

# Portrait of an ISTP

## Introverted Sensing Thinking Perceiving (Introverted Thinking with Extraverted Sensing)

### *The Mechanic*

As an ISTP, your primary mode of living is focused internally, where you deal with things rationally and logically. Your secondary mode is external, where you take things in via your five senses in a literal, concrete fashion.

ISTP's have a compelling drive to understand the way things work. They're good at logical analysis, and like to use it on practical concerns. They typically have strong powers of reasoning, although they're not interested in theories or concepts unless they can see a practical application. They like to take things apart and see the way they work.

ISTP's have an adventuresome spirit. They are attracted to motorcycles, airplanes, sky diving, surfing, etc. They thrive on action, and are usually fearless. ISTP's are fiercely independent, needing to have the space to make their own decisions about their next step. They do not believe in or follow rules and regulations, as this would prohibit their ability to "do their own thing". Their sense of adventure and desire for constant action makes ISTP's prone to becoming bored rather quickly.

ISTP's are loyal to their causes and beliefs, and are firm believers that people should be treated with equity and fairness. Although they do not respect the rules of the "System", they follow their own rules and guidelines for behavior faithfully. They will not take part in something which violates their personal laws. ISTP's are extremely loyal and faithful to their "brothers".

ISTP's like and need to spend time alone, because this is when they can sort things out in their minds most clearly. They absorb large quantities of impersonal facts from the external world, and sort through those facts, making judgments, when they are alone.

ISTP's are action-oriented people. They like to be up and about, doing things. They are not people to sit behind a desk all day and do long-range planning. Adaptable and spontaneous, they respond to what is immediately before them. They usually have strong technical skills, and can be effective technical leaders. They focus on details and practical things. They have an excellent sense of expediency and grasp of the details which enables them to make quick, effective decisions.

ISTP's avoid making judgments based on personal values - they feel that judgments and decisions should be made impartially, based on the fact. They are not naturally tuned in to how they are affecting others. They do not pay attention to their own feelings, and even distrust them and try to ignore them, because they have difficulty distinguishing

between emotional reactions and value judgments. This may be a problem area for many ISTP's.

An ISTP who is over-stressed may exhibit rash emotional outbursts of anger, or on the other extreme may be overwhelmed by emotions and feelings which they feel compelled to share with people (often inappropriately). An ISTP who is down on themselves will foray into the world of value judgments - a place which is not natural for the ISTP - and judge themselves by their inability to perform some task. They will then approach the task in a grim emotional state, expecting the worst.

ISTP's are excellent in a crisis situations. They're usually good athletes, and have very good hand-eye coordination. They are good at following through with a project, and tying up loose ends. They usually don't have much trouble with school, because they are introverts who can think logically. They are usually patient individuals, although they may be prone to occasional emotional outbursts due to their inattention to their own feelings.

ISTP's have a lot of natural ability which makes them good at many different kinds of things. However, they are happiest when they are centered in action-oriented tasks which require detailed logical analysis and technical skill. They take pride in their ability to take the next correct step.

ISTP's are optimistic, full of good cheer, loyal to their equals, uncomplicated in their desires, generous, trusting and receptive people who want no part in confining commitments.

**Jungian functional preference ordering:**

Dominant: Introverted Thinking

Auxiliary: Extraverted Sensing

Tertiary: Introverted Intuition

Inferior: Extraverted Feeling

**ISTP's generally have the following traits:**

- Interested in how and why things work
- Do not function well in regimented, structured environments; they will either feel stifled or become intensely bored
- Constantly gather facts about their environment and store them away
- Have an excellent ability to apply logic and reason to their immense store of facts to solve problems or discover how things work
- Learn best "hands-on"
- Usually able to master theory and abstract thinking, but don't particularly like dealing with it unless they see a practical application
- Action-oriented "doers"
- Focused on living in the present, rather than the future
- Love variety and new experiences
- Highly practical and realistic

- Excellent "trouble-shooters", able to quickly find solutions to a wide variety of practical problems
- Results-oriented; they like to see immediate results for their efforts
- Usually laid-back and easy-going with people
- Risk-takers who thrive on action
- Independent and determined - usually dislike committing themselves
- Usually quite self-confident

The ISTP is fortunate because they have the abilities to be good at many different kinds of tasks. Their introverted and thinking preferences give them the ability to concentrate and work through problems which leaves many doors open to them. However, to be happiest, the ISTP needs to lead a lifestyle which offers a great deal of autonomy and does not include much external enforcement of structure. ISTP's will do best working for themselves, or working in very flexible environments. Their natural interests lie towards applying their excellent reasoning skills against known facts and data to discover underlying structure, or solutions to practical questions.

### **ISTP Relationships**

ISTP's are generally extremely capable individuals who are good at most things which interest them. They are usually bright, interesting, and exciting individuals with a lot to offer. They live almost entirely in the present moment, and usually do not make commitments beyond the immediate foreseeable future. An ISTP probably coined the phrase "nothing is unconditional". They strongly prefer to take things one day at a time, rather than make long-term commitments. If a relationship interests them and satisfies their needs, the ISTP will do their part on a daily basis to keep the relationship strong and healthy. If they lose interest in a relationship, their natural tendency will be to move on.

### **ISTP Strengths**

- Good listeners
- Usually self-confident
- Generally optimistic and fun to be with
- Practical and realistic, they handle daily concerns
- Are not threatened by conflict or criticism
- Able to leave a relationship with relative ease once it is over
- Able to administer punishment, although they're not interested in doing so
- Likely to respect other's needs for space and privacy

### **ISTP Weaknesses**

- Living entirely in the present, they have difficulty with long-term commitments
- Not naturally good at expressing feelings and emotions
- Not tuned in to what others are feeling, they may be insensitive at times
- Tendency to be overly private and hold back part of themselves
- Need a lot of personal space, which they don't like to have invaded
- They thrive on action and excitement, and may stir things up to create it

### **What does Success mean to an ISTP?**

People with the ISTP personality type are action-oriented thinkers. They are highly tuned into their immediate environment, and driven to interact with it in a hands-on fashion. It is by working with things in their environment that they experience and understand life. By working physically with their environment, they have a natural and immediate understanding of how things work, and how best to achieve their identified goals. Although they constantly use logic to determine how to best manipulate objects in their immediate situation, they are not naturally analytical in a more objective sense. When they step back to methodically analyze the relationship between objects in their world, they often lose touch with their understanding. Their understanding is intimately tied into their physical experience with reality. It is immediate and holistic. They are naturally "in-sync" with the physical world, and value life largely in terms of their ability to flow with and conquer the physical challenges presented to them. Although they think about and value past experiences, they live almost entirely in the here and now. ISTP's are natural mechanics, athletes, musicians, technicians, and engineers. They excel at tasks that require a great deal of tactile mastery, as well as quick, logic-based action. ISTP's are most comfortable using their known skills, rather than being thrown into situations with which they have no personal experience. The nuances of variation in each individual situation will bring a sense of newness and freshness to the experience for the ISTP. ISTP's often resist and rebel situations that are entirely new, or that require a great deal of structured planning and thinking. This way of thinking is foreign to the ISTP, and therefore uncomfortable. When someone tries to push or control the ISTP into these situations, he or she is likely to "walk away" from that person without looking back. Their resistance to structure may cause them to quit school early, quit jobs that they find stifling, or quit relationships that have too many expectations. ISTP's are often likeable and have more friends and social interaction than is normal for an Introvert. The ISTP genuinely enjoys the company of their friends, and needs their input in his or her physical world to maintain their understanding of their own place in the world. An ISTP's feeling of success is dependent primarily upon their mastery of their physical world, but is also dependent upon the existence of strong, reliable, interpersonal relationships. Without these relationships, the ISTP is likely to avoid relationships, isolate him or herself, and feel very vulnerable to rejection and hurt.

### **Allowing Your ISTP Strengths to Flourish**

As an ISTP, you have gifts that are specific to your personality type that aren't natural strengths for other types. By recognizing your special gifts and encouraging their growth and development, you will more readily see your place in the world, and be more content with your role.

Nearly all ISTP's will recognize the following characteristics in themselves. They should embrace and nourish these strengths:

- They have a natural ability to focus and "become one" with their immediate environment. This ability allows them to be great athletes, dancers, and musicians. They have an innately graceful connection with the physical world.
- They are highly in tune with their physical surroundings, and therefore have well-developed aesthetic appreciation. They appreciate beauty. If they are so inclined,

they may develop their ability to control the physical world into some form of art expression, and become artists.

- They are exceptional troubleshooters in emergency situations. They can quickly take in the current situation and apply logic immediately to take steps that control the problem. Since the ISTP's use of logic is based on their personal experience, their ability to troubleshoot will get better and better as they gain more experience. For this reason, ISTP's who are mechanics, technicians, and computer analysts (for example) often achieve "guru" status after they have been working in the field for a long time.
- They're very sensual and earthy people. They usually a good deal of sex appeal and attractive sensuality.

ISTP's who have developed their Extraverted Sensing to the extent that they regularly take in information in an objective fashion, rather than strictly to support their own way of life, will enjoy these very special gifts:

- They have attractive and compelling personalities, and are well-liked and accepted by most people.
- They're usually quite intelligent, and can work through difficult problems.
- They understand the benefits of close relationships, and understand how to support and enhance these relationships.
- They can handle just about any task that they are presented with.

### **Potential Problem Areas**

With any gift of strength, there is an associated weakness. Without "bad", there would be no "good". Without "difficult", there would be no "easy". We value our strengths, but we often curse and ignore our weaknesses. To grow as a person and get what we want out of life, we must not only capitalize upon our strengths, but also face our weaknesses and deal with them. That means taking a hard look at our personality type's potential problem areas.

Most of the weaker characteristics that are found in ISTP's are due to their dominant function of Introverted Thinking overtaking the personality to the point that all of the other functions exist merely to serve the purposes of Introverted Thinking. In such cases, an ISTP may show some or all of the following weaknesses in varying degrees:

- The ISTP gets "stuck in a rut" and only does those things that are known and comfortable to the ISTP.
- The ISTP resists and rejects anything that doesn't support their own experiential understanding of the world. If there is a conflict between their own way of life and something that they encounter, they don't perceive that "something" in an objective sense. Rather, they reject it to avoid conflict and to preserve the sanctity of their inner world.
- They choose to surround themselves with people who support their own way of life, and reject people who think or live differently.
- They may become overly paranoid about social organizations and institutions trying to control them.
- They may unknowingly or uncaringly hurt people's feelings.

- They may be completely unaware of how to express their inner world to others in a meaningful way.
- They may be completely unaware of the type of communication that is often desirable and (to some degree) expected in an intimate relationship. If they are aware of the kinds of things that are appropriate to say and do to foster emotional bonding, they may be unable to appreciate the value of such actions. They may feel too vulnerable to express themselves in this fashion, and so reject the entire idea.
- If pushed beyond their comfort level to form commitments or emotional bonds, they may reject a relationship entirely.
- Under stress, they may show intense emotions that seem disproportionate to the situation.

### **Explanation of Problems**

Nearly all of the problematic characteristics described above can be attributed in various degrees to the common ISTP problem of only taking in information that relates to or supports their own life experience. The ISTP is driven to work with and understand his or her world by applying their special brand of logic (an immediate, spatial, "fuzzy" logic) to their physical experience. They don't necessarily have a goal in mind to achieve from this process - it is the process itself that is rewarding to the ISTP. In their zeal for the satisfaction that comes from mastering their physical environment in such a way, ISTP's often selectively choose to put themselves in situations in which they have the opportunity to exercise these skills. That's certainly not a problem. Most personality types choose to do the things that they're best at most often. Such is the nature of capitalizing upon our strengths. The problem rears its ugly head when the goal of the ISTP becomes to achieve their personal satisfaction at all costs.

It is healthy to choose your paths and goals in life so that they coincide with what you find rewarding, and what you're really good at. However, it sometimes happens that we take this approach a bit too far and sacrifice an accurate and objective understanding of the world for a more narrow vision that is easier and comfortable for us to deal with. The ISTP affects this problem when they stop taking in information in a truly objective sense, and instead only take in information that supports their way of life.

The dominant function of the ISTP is Introverted Thinking. This function is supported closely and importantly by the auxiliary function of Extraverted Sensing. Extraverted Sensing perceives the world and sends information into the psyche, where it is processed by Introverted Thinking. An ISTP who uses their Extraverted Sensing function in a diminished way is one who chooses to restrict their environment to people and places that support their favored activities. In such a way, the ISTP prevents his or her psyche from having to consider data from differing viewpoints and lifestyles, and thus promotes a lifestyle that allows them to frequently exercise and enhance their known tactile skills. It serves their immediate needs, which are the primary focus of the ISTP. However, it also promotes a lifestyle that is essentially self-centered and narrow in focus. It solves short-term problems, and creates long-term ones.

The ISTP's inferior (fourth) function is Extraverted Feeling. This means that the ISTP is not naturally in tune with how other people are feeling, or with social expectations. In fact, the ISTP is likely to reject the importance of social rituals, rules, and expectations. This is a natural weak point for the ISTP, which no doubt causes strife to the ISTP and their love partner. This weakness can be overcome by developing their Extraverted Sensing to the point that they can perceive Feeling type expectations in the external world. They don't have to use Extraverted Feeling to understand how to act in situations. They can perceive the expected behavior from their Extraverted Sensing function. However, if they are restricting their incoming data to only those things that support their existing way of life, then they are not learning from Extraverted Sensing at all. They are not growing their understanding of social and intimate behaviors - rather, they are reducing the importance of this type of understanding to their own life. In these situations, ISTP's shy away from very close personal relationships, and feel more vulnerable and less sure of themselves in situations that involve expressing their emotions.

### **Solutions**

To grow as an individual, the ISTP needs to focus on taking in as much information as possible through Extraverted Sensing. He or she needs to allow themselves to get into situations that they aren't necessarily comfortable with, or that are different from the situations that they would normally choose in life. The ISTP learns from experience, so the best way for the ISTP to grow as a person is to open him or herself to new experiences. Be aware of the tendency to want to run out and do something "new" that is actually just a different opportunity to exercise a known skill. Your task, as a person interested in personal growth, is to understand the world in a truly objective fashion, rather than understanding how the world fits in with your way of life.

### **Living Happily in our World as an ISTP**

ISTP's usually have a loyal group of friends that they fit in with and feel comfortable with. The problems that ISTP's have with regards to fitting into our world are not usually related to platonic friendships. Usually, the ISTP has trouble finding and maintaining a love relationship. The ISTP usually has very simple needs and expectations from their mates, and they're surprised and confused to find that their mates have more complex demands. They feel inadequate to meeting their mate's needs, and begin to get very uncomfortable with the situation as they perceive that they are expected to do something that is unknown to them. They back away from the relationship. Outside of a relationship, they feel more unloved and unappreciated, but are afraid to commit to a relationship because they fear rejection and hurt.

### **Specific suggestions:**

Don't expect yourself to be a master at the "touchy-feely" game. Be yourself, but remember that there is a basic assumption of human decency that must be adhered to in relationships. If you're not sure what that means, take special care to observe how people in "good" committed relationships behave towards each other, so that you can determine where the lines are drawn.

Pair yourself with an Extraverted Thinker (ESTJ or ENTJ) who is less likely to assume that the lack of feedback is the same thing as negative feedback.

Expanding your world and experiences will expand your understanding of human expectations. Try to figure out the personality type of people that you know and encounter in your life.

Don't fear the unknown. You can handle it.

### **Ten Rules to Live By to Achieve ISTP Success**

1. **Feed Your Strengths!** Realize your gift at mastering your physical environment, and give yourself plenty of opportunities to exercise your abilities. Ride, play, paint, work it. Much of your sense of well-being will come from these experiences.
2. **Face Your Weaknesses!** Face your fear of the unknown, and get yourself into new situations. Experience new activities and people with new perspectives. Don't isolate yourself into a narrow and lonely existence.
3. **Talk About Your Thoughts.** Discussing your ideas and perceptions with others will help you to develop your Extraverted Sensing, and thus your understanding of the world. How well you use your auxiliary function is very important to your overall health and happiness.
4. **Don't Be Afraid to Love.** That's just your old inferior function trying to convince you that you're unloved and unlovable. It's not true. Just because you're not sure what to do with yourself doesn't mean that you can't learn! Go on... jump in. The water's warm.
5. **Respect Your Need for Action.** Understand that you need to be actively working with your environment to be "in the groove" with life. Don't chastise yourself for not being the sort to sit around and read a book or watch a movie. Choose a partner and companions who value active lifestyles.
6. **Recognize Social Principles.** Realize that our society functions around some basic social principles, and that our society would fail unless those principles are recognized and upheld. In a democracy, people vote. At a red stoplight, people stop. If people stopped voting because it wasn't important to their own way of life, who would be in power? If people stopped stopping at red stop lights because it didn't fit into their way of life, how could we drive safely? Your priorities and beliefs are important, but you must recognize that the external world's agenda is also important. Don't dismiss the importance of principles that don't affect your life directly.
7. **It's OK to Get Out of your Comfort Zone.** Understand that the only way to grow is to get outside of your comfort zone. If you're uncomfortable with an idea or situation because you're not sure how to act, that's good! That's an opportunity for growth.
8. **Identify and Express Your Feelings.** You may have a hard time figuring out exactly how you feel about someone that you're involved with. It's important that you do figure this out. Don't lead someone on with your ambivalence. If you determine that you value the person, tell them so every time you think of it. This

- is the best way to make them feel secure in your affections, and so to promote a long-lasting relationship.
9. Be Aware of Others. Try to really identify where people are coming from. Their ideas, thoughts and priorities are different from yours. They have something to offer you. Try to identify their personality types.
  10. Assume the Best. Don't distress yourself with fear and dark imaginings. Expect the best, and the best will come.

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