

# SANDY DAYS, SALTY NIGHTS

## The uncertainty of love



The corporate world loves to categorize. In today's hectic work environment, most employees spend more time with their colleagues than their spouses (and I mean that in the strictest professional sense, not the after-hours bump-and-grind kind). When more than forty hours a week are dedicated to the same group of people, it's crucial to know the personality types of everyone in the office.

Psychologists and authors have tapped into this need, turning out truckloads of personality assessment workbooks. From Jungian-based models to the granddaddy of all personality tests - Myers-Briggs - corporate America is on a quest to identify its workers.

As a business undergrad, I had a chance to take my fair share of personality reviews. My memory of the results beat a fast retreat after graduation, following the exit path of amortization schedules and the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (whose name,

admittedly, I just had to google). But, there's one test that has stuck with me all these years, mainly because I run-up against the results every day: Tolerance for Uncertainty.

This particular test was part of a global cross-cultural management class, an internationally-focused piece of fluff in my senior year. The Tolerance for Uncertainty categorization formed part of a consortium of personality identifiers designed to show how different cultures react to similar situations. Germans, for instance, have a generally low tolerance for uncertainty; hence the famously precise German train system. Latin cultures, known for the mañana mentality, have a much higher tolerance for uncertainty and are rarely ruffled when things don't turn out as planned. Most Americans fall somewhere in between.

My score, however, was a five on the hundred-point scale, lower even than the Teutones across the Atlantic. That means I have an abysmally low tolerance for anything where the outcome is not 100 percent certain. Like dating. And, especially, love.

Even for people who have normal tolerance levels, the amount of uncer-

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tainty in romance can be agony. Pre-dating angst is fraught with questions of whether or not he'll call and if he's really interested. Once the relationship has solidified, the questions continue. Is she the one? Is this a deal-breaker?

Even after marriage, with its iron-tight vows and solid gold wedding bands, there remains a degree of uncertainty. My friend Donna was blindsided when her husband of 20 years filed for divorce. She swears she never saw it coming. Not the affair, not his decision to leave, not the cold way he handled her after the divorce was final.

"One minute, we were the perfect family," she said. "The next, everything fell apart."

Another friend, Shelly, was equally unprepared for the end

of her marriage. She tells of meeting her husband Brad in high-school and eloping at 18. For thirteen years, he was her only love, her best friend and the father of their two children. When he was killed in Iraq on Memorial Day of last year, she was brought to her knees by the sudden loss of her marriage. Even in that relationship, where happiness flourished, the uncertainty of love was devastating.

I know that my low tolerance for uncertainty borders on neurotic, and that I'd make a heluva sketchy colleague. But, when it comes to matters of the heart, sometimes it helps to be wary of the unknown. ■



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