

Are You Motivated by Information, People, Activities, Things or Places?

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Most people are motivated by either information, people, activities, things, or places. You are probably focused on one of these as well, and this explains why some people interest you, and others you find boring. This also explains why you hit it off with certain types of people and do not hit it off with others, and why you are attracted to certain jobs and activities more than others.

The rarest sort of person is the one who is interested primarily in information. For most of his life my grandfather woke up every morning and studied the day's news. He would read a variety of newspapers, cut out articles that interested him, organize the articles, and then spend the rest of the day writing his own column. He had started doing this when he was probably around 17 years old, and he continued in college, writing for the newspaper at the University of Michigan. Eventually his career blossomed as a writer with the Detroit News, and as a [radio personality](#) with a Detroit radio station, WJR. My grandfather became extremely well known doing this. He had his pictures plastered on the sides of buses, and advertisements on the radio and newspapers hyped his analysis of the news.

My grandfather spent his career doing this because he was so deeply interested in information, specifically foreign affairs, and loved studying and writing about this. He loved this so much that he worked literally until his fingers could no longer type. His fascination with studying information was so intense that for a time he was a general in the army who specialized in gathering intelligence. In addition, he spent a good portion of his career all over the world, writing in Paris and other areas about information that he learned.

Into his 80s, he used to give weekly speeches to people at the public library in Birmingham, Michigan, about various things he had learned. He spent most of his life studying and analyzing information, until the weeks before he died.

My grandfather's fascination made him a bit of a different person from many other people. Unless you were quite intellectual and interested in discussing information all the time you would not have found him all that interesting--and he probably would not have found you all that interesting either. In fact, he had few friends and preferred to spend most of his free time lecturing. He was more focused his entire life on acquiring information than

- doing things with people,
- acquiring material things like cars and houses,
- traveling,
- interacting with people and meeting new people.

He was what I would call, simply, an information person. Information people are primarily interested in things like

- learning and telling others about what they learn,
- investigating facts,
- reflecting on information and facts.

Most people are not interested in information to such a degree. You may know certain people who are interested in information, but there are actually few people like this in the world.

If you are someone who is interested in information primarily, you will have certain needs in your job. You will require lots of information at all times, you will want time to think and reflect on the information you are given, and you will want to be given problems to solve. This is a work style and the better you are at working like this, the better off you will be in your job. Some people need information in order to function effectively in their jobs, and others do not.

People who are focused on information to this degree typically have the fewest close friends. They are most likely to only befriend another rare person who is also interested in information.

I once heard my grandfather criticized for not having lots of close friends, not being interested in leaving the house, except to buy all sorts of exotic newspapers--and he was also praised for not being interested in purchasing things. If you are an information sort of person, it is important to be true to yourself and realize that you may not want to be in a job that requires a lot of travel, personal interaction, and so forth: You want to be in a job that makes use of your love and fascination with information.

When you look at many of the people who are more comfortable staying home and studying than going out, talking on the phone, spending money, and so forth, you will generally find an information-centric person. If you are this sort of person, it is important that you spend your time doing what you like and that you do not feel pressured to change. You are the person who you are on a deep and fundamental level, and you should embrace this.

While the information-centered person is the rarest, probably comprising less than 1 in every 10 people out there, the person-centered person probably comprises 1 in every 3 people out there. Someone who is person-centered is most interested in people. When you speak to these people, they will be very curious to hear information about other people, whoever they may be, and their conversations will be dominated by learning more about others. Those who are interested primarily in people will

- want to talk and speak with people a great deal,
- always talk about other people in their conversations,
- constantly want to be in social situations.

When I met my wife, she had just spent a year working inside of an [intellectual property law firm](#), with a boss who was an

information person, I believe. My wife fits the characteristics of a people person, as I described them above--to a 1. However, she had spent a year around a classic *information person*, and felt that she too should be the same way. She had started subscribing to magazines like the *Economist* and trying to discuss the articles that she read. This did not work, of course, because my wife was simply not acting like the person she was; in reality, she was not interested in the information she was reading, and her efforts to discuss it were in vain. My wife prefers to read magazines like *People*, for example.

While my wife loves parties and people, an information person does not. Each person is motivated by something different and, again, it is internal and deep-seated; neither person is going to change how they are.

- When you speak with people who are focused on people, their conversation will involve the people who were a part of their day or an event.
- They will want to show you pictures of their family and friends; they will typically have numerous pictures scattered throughout their office and home.
- If they hear about an event and are telling you about it, they will describe the people who were involved in the event more than the event itself.

For people who are focused on people, it is the quality of the relationships and people they are working with that is most important. Moreover, they want to work for people with whom they have good relationships. They are very concerned with morale at the office.

If you are a people person you need to understand that it is important for you to work where you can interact with other people, where morale is good, and where you can spend time with your coworkers both inside and outside of work. You also should be working for people you like. Because of your focus on the "people" part of work, it is important that you avoid working for people you do not like and could not be friends with. Many work environments are not like this, and you need to take extra care to find a compatible workplace for yourself.

The next most common sort of person is focused on doing things all the time. These sorts of people are always "out and about," focusing on doing various things. They love movement, whether it is driving somewhere or participating in an activity. These people do not like being still. For example, a vacation at the beach for two weeks with no activities planned is not something they would be interested in. Conversely, if the vacation involved constantly doing various things such as scuba diving, hiking, and a variety of activities each day, then they would greatly enjoy themselves.

Vacations are generally the time when the "true side" of people comes out.

- The *information* person will bring a ton of books with them and generally savor the free time to read.
- An *activity* person will view the vacation as an opportunity to engage in various activities and tours of the area, and will stay occupied with these sorts of things.
- A *people* person will view the vacation as a great opportunity to meet new people.

When you speak with people who are focused on activities, they will generally describe the activities they were involved in on one day or another and will focus the conversation on describing what various people were doing at one time or another. The homes and offices of people interested in activities are typically filled with signs of their activities, whether it is a trophy-fish on the wall or athletic gear in the closet.

In the workplace, someone who is focused on activities will generally be most interested in *doing*. For example, these types of people would not be happy sitting around, writing a brief in a law office day after day. They would not be happy being expected to think all day. Instead, it is important for them to be on the move, doing various things day in and day out. Activity people hate inactivity and are always looking for ways to stay occupied.

If you are an activity-focused person, it is important that you [find yourself a job](#) that involve lots of action and movement at all times, which does not involve a lot of idle activity. You may be happier outside of the office than inside the office. You may be uncomfortable sitting still for long periods of time.

I have known many people throughout the years who give seminars for a living. Some of these people spend less than a month at home each year, but they appear to love all of the movement from place to place that their jobs involve. This would be my absolute worst nightmare of a job, but for activity-based people, moving from city to city is exactly the sort of work they love to do. It is in their nature. One day I remember corresponding with a well-known seminar presenter, and I had looked at his business and I told him that he probably could make much more money selling courses online; plus, this way he could just work in one place. This was not what the person wanted to hear. This person was more interested on being "on the move," and making money was a secondary concern.

The next most common sort of person is the person who is most interested in various material objects. These people may be interested in what things cost, what things are, or the significance of various objects. Object-focused people may be collectors of things, and they tend to purchase things just because they want to have them--not necessarily because they need them. Object-oriented people love to purchase, collect, and exchange things.

I am sure you have known numerous people over the years who are focused on material objects. (In my experience you can find a lot of these people in New York City!) When you speak with people who are focused on objects and things,

- they often will describe various material objects they noticed throughout the day;
- they often will tell you about something they bought;
- they will often tell you about things that other people use or have.

Inside the homes and offices of these sorts of people, you will find a variety of material objects. If you go somewhere with an object-centered person, he or she will describe the objects there, such as the furniture, paintings, and so forth--and will dwell on this. When the person describes meeting people, he or she might describe what a given person was wearing and what was inside the room where the meeting took place.

I have met and managed many object-oriented people throughout my career. People who are focused on objects are interested in making money in order to purchase things. In some cases they even view working as a competition to earn the most money, in order to buy the most things.

If you are an object-oriented person, it is important that you are in a job that makes the most of your interests. For example, you might be interested in selling things and explaining their value to others. You might be interested in something that

requires you to keep a machine or computer updated. You are interested in jobs wherein you can make as much money as possible, in order to purchase things.

The final sort of person is someone who is interested in locations and spaces. Like the information person, this type of person is very rare. Someone who is interested in locations and spaces is interested in where things occur. Place-oriented people are focused on where they are going to be going at various times.

It is interesting, but my daughter who is less than three years old is someone who I think has this natural inclination, even at this young age. Her conversations are punctuated at all times with questions about where she is going, when she is going somewhere, whether we will be inside or outside, and so forth. This fascination with *place* is natural to her, the same way that a fascination with *people* or *information* is natural to other individuals.

When you speak with people concerned about place,

- they will want to tell you about where they went on a given day and will describe the place in detail;
- they will tell you where other people were on a given day;
- they will describe the ambiance of a particular place.

When I was in fifth grade, I had a teacher I am almost 100% confident was a place-oriented person, because all he ever did was show us slides, at least a few hours a month, of his various trips to Europe. He would describe all of these places in excruciating detail.

If you are most concerned with places, then you will typically be very concerned with working in locations that you like or that are convenient to you. You will also be the sort of person who believes that your productivity is tied to the location in which you work. You will place a large focus on the feel of the place where you are working, its physical attributes and geographical surroundings.

Understanding whether you are most interested in information, people, activities, things, or places can really help you zero in on what is important to you in your job, career, and life. The frustration you may have felt in past jobs or in your current job is likely related to whether or not you were in an environment that supported and nourished your natural inclinations and interests. In addition, the emphasis of your supervisor should ideally fit in with your particular leanings. From your work to the friends you choose, it is important that you understand that people typically are motivated by one of these elements or another. Your ultimate success will in large part be based on whether you stay true to this understanding.

THE LESSON

Determining whether you are most interested in information, people, places, or things can help you better understand your career and life priorities. Everyone's motivation is different, and their motivation places them in one of these categories. These are deep-seated personality types, among which there is no intermingling, and each has its positive and negative points. You must find a work environment in which your natural inclinations and interests are nourished.

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