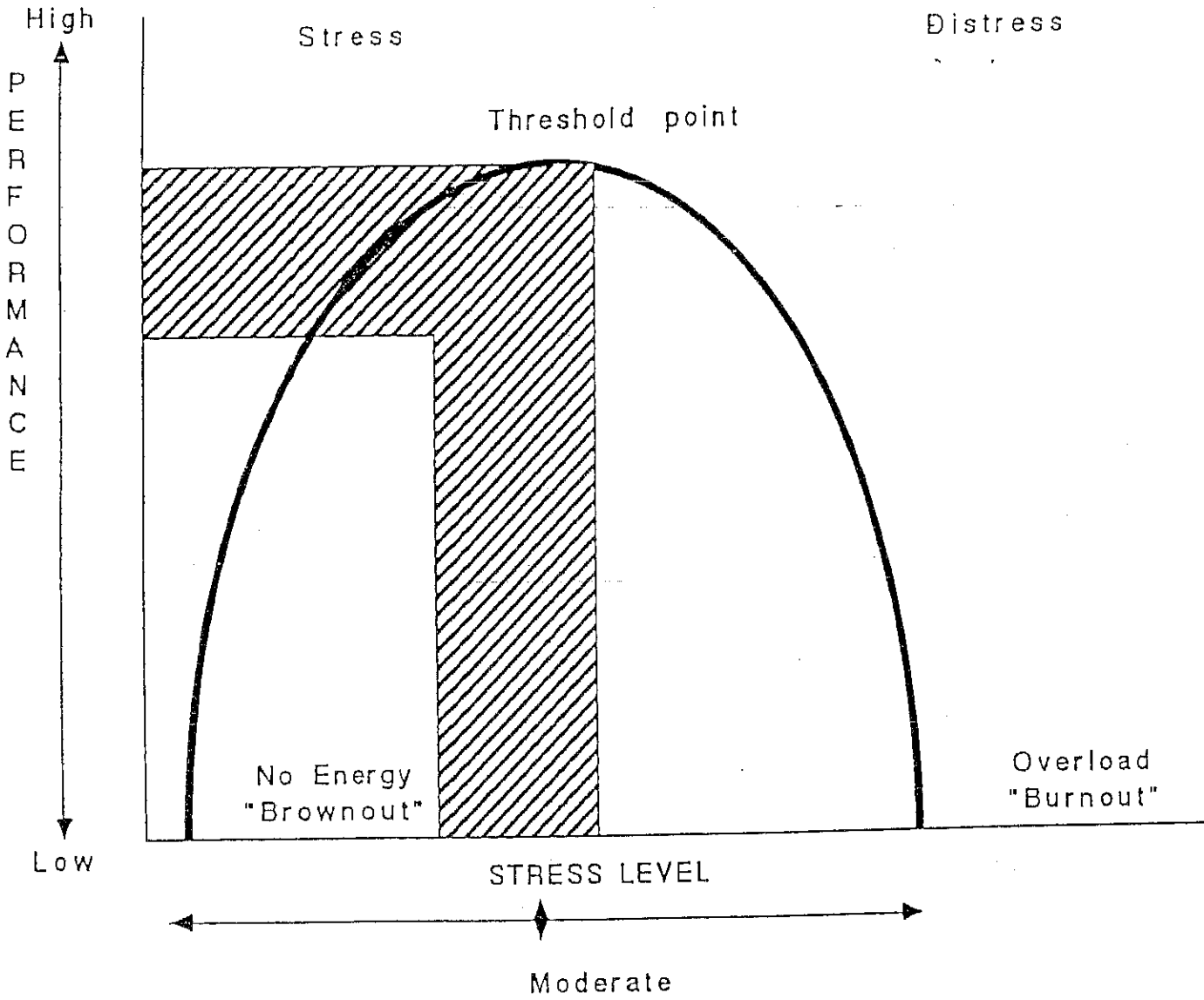
Low Stress Level - Results in: Dull and boring conditions. There is a low sense of urgency, no necessity to look for alternatives, little opportunity to solve problems creatively, few opportunities to make new decisions. The work environment in the organization is in a state of stagnation and decay.

Moderate Stress Level - Results in: Optimal conditions. People are required to search out, generate, and integrate new information, there is greater opportunity to generate options. There is a higher sense of urgency to take a fresh look at options, generate new solutions, and seek new approaches to problems, situations and new challenges. The organization prides itself on its adaptability.

High Stress Level - Results in: Distress and overload. Extraordinary pressures create a sense of loss of control. The ability to process information decreases. The ability to perceive and generate new options and solutions drops off dramatically, and people may become rigid in their thinking and headstrong in their actions. Confusion results in blaming behavior and the organization begins to shut down in its ability to solve problems.

5. Stress is a motivator. It stirs us to action and helps us to survive, succeed, learn, and grow. Life without stress would be dull and boring. In moderate amounts stress is the "spice of life." It is as much a part of life as the emotions of joy, pain, or love. Stress in moderation results in anticipation. As it grows beyond moderate levels, it can create anxiety. Both anticipation and anxiety are motivators, but anxiety, when unresolved, can lead to distress, overload, and dysfunction.

LIFO - STRESS PERFORMANCE CURVE



MY LIFO STYLE PREFERENCE IS:

	S/G SUPPORTIVE GIVING	C/T CONTROLLING TAKING	C/H CONSERVING HOLDING	A/D ADAPTING DEALING
Productive conditions (+)				
Stress and conflict conditions (-)				

PRODUCTIVE CONDITIONS		STRESS AND CONFLICT	
Preferred Style	_____	Preferred Style	_____
Supporting Style	_____	Supporting Style	_____
Least Preferred Style	_____	Least Preferred Style	_____
<p>Note: + or - five points is significant + eight points may indicate overreliance on style</p>			

LIFO SCORE INTERPRETATION

1. There are two independent questionnaires of 36 questions each, one to identify preferred strength styles, and the other to identify excess style preferences (style preferences when under or approaching dysfunctional stress).
2. For any one style the range is a low of 9 to a high of 36.
3. The highest score is called the main LIFO style, the next highest score is called the backup LIFO style, and the lowest score is called the least-preferred LIFO style.
4. A difference of at least five (5) points in scores is significant. A difference of eight (8) points or greater indicates the obvious tendency to over-rely on the style with the higher score.
5. Small differences in scores of four (4) or less points suggests a mixing or combining of styles and a high degree of flexibility and adaptability between these styles.
6. A balanced array of scores (i.e. 23,22,23,22) suggests a flexible approach to problem situations. A person with this profile may be hard to read and somewhat unpredictable because of the shift from one LIFO style to another as circumstances change.

LIFO STYLES Brief Word Descriptions

Thoughtful	Controlling	Tenacious	Flexible
Idealistic	Quick-to-act	Practical	Experimenting
Modest	Self confident	Economical	Enthusiastic
Trusting	Seeks change	Reserved	Tactful
Loyal	Persuasive	Factual	Socially skilled
Helpful	Forceful	Steadfast	Negotiating
Receptive	Competitive	Methodical	Animated
Responsive	Risk-taker	Detail-oriented	Inspiring
Seeks excellence	Persistent	Analytical	Entertaining
Cooperative	Urgency	Cautious	Complimentary
Feeling	Ambitious	Weigh alternatives	Solicitous
Optimistic	Proud	Fair	
	Self-starter	Logical	

S/G

C/T

C/H

A/D

THE KEY TO SUCCESS: YOU MUST ADAPT TO THE PERSON UNDER DISRESS.

YOU MUST DISCERN AND THEN MEET THEIR NEEDS TO MAINTAIN HIGH RECEPTIVITY AND PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

SUPPORTIVE/GIVING	CONTROLLING/TAKING	CONSERVING/HOLDING	ADAPTING/DEALING
<p>Provide support, reassurance and encouragement</p> <p>Give specific aid and help</p> <p>Hear the person out and provide plenty of listening time</p> <p>Provide meaningful rationale directed toward the anxiety, complaint, or concern</p> <p>Acknowledge the value of the persons effort, even if the consequences were less than desired</p> <p>Suggest some way the person could make up-for what they consider the failure.</p> <p>Don't nag or prod these people for being late in their responses</p>	<p>Try to respond quickly to what they want</p> <p>Offer solutions - DON'T bring up new problems</p> <p>Be open and firm about your position, but be respectful</p> <p>Reflect understanding of their concerns</p> <p>Ask questions to help this person feel he/she found his/her own solution</p> <p>Provide some alternative view to the situation</p> <p>Wait until the pressure is off for awhile before making any new demands</p>	<p>Try to lower the sense of threat and tension</p> <p>Minimize emotionality</p> <p>Try a lighter touch, humor may help</p> <p>Invite suggestions as to criteria that might be used to evaluate the problem</p> <p>Allow some cooling off time or if possible delay the need to make an immediate decision</p> <p>Get some additional data the person might trust</p>	<p>Reassure this person that they are still well liked</p> <p>Be willing to try to help the person relieve stress by seeking a compromise, or creative solution</p> <p>Suggest that you admire people who are open to different ways of doing things</p> <p>Use positive probes, "What I like about that is..." or "I think some reservations about that solution might be..."</p> <p>Spend some time socializing with this person before you press for a decision</p> <p>Always allow for saving face</p>
<p>YOUR GOAL IS ALWAYS TO HELP THE OTHER PERSON BY MEETING THE NEEDS CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR STYLE</p>			
<p>To be seen as a responsive and worthy person</p> <p>To feel valued, understood, accepted, and trusted</p> <p>To feel that "ideals" are not lost</p>	<p>To be seen as capable, competent, and in charge</p> <p>To feel capable of solving problems, and overcoming obstacles</p> <p>To feel there are still other opportunities</p>	<p>To be seen as objective, purposeful and rational</p> <p>To feel safe and secure</p> <p>To feel no loss is overwhelming. there is always a way to overcome</p>	<p>To be seen as likable and popular</p> <p>To have everyone pleased about outcomes and conditions</p> <p>Always be sure there is a chance to please people</p>

	Supportive/Giving	Controlling/Taking	Conserving/Holding	Adapting/Dealing
How to communicate with a person according to style	<p>Stress worthwhile causes</p> <p>Idealistic appeals</p> <p>Ask for their help</p> <p>Appeal to excellence</p> <p>Show concern</p> <p>Stress self-development</p>	<p>Offer opportunity</p> <p>Give more responsibility</p> <p>Challenge</p> <p>Provide resources and don't over supervise</p> <p>Give authority</p>	<p>Present ideas as low risk</p> <p>Give opportunity to be analytical</p> <p>Exercise logic, use facts</p> <p>Use familiarity, routine, and structure</p> <p>Examples of past success</p>	<p>Chance to do things with others</p> <p>Use humorous appeals</p> <p>Let them know you are pleased</p> <p>Provide opportunities to be in the spotlight</p>
Most effective environment for each style	<p>Respecting</p> <p>Supportive</p> <p>Reassuring</p> <p>Idealistic</p>	<p>Competitive</p> <p>Direct</p> <p>Risk-taking</p> <p>Opportunistic</p>	<p>Unemotional</p> <p>Factual</p> <p>Scientific</p> <p>Practical</p>	<p>Social</p> <p>Changing</p> <p>Youthful</p> <p>Optimistic</p>
Least effective environment for each style	<p>Betrayal</p> <p>Personal criticism</p> <p>Ridicule</p> <p>Failure</p> <p>Lack of support</p>	<p>No resources</p> <p>Authority countermanded</p> <p>Responsibility diminished</p> <p>No challenges</p> <p>Can't control factors which affect results</p>	<p>Constantly changing the rules</p> <p>Highly emotional</p> <p>Premature decision making</p> <p>Failure to be taken seriously</p>	<p>Critical authority</p> <p>Unfriendly co-workers</p> <p>Routines and details</p> <p>Firm schedules and tight supervision</p>
How to be the most effective supervisor for each style	<p>Give recognition, trust and recognition</p> <p>Mutual goal setting</p> <p>Be accessible</p> <p>Try to share</p> <p>Be dependable</p>	<p>Be confident</p> <p>Provide autonomy</p> <p>Reward results</p> <p>Firm boundaries, but appreciate initiative</p> <p>Listen, but be decisive</p> <p>Interact on an equal basis</p>	<p>Be organized</p> <p>Show purpose</p> <p>Detail-oriented</p> <p>Systematic</p> <p>Objective</p> <p>Fair</p> <p>Consistent</p>	<p>Be friendly</p> <p>Informative</p> <p>Helpful feedback</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Encouraging</p> <p>Flexible</p> <p>Sense of Humor</p>
How to be the best staff member for each style	<p>Demonstrate worth</p> <p>Show Loyalty</p> <p>Be Sincere</p> <p>Team oriented</p>	<p>Be responsive</p> <p>Capable</p> <p>Independent</p> <p>Respectfully candid</p>	<p>Be respectful</p> <p>Conforming</p> <p>Logical</p> <p>Pays attention</p>	<p>Be sociable</p> <p>Sophisticated</p> <p>Tactful</p> <p>Influential</p>

LIFO - Under Productive Conditions

Strengths by Style

SG - Supportive Giving

General Description

This style is characterized by *responsiveness* to the requests and needs of others.

- * Approach to others : Getting things done for others
- * Basic motivation: Being genuinely helpful to and supportive of others
- * Personal goal: To be seen as a responsive and worthy person
- * Evaluates others: giver / taker; nurturing / assertive; warm / hostile

Basic Life Orientation Themes

- * Good deeds speak for themselves
- * It is better to give than to receive
- * Ask not what others can do for you, but what you can do for others
- * Helping others results in appreciation and a sense of efficacy

Productive Strengths

- * Development and orientation of subordinates
- * Team orientation
- * Responsive to and supportive of others
- * Recognizes accomplishments of others
- * Trusting
- * Idealistic
- * Loyal
- * Optimistic
- * Good listener
- * Empathetic while also productively helpful

LIFO - Under Productive Conditions

Strengths by Style

CT - Controlling Taking

General Description

This style is characterized by *initiative taking* and a tendency to challenge, motivate, and direct others to accomplishment of tasks.

- * Approach to others : Getting things done through others
- * Basic motivation: Being a leader of others
- * Personal goal: To be seen as capable, competent, and successful
- * Evaluates others: leader / follower; strong / weak; value adder / maintainer

Basic Life Orientation Themes

- * Things happen only if we make them happen
- * He who hesitates is lost
- * You have to risk to accomplish
- * If it ain't broke, break it, then fix it better than it was
- * Carpe diem (seize the day!)

Productive Strengths

- * Will take charge and provide structure to others
- * Solid risk-taker
- * Likes and responds to challenge
- * Problem solver
- * Competitive
- * Self-motivated, possesses a sense of urgency
- * Seeks change, variety
- * Prefers to direct and coordinate the work of others
- * Resourceful
- * Self-confident
- * Persistent

LIFO - Under Productive Conditions

Strengths by Style

CH - Conserving Holding

General Description

This style is characterized by being *conservative and cautious*.

- * Approach to others : Getting things done independently of others
- * Basic motivation: Being seen as self-sufficient and self-reliant
- * Personal goal: Be your own person, be objective, be purposeful, be logical
- * Evaluates others: bright / slow; black / white; analytical / emotional

Basic Life Orientation Themes

- * Preserve what you have and build the future on the past
- * A penny saved is a penny earned
- * "Show me"
- * Gains are made by avoiding losses
- * The consummate manager

Productive Strengths

- * Orderly, weighs pro's and con's to eliminate or manage risk
- * Structured
- * Gathers facts and relies on logic
- * Analytical and practical
- * Not easily swayed by emotion
- * Realistic
- * Highly organized
- * Does research and has all the data
- * Consequence-oriented
- * Thorough
- * Excellent resource manager
- * Formulates and uses procedure, past practice, tradition

LIFO - Under Productive Conditions

Strengths by Style

AD - Adaptive Dealing

General Description

This style is characterized by being *adaptable and creative*. They are comfortable with most all people, fitting in with others in a variety of situations.

- * Approach to others : Being harmonious
- * Basic motivation: Sensitive to the needs and wants of others
- * Personal goal: To be seen as likeable acceptable
- * Evaluates others: friendly / hostile; collaborative / loner

Basic Life Orientation Themes

- * Smile and the world smiles with you
- * Our organization is a "Family"
- * Meeting others more than half way
- * A bridge builder
- * Can calm troubled waters

Productive Strengths

- * Perceptive and sensitive to the needs and feelings of others
- * Is changeable and flexible
- * Willing to give and take during negotiations
- * Highly sensitive to the needs of the organization
- * Tactful and has excellent timing
- * Uses humor appropriately to diffuse tense situations
- * Politically astute
- * Extroverted
- * Creative
- * Tactful

LIFO - Under Stress and Conflict Conditions

The Dysfunctional Use of Styles

CT - Controlling Taking

General Description

This style is characterized by *initiative taking* and a tendency to challenge, motivate, and direct others to accomplishment of tasks.

Basic Life Orientation Themes Under Stress

“ I’m O.K., you’re not”.

“I’d rather fight than switch my position”.

Dysfunctional Behaviors

- * Often “buys back” delegation.
- * Can exploit, threaten, and ride rough shod over others.
- * Can become impulsive and hyperactive. May sacrifice thought for action.
- * Likes new things for the sake of newness and abandons past practice even if it is still useful.
- * Adopts a win-lose posture and may resort to pressure.
- * May exhibit a “nobody pushes me” attitude.
- * Can become very confrontational. Will win battles while disproportionately damaging relationships.

LIFO - Under Stress and Conflict Conditions

The Dysfunctional Use of Styles

SG - Supportive Giving

General Description

This style is characterized by *responsiveness* to the requests and needs of others.

Basic Life Orientation Themes Under Stress

"I'm not O.K., you're OK

Dysfunctional Behaviors

- * Becomes too trusting to the point of being seen as gullible and giving in.
- * Becomes over-committed and over-involved.
- * Vulnerable to disappointment because goals are too high and unrealistic.
- * Easily manipulated leading to disappointment in others.
- * Becomes submissive, unsure, dependent, and over-relies on others for direction.
- * Gives in to opposition when questioned.
- * Shoulders blame and gets depressed.
- * May accept unreasonable demands and makes too many concessions.

LIFO - Under Stress and Conflict Conditions

The Dysfunctional Use of Styles

CH - Conserving Holding

General Description

This style is characterized by being *conservative and cautious*.

Basic Life Orientation Themes Under Stress

"There is nothing new under the sun".

"Follow policy, and procedure".

"Do not set a new precedent".

"Do not disturb".

"We already tried that".

Dysfunctional Behaviors

- * May get a severe case of, "analysis paralysis".
- * Weighs, checks, tests, researches, analyzes, but can't make a decision.
- * Nit picks.
- * Becomes data and logic bound. Often floods others with too much information.
- * Bureaucratic. Follows procedure, rules, and direction to the letter.
- * Becomes over-cautious, conservative, stubborn, cold and/or withdrawn.
- * Brands any new approach as flawed.
- * Becomes detached and remote and waits for others to come to him/her.
- * Suppresses feelings, and maintains an ever widening emotional distance.

LIFO - Under Stress and Conflict Conditions

The Dysfunctional Use of Styles

AD - Adapting Dealing

General Description

This style is characterized by being *adaptable and creative*. They are comfortable with most all people, fitting in with others in a variety of situations.

Basic Life Orientation Themes Under Stress

"I'd rather be liked than be right".

"Don't rock the boat"

Dysfunctional Behaviors

- * Becomes over-solicitous to please others.
- * Can lose a sense of his/her own identity, seem to be off-balance, and does not maintain consistency in direction.
- * Becomes ambivalent, flexible, changeable in an almost chameleon like way.
- * Driven by harmony and loses sight of the benefits of conflict and discussion.
- * Avoids confrontation at all costs even if she/he feels another person may be wrong.
- * May become superficial and flattering to a point of creating discomfort in others.
- * Can be too easily swayed by opinion.
- * Uses humor or horseplay inappropriately and/or to excess.
- * Charming and compromising to a fault.

LIFO -
Strengths and Weaknesses by Style

Development of Strategies for Moving Beyond Your Current
Level of Success

I Capitalize on Your Strengths

What strengths do you have based on your most preferred style that you would like to build on?

II Augment your Strengths

What strengths do you admire in others that you would like to build into your style?

III Extend Your Strengths

What strength do you find in your LEAST PREFERRED STYLE that you would like to build on? Look for ways to practice that strength in LOW RISK situations.

IV Control Your Excessive Use of Strengths

Identify situations you feel put you under stress. Think back and explore people, situations, and events that triggered your stress reactions. List some of them and look for patterns. When you find yourself in those situations again step back if you can before your reactions go too far.

1.

2.

3.

