



Are You Igniting Your Own Burnout? **By Kathy Kolbe**

- You're a scientist who's trying to hurry the conclusions on an experiment before the grant money runs out.
- Or you're a secretary who's told to ignore office procedures to accommodate this new project.
- Or you're a carpenter who's told to use leftover material on a mass-produced subdivision.
- Or you're an entrepreneur who's latest failure makes you vow, "I'll never do that again - next time I'll do my homework before I take the risk."

All of you are suffering from the same problem - it's just a different spin. You're all trying to work against your grain. You're working outside your natural method - the way that's appropriate for you.

You're fighting your instincts.

The end result is obvious: You're stressed. You may feel so much stress, you resort to the common signals that you can't take it anymore: you procrastinate to avoid the task altogether; you get fatigued and weary; you get sick so you don't have to show up at the office at all. Sometimes, you quit. The first thing you do is blame the source of your discomfort - the boss who's too demanding, the bureaucrat who doesn't appreciate thorough science, the foreman who's only interested in the bottom-line, the fickle marketplace that didn't respond to your last bright idea. In fact, most people spend an enormous amount of energy - much of it in the wee hours when they're too stressed to sleep - on these blame them sessions. But there comes a point, after you've kicked the proverbial dog around the block that you want to kick yourself for letting the mess happen. The bad news is that the same stressful scenario will happen again and again if you continue to respond "out of synch" with your instincts. The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. Fashioning your job to your instinctive talents is not only doable; it's imperative to stop the stress cycle.

Human instinct is the most misunderstood, understudied, and undervalued part of our makeup. Common sense tells us we have instincts. "If I'd have just followed my gut feeling," is an often-heard lament, just as "my gut tells me" is used regularly to justify a decision. When you think back, your best decisions came when you went with your instincts, and your worse mistakes occurred

when you ignored them. So it's not only surprising, but also amusing, that science claims humans don't even have instincts. For centuries, the idea that instincts were definable, measurable and a crucial component of human action has been debunked by some of the best minds the world has ever known. "Man is indeed devoid of instinct," philosopher Lindley Kimp proclaimed in the 1800s. "He observes and reflects, and acts in accordance to the decisions of his mind." It became a tenet of science that what separated mankind from the lower animals is that we weren't governed by instinct, but by reason. Even those few philosophers who did acknowledge human instinct, saw it only narrowly: Freud thought instinct was confined to sex and death; Jung added the herd and nutritional instincts; Woodworth found 110 instincts under the general headings of organic needs, responses to others, and play instincts. By 1926, even these limited views were too much for Luther L. Bernard. He went so far as to say that since instincts - whatever they might be - weren't visible, they weren't appropriate for scientific study. His criticisms were instrumental in turning modern scholars away once again from the study of instinct.

By that time, Alfred Binet had discovered how to measure intellect. IQ testing became the rage, both in education and the workplace. How old were you when you first realized the "smart" kids got the prestigious teacher-pet jobs, while the "dumb" kids got to clean erasers? You don't have to be a career counselor to know the "smart" applicants get the best-paying jobs and the best run at the career ladder.

Most career counseling takes only motivation and reason into account. Do you want or need the job? Are you smart enough to do the job? Nobody ever asks the third question that will determine if you and the job are a good match. Nobody asks if you have the right instincts to do the job.

And that's why the stress cycle starts so early and is so pervasive in today's workplace. It is impossible to receive effective career guidance when neither you nor the advisor understands what compels you to do what you do. Through skills testing, professional counselors can tell you what you are smart enough to learn. Through personality testing, they can tell you what jobs you would like. However, without a test to measure instinct, they have not been able to tell you what you will do best. One career advisor even told me, "Regardless of what we say, finding the right career fit is mostly a matter of luck." No, it's not.

With an understanding of instinct, you can create a fit as perfect as a custom-tailored suit. When you find a career that matches your instinctive talents, it not only offers you the freedom to be yourself - my personal definition of success - but also pays you for the pleasure. There's no paycheck big enough to compensate you for the misery and stress of being in a job that forces you to work against your instinctive grain.

I've spent more than 20 years studying instincts and developed a simple "test" that measures human instinct. I've done all this without advanced degrees or scientific grants. But I've done it the way all pioneering work is done - I've followed my instincts. I learned to trust my instincts early because I'm both dyslectic and disgraphic: words are backwards, directions make no sense. I knew I couldn't do things the same way as other kids did, but I also knew the limitations I heard early - you'll never be a writer, you'll never run a business - were nonsense. I had a natural ability to express myself and I never lacked for ideas about new approaches. I was lucky in that I was encouraged to find my own way by my father, who founded the field of personnel testing in the 1930s with his Wonderlic Personnel Test. For three decades, it was hard to get a good job in this country without scoring well on my Dad's IQ-based test. I remember arguing with him early on that intelligence wasn't everything. I was smart, but I didn't do things the "right" way. He acknowledged there was more than intelligence. But he lamented the point I'd later find science has always hidden behind: We don't know how to measure it - whatever "it" was.

I made that my life's work - figuring out what "it" was. In my first business, I published educational material for gifted children. I found children were in touch with their natural talents; they were still free enough to tap into the energy reserves I came to know as instincts. Children have yet to be so over-taught, so overtrained that they ignore their natural traits. By the time they get to be adults, they're "too smart" to listen to their gut instincts anymore. Eventually I expanded my study into adults, finding identical instinctive traits I identified in children, were still present - and still governing behavior.

I've now conducted more than 500,000 case studies around the world. I'm using the instinctive approach with hundreds of companies to help them hire, assign, and manage their employees. The results have been startling. CEOs who should never have taken a new job that forced them to work against their grain have given up the promotion. Companies have reassigned people they never would have considered for a job when the instinct test convinced them the fit was perfect. People have abandoned jobs they had all the smarts to do, but not the instincts. People have reorganized their jobs to fit their instinctive strengths. And the bottom line for all this is that both the employer and the employee are happier and more productive.

I've found there are four "Striving Instincts" - definable, measurable, predictable instincts that so identify behavior, they're like mental fingerprints. Understanding human instincts - what they are and where you fit - is the single most significant tool in achieving success and ending the stress cycle. The four Striving Instincts are:

- Fact Finder: these types probe, study, and investigate.
- Follow Thru: these types need patterns, structure, and clear systems.
- Quick Start: these types thrive on new ideas, taking chances, and chaos.

- Implementor: these types need hands-on activities and quality control.

None of us are "boxed" into one single instinct. We have talents in all four, but our talents are expressed very differently.

I've found there are three ways we use each instinct: We initiate or insist action; we accommodate or respond to action; or we resist or prevent action. When we initiate action in a particular instinctive mode that tells us how we will act. When we accommodate, that tells us how we can act if we need to. And when we resist, it tells us how we won't act. It's a given that a person who is insistent in Fact Finder will never have enough information, while a person who is resistant in Fact Finder could care less about the data. It's a given that a person who is insistent in Follow Thru must find closure, while a person who is resistant in Follow Thru can't stand structure. It's a given that a person who is insistent in Quick Start will experiment, while a person who is resistant in Quick Start wants predictability. It's a given that a person who is insistent in Implementor will tinker, while a person who is resistant in Implementor is a klutz.

How about our scientist who is stressed out by trying to reach conclusions before the grant runs out? She's insistent in Fact Finder. How much less stress will she feel if she acknowledges that she'll never have every shred of information she'd like to have? Will she be able to let go of that compelling urge to conduct one more experiment or take the statistics to one more decimal point? She's headed toward burnout unless she does. But she can also use the knowledge of her instinctive drive to lessen the stress cycle. She can start by redefining the issues. Maybe the scope of the project is too big for the time allowed; maybe she can compromise and take the stats to the second decimal point, rather than the third; maybe she needs to learn it's okay to hedge with modifying words, such as "at this point" or "based on the available information." There will always be the drive for a person insistent in Fact Finder to be thorough, to be appropriate, to have historical evidence, to investigate in depth. The key is to use those instinctive urges to benefit the project, not drive the project manager crazy.

Take our secretary who is forced to bounce between several demands at one time due to the chaotic nature of her workplace. She's insistent in Follow Thru and she suffers horribly in this atmosphere. People who are insistent in Follow Thru need structure. They keep their desks neat and files in order. They like routine and ritual in their workdays. How many times have you watched people who come in each day and go through the same routines before they begin their tasks? Interrupt them and you've thrown them off, sometimes for the whole day. They don't want things out of sequence. Those insistent in Follow Thru are the ones you want around when you need to finish a job. They demand closure. They'll invariably have a checklist of things to do and will need to check things off. A long list still undone at the end of the day spells stress for them. It makes them feel as if they aren't doing their jobs. People who are insistent in Follow Thru need to carefully define their "to-do" list. They need to finish one part

of the project before they move on to the next part. If they're forced to keep several parts open at once - finding no closure until the entire project is completed - the stress will be too severe. They need to learn to say: "That's not on my list to do." And mean it.

Take our entrepreneur who has every intention of being thorough and precise next time. He's a person who is insistent in Quick Start. And all the best intentions in the world won't change his behavior - next time a great idea comes along, he'll lunge at it the same way he lunged at the one he's lamenting for its failure. The important thing for a person who is insistent in Quick Start is the freedom to do several things at once - and be able to fail at several. These are people who learn by trial and error. If it didn't work, they need to move on and not get bogged down. Instead of seeing failure as a negative, it's seen as instructive of all the things that were learned and the benefits of knowing what won't work. For people who are insistent in Quick Start, it's about moving, not necessarily about where they're going. They take a path because it's there. Frequently, people insistent in Quick Start will say "let's talk about this," and launch into a brainstorming session without an agenda. They have little concern for the past, but see everything in terms of its impact on the future. They're verbal, able to sell ideas and products. The problem for people who initiate in Quick Start is they scare everyone else. Their lack of historical information will drive a person insistent in Fact Finder through the roof - "what's your basis for this idea?" Their lack of concern for how the idea gets done will give the willies to a person who is insistent in Follow-Thru. Their verbal descriptions, which suffice for them, will leave a person who initiates in Implementor cold. People who initiate in Quick Start need to understand that they need to watch their black-and-white-type of hyperbole. They need to tone things down enough to convince others that even though there's a risk, it's a "manageable risk." And they need to go off on their own and try things out, without telling everyone everything they're doing or every wild idea they're considering. Otherwise, they're either seen as "going off on a tangent again," or being a "big talker" who never really delivers the goods.

Then there's our carpenter who's forced to use leftover materials for a mass-produced subdivision. She's a person who is insistent in Implementor. Her instinctive needs for quality work and detailed crafts are being squashed. Those who initiate in Implementor cannot be confined. Give them a small office with no ability to move around and you've assured they'll be miserable. Instead they need, at the least, a window in their offices and at best, access to the outdoors. Give them a cellular phone while you're at it, because they have trouble sitting at a desk. Never make them sit in a long meeting - they'll literally jump out of their seats. Never ask them to make a verbal report. Instead, they'll build a three-dimensional model. They communicate with props, not hyperbole. People who are insistent in Implementor are the least understood and least rewarded of all the instincts. Education doesn't know what to do with kids who demand hands-on experiences and can't stand the boring routine of the

classroom. One of my consultants who's studying instinctive issues with schoolchildren says flatly, "Education is killing Implementor kids." A child who's "mechanically-minded," as it's often described, is automatically channeled into job training courses, not college prep. The same thing happens to these people when they get to be adults. They're seen as aloof and uncommunicative. They feel out of synch with how most others do things. But they're used to being the first stop for a colleague who needs something fixed. These are the people you need when you want to be sure the product will get built - and will work. The point should be clear. You're igniting your own burnout when you let someone force you to work against your grain. You're extinguishing your own burnout when you demand the freedom to be yourself.