



# THE THIRD WINDOW

## THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS

### Finding our inner fire, air, water and earth

From the basic elements of Fire, Air, Water and Earth come four basic human temperaments.

#### FIRE

People with a fiery temperament often behave in a fiery way. Passionate, forceful, quick to anger, quick to forgive, they are often eager to take on leadership positions.



#### WATER

People with a watery temperament are calm and relaxed, low-key, easygoing and patient – if a bit slow for others.



#### AIR

Cheerful, positive, talkative and optimistic, people of an airy temperament love to juggle tasks, but sometimes drop the ball.



#### EARTH

Cautious, serious, sensitive and critical, people with an earthy temperament can be overly critical of self and others.



## Introduction

The model of the Four Temperaments has been around for a long time. Its origins go back to ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, but it was not formalised until around 400BC when it was linked by ancient Greek physicians to the theory of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire. Hippocrates developed this linkage into the theory of the Four Humours. He believed that some human behaviours were caused by bodily fluids (which he called “humours”). The four humours are blood, (yellow) bile, black bile and phlegm. Although this theory has largely been discredited by the medical establishment, the archetype of the Four Humours, linked to the Four Temperaments and the Four Elements, has stood the test of time. The model of the the Four Temperaments (Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic and Phlegmatic) continues to prove useful in a variety of contexts.

**Sanguine (or sanguinous)** is linked to blood, to the season of spring (wet and hot) and the element of Air.

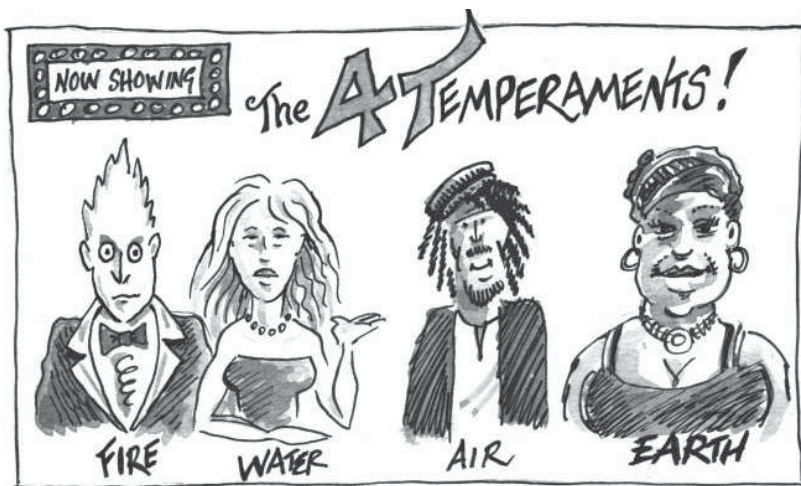
**Choleric (or bilious)** is linked to yellow bile, to the season of summer (dry and hot), and the element of Fire.

**Melancholic** is linked with black bile, with the season of autumn (dry and cold) and the element of Earth.

**Phlegmatic** is linked with phlegm, with the season of winter (wet and cold), and the element of Water.

The Four Temperaments can be very useful in helping us to understand ourselves and each other. It also helps us to appreciate, celebrate and make use of the gifts we have, and those of the people we work with.

However, we should be careful to avoid stereotyping ourselves and those around us. Remember, by nature we are complex and a combination of many things. The Four Temperaments is only one window through which to see people.



## An overview of the 4 temperaments

**FIRE** – The Fire temperament is also thought of as Choleric. People of this temperament are energetic, ambitious and passionate, and often want to instill these values in others. They tend to be doers and as leaders are dynamic and independent, but can be compulsive. They are principled and decisive and want to be right, not popular. Confident and independent, they are not easily discouraged, but can be impatient and quick to anger. At work they tend to be highly goal orientated, with good judgment and decision-making skills. They may be impatient with meetings and other members of staff though, and can be blind to their effect on people around them.

**AIR** – The Air temperament is also known as Sanguine. Air indicates a personality that is cheerful, talkative and entertaining. Air people are fun-loving and enthusiastic, with good people-skills and a confident and spontaneous flare. They are emotional and demonstrative by nature, but can tend towards arrogance and self-indulgence. At work they provide a positive atmosphere and often volunteer to help out. However they can be day dreamers and battle to complete work, juggling many tasks at once. Their creative and enthusiastic energy can inspire others, but they tend to lose focus on the task when the novelty wears off.

**WATER** – The Water temperament represents a Phlegmatic personality. People of this temperament are relaxed and easy going. They stay calm and quiet for the most part and can be thought of as all-purpose and able. Although they are slow to anger, if pushed too far they can be explosive. At work they are steady and have a good sense of process and timing. They are good mediators and work well under pressure, but need deadlines to work towards. They sometimes find it hard to be heard in the workplace and will avoid conflict.

**EARTH** – The Earth temperament is also known as Melancholic. They are deep and thoughtful people who appreciate beauty and are sensitive towards others. They can be philosophical and poetic, self-sacrificing and conscientious. They can become easily depressed and self-critical. They tend to be principled and idealistic. At work they are goal orientated and well organised, with very high standards, keeping their work spaces neat and tidy. They ask difficult questions and are persistent and thorough, being conscious of detail. They can find creative solutions but expect the worst. They may resist change if there is no good precedent.

## SOME IDEAS FOR WORKING WITH THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS MODEL

The model provides workshop participants with a wonderful language for talking about their individual differences and similarities. It has helped many people relax about tense relationships that they experience at work, to appreciate themselves more and to assert themselves more confidently. The model can help to contribute to a more thoughtful and tolerant workplace culture.

The model may also be used when choosing new staff members. It should not be seen as a New Age equivalent of the barrage of psychometric tests that corporate organisations use, but rather as a more gentle set of guidelines as to how people are likely to fit in with the other people that they would be working with.

Chapter 6 has some ideas of how different temperaments respond to change.

### A fun Exercise

Try this! Brainstorm all words that you associate with each of the four elements: fire, air, water and earth.... Then ask yourself which of these also describe human qualities. You may come up with words like passionate (fire), cool (water), deep (earth), light (air). Which words more closely describe your qualities?

# The temperaments chart



## PLEASE REMEMBER

- Most people have two dominant temperaments, and one temperament that is much less present. It is the temperaments that are least present that will often help a person find their challenges, e.g. strong water temperaments are often challenged to find their fire, what they really want.
- Temperaments should be used to appreciate the gifts we have and those of others. They can also help us identify our challenges, but should not be used to negatively judge self or others.
- Sometimes your mix of temperaments is hidden by behaviours that were forced on you or adopted as a child, or by sickness or depression. Trying to find your mix of temperaments may take time.
- Functional organisations can really benefit from having a good diversity of temperaments, as they will complement each other in many ways.

# The four temperaments at work: tips and challenges

## TIPS FOR PEOPLE OF FIERY TEMPERAMENT

- Try to be conscious of your own power and how you affect others emotionally.
- Respect the gifts of other temperaments, especially those that are more careful, less decisive or slow.
- Allow for processes to happen; don't be quick to judge – wait for wider participation.



## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FIERY PEOPLE

- Get straight to the point with them. Be clear and decisive.
- Bring good arguments forward supported by facts and details.
- Don't complain unless absolutely necessary.
- Be prepared to be challenged.
- Think through consequences and back up plans.
- Help them see the need to bring others on board.

## TIPS FOR PEOPLE OF AIRY TEMPERAMENT

- Follow through and be complete and comprehensive.
- Find and identify internal and external boundaries.
- Listen deeply and carefully.



## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH AIRY PEOPLE

- Be informal and relaxed, don't rush straight to the point.
- Create a positive mood conducive to work.
- Give and facilitate vivid images.
- Don't be too structured.
- Give limits and outlines to change.
- Hold them to deadlines.

## TIPS FOR PEOPLE OF EARTHY TEMPERAMENT

- Look beyond the self.
- Look for the lighter side of things.
- Be more self-forgiving



## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH EARTHY PEOPLE

- Accept that change will be difficult for them to easily accept.
- Find experiences that link with the new situation.
- Acknowledge and don't begrudge the difficulties of working with the person.
- Give full descriptions of alternative plans you suggest, including their reasons and problems (if there are any).
- Don't be overly positive without reason.
- Use reverse psychology; sometimes feeding resistance and negativity will provoke them to be more positive.

## TIPS FOR PEOPLE OF WATERY TEMPERAMENT

- Find your fire!
- Be more action orientated and decisive.
- Pay closer attention to the product.



## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH WATERY PEOPLE

- Take your time, don't rush through things.
- Be clear and careful.
- Give important information without too much extraneous detail.
- Give alternatives, as well as time for consideration.
- Don't expect immediate answers, have patience.
- Understand that when the time is right they will move.