6. The Inspector [ISTJ]

Inspecting is the act of looking carefully and thoroughly at the products and accounts of an institution—the company’s ledger, the farmer’s produce, the manufacturer’s merchandise, the family’s budget—and ISTJs take on this role with quiet dedication. These Inspectors are earnest and attentive in their inspecting; to be certified as right and proper, all must go under their scrutiny, so that no irregularities or discrepancies are let go by. Most often reporting to higher authorities, Inspectors tend to work behind the scenes, only rarely having to confront others with their findings. Indeed, Inspectors make their examinations without flourish or fanfare, and, therefore, the dedication they bring to their work can go unnoticed and unappreciated.

As a variant of Plato’s Guardians and Aristotle’s Proprietaries, the ISTJs are little different from the other SJs in most respects. Like all the Guardians they are concrete in communicating and cooperative in implementing goals. They are interested in learning about commerce, are preoccupied with morality, and work well with materiel. In orientation, they tend to be fatalistic, pessimistic, and stoical as they guard the gateways and look to yesterday. They base their self-image on being seen as dependable, beneficent, and respectable. Often concerned about things, they trust authority, yearn for belonging, seek security, prize gratitude, and aspire to executive position. Intellectually, they are prone to practice logistics far more than tactics, diplomacy, and especially strategy. Further, with their tough-minded nature they tend to choose the directive Administrator’s role over the soft-hearted Conservator’s informative role. And because of their natural reserve and softspokenness they seem to enjoy the role of Inspector more than that of Supervisor. To visualize ISTJ intellectual development consider the following graph depicting the most probable profile of their logistical roles:

There are a great many Inspectors—they make up perhaps as much as ten percent of the general population. They are characterized by decisiveness in practical affairs, are the guardians of institutions, and if only one adjective could be selected, ‘superdependable’ (a term used by Myers) would best describe them. Whether at home or at work, ISTJs are nothing if not reliable, particularly when it comes to inspecting the people and things in their jurisdiction—quietly seeing to it that uniform quality of product is maintained, and that those around them uphold certain standards of attitude and conduct.

These hard-nosed and silent Guardians have a distaste for and distrust of fanciness in speech, dress, and place. Their words tend to be simple and down home, not showy or high-flown; their clothes are often homespun and conservative rather than of the latest fashion; and their home and work environments are usually neat, orderly, and plain, rather than up-to-date or luxurious. In their choice of personal property (cars, furnishings, jewelry, and so on) price and durability are of
primary concern, comfort or appearance given small consideration. Classics, antiques, and heirlooms are especially valued, having achieved a certain time-honored status—Inspectors prefer the old-fashioned to the newfangled every time. Even on vacation, ISTJs are no-nonsense types who tend not to be attracted by exotic foods, beverages, or locales.

While not outgoing like the ESTJs, ISTJs are likely to be involved in community service organizations that transmit traditional values to the young, such as Sunday School, Little League, or Boy and Girl Scouting. They understand and appreciate the contributions these institutions make in preserving the national heritage. Along with all the Guardians, the Inspectors find value in ceremonies and rituals—weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries, for example—although they tend to be shy if the occasion becomes too large or too public. At work, they are apt to see the company picnic or holiday office party as a necessary nuisance, but are likely to enjoy these events once they arrive and loosen up a bit. More to the male Inspector’s liking is the men-only party, where he can drop his guard and use a bit of off-color language. The yearly hunting or fishing trip is often a cherished male ritual for an ISTJ.

As Administrators they are patient with their work and with procedures within an institution, although not always patient with the individual goals and unauthorized behavior of some people in that institution. These Inspectors are comfortable when people know their duties, follow the guidelines, and operate within the rules—rules are there to be followed, they say, not gotten around for personal reasons. For their part, ISTJs will see to it that goods are inspected and schedules are kept, that resources will be up to standard and delivered when and where they are supposed to be. And they would prefer that everyone’s attitudes and actions be this law-abiding. They can be adamant about the need for rule-compliance in the workplace, and do not hesitate to report irregularities to the proper authorities. Because of this they are often misjudged as having ice in their veins, for people fail to see their good intentions and their vulnerability to criticism.

Their interest in thoroughness, detail, legality, standard procedures, and orderly flow of materiel leads this type to a number of occupations. Inspectors can handle difficult, detailed forms and columns of figures, and thus they make excellent bank examiners, auditors, accountants, or tax attorneys. Investments in securities are likely to interest this type, particularly investments in municipal bonds and blue-chip securities. Inspectors are not likely to take chances either with their own or others’ money, and the thought of a bankrupt nation, state, institution, or family gives them more than a little uneasiness. The idea of dishonoring a contract also bothers an ISTJ—their word is their bond—and they naturally communicate a message of trustworthiness and stability, which can make them successful in business. With their inspector’s eye, ISTJs make good librarians, dentists, optometrists, legal secretaries, and law researchers. High school teachers of business, home economics, physical education, civics, and history tend to be
Inspectors, as do quartermaster officers in the military.

As a husband or wife, Inspectors are a source of strength. Just as they honor business contracts, so do they honor the marriage contract. Loyal and faithful mates, they take responsibilities to children and spouse seriously, giving lifelong commitment to them. In family matters, as in all other, "duty" is a word the Inspector understands. The male ISTJ’s concept of masculinity is patriarchal, and he sees himself as the head of the household and breadwinner of the family. He can accept a working wife—as long as she does not shirk her responsibilities to the children. The female ISTJ makes a steady, dependable partner, but with a commitment to respectability that may not always allow her to express her sensuality.

In their parenting role, Inspectors are firm and consistent in handling their children; they make the rules of the family clear and expect them to be followed. A rebellious, nonconformist child may have a difficult time with an ISTJ parent, and vice versa. Inspectors care about passing along their work ethic to their children, and will often require them to help with household chores and projects. They patiently teach their children basic home maintenance skills, cooking, gardening, carpentry—time-consuming activities which sometimes leave them little opportunity to play with their children. The Inspector child is apt to be obedient and a source of pleasure to parents and teachers.