



By Gerry Bourdeau, Condominium Management Group

Why is it that some people would put up with almost anything instead of having a confrontation? Meanwhile, why do some people seem like they've been in a perpetual confrontation since prior to the release of the toonie? Why do some condominium owners worry about the ornamental grass or the last time the parking lot was dusted while others wouldn't report a leak in their bedroom even if they were sleeping in five centimeters of water? The answer is personality.

Everyone uses the word personality. But what does the word personality mean technically? Why do we have differing personalities? And how does it help us to have answers to these questions?

When psychologists refer to personality, they mean the behaviours and patterns of thinking and feeling that people exhibit. They're more precise about the foregoing than the lay person tends to be when they say something like "dogs have a lot of personality." Psychologists don't just mean that personality is animation or quiriness. Instead, psychologists will refer to specific traits that have been defined over time through a process known as psychometrics.

The most famous and psychometrically tested model of personality is called the Big Five or Five Factor Model. The preceding model was invented using the premise that descriptors of personality were already represented in language and that those descriptors could be used to investigate how many dimensions there are to human personality. So, what psychologists did (and have repeatedly done) is they collected all of the words in the English Language that refer to behaviours and feelings and they put them in a self-report test. The test might have a few hundred questions that read something like "do you often feel nervous" or "are you a social person?" From there, psychologists were able to correlate the answers across large sets of data and they came up with the following five factors of human personality:

1. **Openness:** If one is high in openness, one is likely to try and to be interested by new things. One is likely to be comfortable with change and the creation of new ideas. Someone low in openness is likely to be made uncomfortable by change and closed off to new experiences.
2. **Conscientiousness:** If one is high in conscientiousness, one is concerned about duties, orderliness, and outcomes. Someone low in conscientiousness is likely to be easygoing and less concerned about duties or orderliness.
3. **Extraversion:** A person who is high in extraversion is energized by other people and typically wants to attend social functions and parties often. Meanwhile, a person low in

extraversion (also known as an introvert) tends to be energized by solitude and may enjoy social events but needn't seek them out and will tire of them.

4. Agreeableness: Those high in agreeableness never want to engage in confrontation or argument. Meanwhile, those low in agreeableness only want to engage in confrontation or argument.
5. Neuroticism: People high in neuroticism tend to be moody, anxious, pessimistic, and nervous. They are worriers! People low in neuroticism are more emotionally stable or positive, usually more stress resilient, and tend to cope better emotionally.

Time and again, personality tests have been administered and these are the factors that emerge. Inside these factors are sub aspects that I won't get into in this article. But why do humans vary along these dimensions? The answer is rooted in evolutionary reasons.

Each of these personality differences fills an evolutionary niche. While it might seem to you that being very disagreeable can't be good, imagine a personality like that in the context of bravery. Sometimes a very disagreeable person is needed to tell the truth that nobody else will say. Or what about a neurotic person? Are they a problem? No! Not necessarily. If a team is working on a very complex issue that could have disastrous consequences should there be a minute detail that is off, then it's good to have a few neurotics around.

The last important bit of psychometric evidence to note is that personality traits are extremely stable across time. It's very unlikely that a neurotic person at the age of 25 will not be neurotic at the age of 50.

How does any of this help you or your condominium? Here's a partial list:

1. Once one understands why people are the way they are, one can have more patience and tolerance for people who are different. We all have some kind of niche that we fill and it's good that we're not all the same so don't expect everyone to be the same.
2. Since we all have a niche that we fill, we can learn to deploy people in more productive ways if we learn to leverage different personalities. Is there a lawyer you know that is really tough? Or an engineer you know that has a lot of time for new ideas? Or maybe a manager you know that is very conscientious? Meanwhile, perhaps you also know professionals who are the polar opposite. We can learn to deploy the correct people in the correct situations.
3. We can predict with some degree of error how directors, owners, managers, and the range of professionals that work in condos will interact. Not every manager or contractor is right for every condominium and that doesn't mean they're bad. It might just come down to them being in the wrong niche!
4. Lastly, one can strategize when making communications to predict and assuage or pre-empt worries and concerns.

While I don't hand people tests or rate exactly how I think people fit into the OCEAN traits on a scale of 1 to 10, I do find it helpful to keep a mental model of where people fall roughly on the foregoing factors. It helps me to serve them better and to make sure they're not exposed to situations that would cause everyone grief. All of this might seem a bit abstract, but if you

practice viewing people from the lens of personality, you might find yourself a better predictor and more patient and understanding person. Well, unless you are low in agreeableness.