



Are You a Type A-agency?

Exploring the Myths Surrounding PR Agency Personality Types

by Louise Armstrong

Psychologists use personality types to categorize the way that people receive and process information. People who fall into the Type A category tend to be strict, rigid perfectionists who are extremely competitive and will do almost anything to accomplish their goals. On the other end of the spectrum are the Type Cs, those happy-go-lucky people who seem to breeze through life unfettered by the need to meet deadlines or follow through on commitments.

If you've spent any time in an agency setting, you'll know that they do seem to have their fair share of Type As. Let's face it, they get things done. But, after 17 years in the field, I believe that successful agencies need a balance of personality types and, in fact, the best communicators cannot be categorized so simply. With that in mind, I would like to debunk some of the myths surrounding the personality traits needed for success in agency public relations (and public relations in general).

Myth	Fact
You need to be a Type A personality to succeed in agency public relations.	Not true. In fact, when counselling clients, one of the most important traits is the ability to see their point of view and tailor your approach accordingly. Most Type A personalities approach every situation the same way.
You need to be aggressive to make it in public relations.	There's a difference between aggressive and assertive. The ability to state your position with confidence, whether you're talking to clients or pitching journalists, is paramount. Aggressiveness is only ever viewed negatively.
Everyone in an agency has to behave the same way.	It takes all types to make any organization work. The person who can successfully lead the charge on a competitive new business pitch is not necessarily the person who will do the tedious behind-the-scenes research needed to support the pitch.
You must be an extrovert to succeed in the communications field.	It's true that public relations careers are not for shrinking violets. Any position where you are dealing with the public, speaking in front of groups, or attempting to persuade people to adopt your point of view requires poise and confidence. However, PR agencies are full of 'confident introverts' or 'reluctant extroverts' — people who feel nervous inside but manage not to show it on the outside.
People who like to be the centre of attention excel in public relations.	Quite the contrary. Public relations, especially in an agency setting, is about making other people look good. After working for months on a project that finally comes to fruition, you need to be comfortable taking a back seat while others get the glory.



Communicator

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The keys to success in a communications agency are not tied to a personality type, but rather to your outlook on life. An entrepreneurial spirit, willingness to work really hard and inclination towards learning will take you far.

By the way, before writing this article, I decided to take Psychology Today's Type A Personality Test (available on its website at www.psychologytoday.psychtests.com).

On a scale of zero to 100, where zero is a Type C, 50 is a Type B and 100 is a Type A, I scored 58 which makes me a high Type B. This means I get angry when someone sneaks into the grocery store express line with more than eight items but I resist the temptation to confront them.

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