8. The Protector [ISFJ]

The primary desire of the Protector is to be of service and to minister to others. But here "service" means not so much furnishing others with the necessities of life (the Provider's concern), as guarding others against life's pitfalls and perils, that is, seeing to their security. These ISFJs derive a great deal of satisfaction from caring for others, and they offer their comfort gently and helpfully, quietly seeing to it that caretaking is scheduled to protect the health and welfare of those in need.

As a variant of Plato's Guardians and Aristotle's Proprietaries, the ISFJs are little different from the other SJs in most respects. Like all the Guardians they are concrete in communicating and cooperative in implementing their 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 seriously 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, being friendly or fond-hearted in nature, they tend to take up the Conservator's roles of Protector and Provider more comfortably than the tough-minded Administrator's roles of Supervisor and Inspector. And owing to their sense of quiet reserve they seem more comfortable acting as a Protector than a Provider.

There is a large proportion of Protectors in the population, perhaps as much as ten percent. And a good thing, because they are vigilant in their protecting, and seem fulfilled in the degree they can insure the safekeeping of those in their family, their circle of friends, or their place of business. Also, they enjoy assisting the downtrodden and can handle disability and neediness in others better than any other type. ISFJs go about their task of caretaking modestly, unassumingly, and because of this their efforts are sometimes not fully appreciated. They are not as open and talkative as the ESFJs, except with close friends and relatives. With these, however, they can chat tirelessly, and for as long as it takes to cover in minute detail everything concrete in their lives. But their shyness with strangers is often misjudged as stiffness, even coldness, when in truth these Guardians are warm-hearted and sympathetic, giving happily of themselves to those in need—although, curiously, their interest may wane when the recipient is no longer in trouble.

Their reserve ought really to be seen as an expression, not of coldness, but of their sincerity and seriousness of purpose. Like all the Guardians, Protectors have a strongly held work ethic, which tells them that work is good, and that play must be earned—if indulged in at all. The least hedonic of all types, ISFJs are willing to work long, long hours doing all the thankless jobs the other types seem content to ignore.
Thoroughness and frugality are also virtues for them. When they undertake a task, they will complete it if at all humanly possible. They also know the value of a dollar and abhor the squandering or misuse of resources. These reserved Conservators are quite content to work alone; indeed, they may experience some discomfort when placed in positions of authority, and may try to do everything themselves rather than direct others to do their jobs.

For all these reasons, Protectors are frequently overworked, just as they are frequently misunderstood and undervalued. Their contributions, and also their economies, are often taken for granted, and they rarely get the gratitude they deserve. This can cause them to harbor feelings of resentment, with their bottled up emotion gnawing inwardly, causing them much undeserved suffering.

Protectors are keenly aware of status given by birth, titles, offices, and credentials. They are impressed by visiting royalty, they admire high-ranking politicians, they honor judges, the police, and the military, and they tend to be devoted and loyal to their superiors. Not that they think of themselves as superior. On the contrary, they are humble to the core, and find the putting on of airs offensive. For the ISFJ, people should behave according to their place in the social order, and they may be annoyed by others who act above their station. They believe in the safety of a traditional social hierarchy, and do everything they can to uphold custom and convention.

The same holds true at work. Protectors are dependable and are seldom happy working in situations where established ways of doing things are not respected. To them, regulations are tried and true, and they rarely question the effectiveness of going by the book. ISFJs often seem to feel personally responsible for seeing to it that people in an institution or business abide by rules, carry out routines, and behave as they are supposed to behave. If others, including their bosses, violate or ignore these standard operating procedures, Protectors are distressed and embarrassed, although they usually will not display these reactions. More likely, such irritation is turned inward and may be experienced as fatigue and as chronic stomach disorders.

With their extraordinary sense of safety and responsibility, and with their unusual talent for executing routines, Protectors do well as curators, private secretaries, librarians, middle-management personnel, and especially as general medical practitioners. To be sure, the hospital is a natural haven for them; it is home to the family doctor, rescuer of life and limb, and to the registered nurse, or licensed practical nurse, the true angels of mercy. The insurance industry is also congenial to these Conservators. To save, to put something aside against an unpredictable future, to prepare for emergencies—these are important actions to ISFJs, who as insurance agents I want to see their clients in good hands, sheltered and protected.
Speculation and innovation do not intrigue Protectors, who would rather leave such risky matters to others, while remaining themselves safely anchored and down-to-earth. For their part, ISFJs value tradition, both cultural and familial. They carry with them a sense of history, a sense of continuity with past events and relationships. They seem to have an innate regard for the past, for whatever is long-established and deeply rooted. They are honored to care for collections of rare old things, books, paintings, china, and so on, seeing to it that they are safely shelved and regularly dusted. But they are also the keepers of simple family things, old photograph albums, timeworn furniture, old tools and wedding dresses. Of all the types, ISFJs are most likely to care about tracing family trees.

Protectors are devoted to mate and family, and are usually excellent homemakers. The ISFJ female often displays a flair for making the interior of the home attractive in a traditional manner, and often gives herself full-time to the duties of housewife. She provides attractive, nourishing meals, sees to the shopping, does the laundry, mends the clothes, and follows a daily routine for keeping the house clean and tidy, with rooms straightened up, dishes done, and beds made. The ISFJ male takes on all the other duties of keeping up the home: he usually handles the finances, cares for the yard (and often tends a vegetable garden), maintains the car, and is usually handy when it comes to minor repairs in masonry, carpentry, painting, plumbing, electrical work, and the like.

In their parenting role, these friendly and soft-spoken Protectors expect their children to conform to the rules of society, feeling a personal responsibility to see to it that these standards are not only adhered to but honored. Such parents worry a great deal, and may try too hard to protect their children from the dirt and dangers of life. Protector mothers in particular need to learn how to encourage their children’s independence and to cut the apron strings. Occasionally an ISFJ mother may be able to find humor in the wayward son, but she still raises her daughters to respect traditions and to do the Right Thing at the Right Time—and always for the Right Reason.