

## Temperament Encounters

It is important to be aware of how, when you are helping an individual, some of the characteristics of his temperament can be used as 'avoidance tactics.'

### Choleric

He has to be on top – he doesn't give anything away. If you touch painful areas he can lift himself above the pain. Sometimes this will show itself by moving into mental areas – e.g. asking lots of questions, rationalising why he does what he does or simply talking for its own sake. He will try to find a reason to make it alright. Sometimes he will find an excuse to physically remove himself from the room. He knows that if he looks at reality he will have to make himself vulnerable.



Learn to ask the questions that will get him back in touch with his own feelings. Be aware that you can ask a feeling question and get an intellectual answer. Avoid a mental debate.

### Melancholic

He cannot hide what he is feeling and thinking – usually it is written all over his face and is seen clearly in his body language.

His low self-worth can translate into 'game playing' – a kind of 'I'm no good. You don't need to bother with me. My problems aren't important. I'll be alright.' Yet he clearly needs help! Remember that he paints negative images all the time.



He tends not to hold himself responsible for his own thoughts and feelings (as he feels so worthless!) so he speaks in a way that removes himself, often just one small step, away from taking that responsibility. He will use a phrase like, 'I have this problem...'

Be aware that a Melancholic can be critical – of others and himself – so help him towards a more accurate, and less subjective, perspective.

If a Choleric thinks it – it must be right. If a Melancholic feels it – it must be right!

### Phlegmatic

Try and help this temperament and you will soon come up against either his silent control – or endless chatter. Think of a circle. A Melancholic will be involved in the whole of that circle whereas a Phlegmatic will select a segment and thereby 'play safe' with his involvement. However, by choosing to restrict himself to that segment all his emotional and mental energies are channelled 'through a narrow gap' and therefore come out as a torrent of detailed and often irrelevant talk. You will have to break into that and help that person to see and feel the bigger picture.



He does not like pain or confrontation so be aware of the constant quest for the 'line of least resistance'. Unless he has chosen to become involved in the process of being made whole he will take the opportunity to terminate the conversation at the earliest point possible. If he does hear you out he may still protect himself with a statement like, 'I understand what you are saying but.....'  
Bear in mind that his instinct is to see himself as the victim.

This temperament can be very objective when it comes to helping others but very subjective when the spotlight is on him.

### **Sanguine**

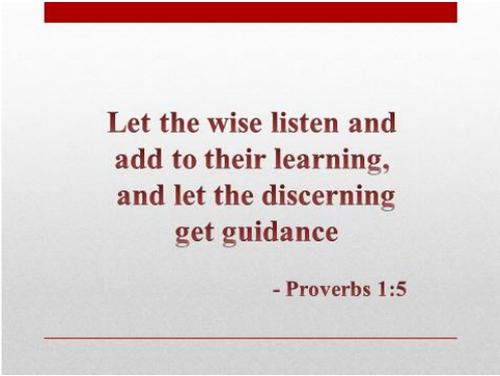
His restlessness will be your biggest challenge. Body language, changing the subject, humour, numerous explanations and cleverly constructed arguments are all designed to put you off the trail. The Sanguine can take the conversation all over the place, talk too much, exaggerate and tie himself up in knots. Just when you think the rabbit is cornered he burrows down and pops up somewhere else. If you engage in that shift of conversation you will never tie him down to the truth.

He does not like pain and does anything he can to avoid looking at it so that his comfort can be restored. With his lovely qualities of warmth and compassion, he can be soft on himself – and others - and miss the point.

Knowing the temperament you are working with helps you distinguish between his perspective and reality.

### **Finally**

Regardless of which temperaments a person may have, if he has a heart for the truth, he will be honest about his 'avoidance tactics' and will welcome what you bring to him. It is this attitude of the Psalmist that leads to wholeness - *'Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don't let me refuse it'* (Psalm 141:5 New Living Translation).



**Let the wise listen and  
add to their learning,  
and let the discerning  
get guidance**

**- Proverbs 1:5**