

Starting and Stopping

You already know that a lot of NLP focuses on structure and patterns in communications and behaviour. Have you ever considered the structure of the kind of work that you're best at?

One element of structure relating to work activities is the part of a process where you do your best work:

- Are you best at starting tasks, projects, programmes, businesses?
- Are you best at maintaining activities, programmes, services, systems?
- Are you best at changing programmes, services, routines, products?
- Are you best at stopping or finishing projects, tasks, activities, services?

You may be good at more than one. Chances are, there's one you're not so good at, too.

Starters:

If your strength is in starting, you might be a serial entrepreneur, you might be a project manager or a business analyst. If you're good at starting, you probably enjoy strategic thinking, working out what needs to be done, how best to take advantage of opportunities that you see. Starters get the ball rolling, enjoy seeing new programmes unfurling, new markets being entered and new people joining teams. Does this sound like you?

Maintainers:

If your strengths lie in maintaining, you might be a service provider focusing on consistent standards, or a support function enabling other departments to work effectively. If you're good at maintaining you'll have systems and structures to keep everything under control and you'll monitor lots of data to get the feedback you need.

Maintainers do whatever it takes to 'keep the show on the road'. Is that you?

Changers:

If changing is your real strength, you might be a continuous improvement champion, or an internal consultant. You could be a trainer or coach, a programme manager or a brand manager. Changers work with what they have and improve it, re-shape it, re-label it or re-launch it. Changers always have ideas about how to modify what they're doing – and often what everyone else is doing as well. Do you recognise yourself?

Stoppers:

Stopping is a rare skill. There are fewer stoppers than starters in most teams. That's why so many people have too much work to do. If stopping is your gift, you'll be good at finishing tasks and projects, but also good at deciding when regular activities can be stopped. You'll notice when a product has 'had its day', when a regular meeting is no longer relevant, when a system is out-of-date or a person has become stale in their role – and you'll stop them. Do you do that?

It's easy to see that certain jobs and roles lend themselves to starting or stopping, to changing or maintaining. If you know your strengths and preferences, it might help you decide what to do and what to delegate. Or what roles to take on.

There's also another dimension to this model.

At a more subtle level, there is a connection between your ability to start, stop, change and maintain and your ability to create the results you want.

As well as being good at one or more of the categories, there's one you're worst at:

If you're worst at **starting**, then you may have difficulty being who you want to be. You keep being something other than who you really want to be. People who are good at starting find it easy to be who they want to be.

If you're worst at **changing** or **maintaining**, you may have trouble doing what you want to do. You never seem to be able to just do what you want to do. People who are good at changing or maintaining find it easy to do what they want to do.

If you're worst at **stopping**, then it's likely you find it hard to have what you want in life. You just don't ever seem to get what you want. People who are good at stopping find it easy to have what they want.

Which of these do you relate to the most? Does that fit with your opinion about your strengths and weaknesses in the four areas?

Or does it show you something you didn't know about yourself?

Recurring patterns in life are a great source of insight for personal development. When you become aware of what's going on in your life, you can decide what to maintain and what to change. You can decide what to start and what to stop.

After all, none of these categories is a life sentence – it's simply a way of describing what's happening today. And tomorrow could be completely different, with a little focus and effort on your part. Couldn't it?

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