



ASK AMY

REVERSAL BOOSTER SERIES

Discussing Reversal Patterns Within the
Birkman Components

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Self-Consciousness Reversal

Ah, reversals. If you are anything like me, you have somewhat of a love/hate relationship with them. On the one hand, I love the insight and the depth reversals provide me when interpreting a Birkman report. On the other hand, I dread the inevitable question that always comes up: “Why is my little Stress box floating inside/outside the Need bar?” (big sigh...)

Regardless of whether you’re new to the Birkman community or a long-time consultant, we can all continue to learn and improve our mastery of The Birkman Method. This month I’m kicking off a new series: a booster series on Birkman reversals. For each newsletter, my column will focus on a different Component in the reversal pattern, starting with the Need for Self-Consciousness. We’ll work through them all until we make it to the Need for Thought. I will share my own insights and I welcome you to share your comments and the experiences you’ve had in your own Birkman work.

Before we get started, let’s review the basics. What is a “reversal” and how do you explain it?

In Birkman, a “reversal” occurs when an individual’s Usual style (which can be seen by others) and his Stress behavior (unfortunately, also seen!) is the opposite of his underlying Need. This is where it can get difficult for him: because his displayed Usual and Stress behaviors are exactly the opposite, it continues to solicit and reinforce the wrong behavior from other people, and from the person’s environment. As a result, the person’s Needs are not as apparent to others, and they continue to not be met in many social situations. Thus, the destructive cycle continues.

From a consultant’s perspective, this is the social answering pattern we call a “reversal”. However, this is not the way I recommend you explain a reversal during your interpretation of a Birkman report. An expert in the Birkman office says they explain a reversal as “a surprise.” In other words, the person’s stress reaction is not what is expected by the outside world and might come as a shock. This disparity can lead to issues for both the individual and the individual’s environment.

The fix? Emphasize to the person the importance of being aware of his unique underlying Needs. Encourage him to communicate-- in a positive way-- his actual or preferred Need to the rest of the world. Urge him to help others out by taking responsibility for getting his Needs met.

Let's take a closer look at the Self-Consciousness reversal and see how this plays out.

The Self-Consciousness Reversal

Examples: U/N/S

31/9/75

99/1/75

62/1/75

I find the Self-Consciousness reversal to be one of the most interesting. Here we have a case where a person sees and describes himself as a sensitive, shy, self-conscious person. Despite the fact that the scores are generally on the lower end of the spectrum, he distinctly sees and describes himself as being more shy than other people.

How do I know this? Check out the examples above. In each case the Usual score is higher than the Need. In other words, the person is identifying that he is more self-conscious and shy than he perceives other people to be. In fact, we can even see to what extent the person sees himself as being more shy than other people. The first example (31/9/75) is a smaller gap. This individual may say something like "I am slightly more shy than other people."

The last example (99/1/75) indicates a significant gap. This person is likely to say something like "I am significantly more shy than most people." [The question begs, who are these "most people" these individuals are referring to? And the answer is this person's perception of other people. We are not dealing with facts here, people. Reality always takes a back seat. We are only interested in the perception of the individual whom we are addressing.]

So in the case of an Self-Consciousness reversal, we have a person who is describing himself as a shy, sensitive person. It would make sense then that when this person goes into his Stress behaviors, his tendency would be to become much more sensitive, and more self-conscious. By looking at the Stress box in our examples, we can see this is the case. In each of these examples the person becomes even more self-conscious, shy and sensitive.

But here's the surprise.

He actually prefers and is more comfortable when other people are direct, straightforward and matter-of-fact. His score tells us that he views himself as the more sensitive one, not other people. He expects other people to be less self-conscious and more direct. In Birkman, when our expectations are met, we stay in our Usual strength behavior. When our expectations are not met, especially over time, we risk moving into that nasty Stress behavior.

The challenge for those of us on the outside is that we see this shy, sensitive person and immediately think we should handle him with kid gloves. Unfortunately for him, our instincts couldn't be more wrong. The more careful and cautious we are in our communication with him, the more alarms start going off in his head. He is thinking, "What's going on? Why are they beating around the bush? What are they not telling me?" In other words, our lack of directness or candor causes him to feel more self-conscious.

So now that you understand what the score is telling you, the next important piece of information is: how do you best coach this person? What's the "so what" for him? How does this person move forward with more understanding and self-awareness?

The important takeaway is that people will not naturally assume this person prefers a direct style. In fact, people will assume the opposite is true. They will see a sensitive shy, person and most will respond in a careful, cautious way. You can coach this person to manage this response by being upfront and forthright about his underlying Need. "You may not assume this about me but it's okay to be candid. Feel free to shoot straight with me. I am actually most comfortable when people deal with me in a direct, straightforward manner. Please don't worry about hurting my feelings. I prefer this candid style."

Keep in mind if you are the person with the Self-Consciousness reversal that you may have to remind people occasionally that this is still the case. As humans, we are programmed to mirror behavior. We see a sensitive person and instinctively move forward in a cautious way. After working with the Birkman for more than ten years I have found people welcome this type of information. After all, we are all doing the best we can, both in terms of ourselves and how we treat others.

Social Energy Reversal

What is a “reversal” and how do you explain it? In Birkman, a “reversal” occurs when an individual’s Usual style (which can be seen by others) and his Stress behavior (unfortunately, also seen!) is the opposite of his underlying Need. This is where it can get difficult for him: because his displayed Usual and Stress behaviors are exactly the opposite, they continue to solicit and reinforce the wrong behavior from other people, and from the person’s environment. As a result, the person’s Needs are not as apparent to others, and they continue to not be met in many social situations. Thus, the destructive cycle continues.

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The fix? Emphasize to the person the importance of being aware of his/her unique underlying Needs and communicating these needs to the rest of the world.

The Social Energy Reversal

Examples: U/N/S

38/68/25

1/99/25

27/68/25

While I don’t have an Social Energy Reversal myself, I have found through my conversations with those that do that their experience around this particular score can be quite painful and isolating.

Let's see why this might be the case:

You will notice in the examples above that the Usual score in each of the examples above is lower than the individual's Need. In other words, the person does not create a level of sociability in his/her Usual style to meet his/her own need. A person with this pattern needs more sociability than his/her usual behavior suggests. People will perceive a low Social Energy Usual person as someone who likes to work alone and assume this person would prefer to be left alone. The tragedy in this case is the person higher underlying Need suggests she wants to be invited, included and accepted by the group. Thus, we see a potentially painful cycle emerge.

Let's take a closer look at this pattern. In the Social Energy reversal example, we have an individual who describes herself as a selectively sociable person who works well alone. In fact, she distinctly sees and describes herself as being less sociable than other people. How do I know this? Check out the examples above. In each case, the Usual score is lower than the Need. In other words, the person is identifying that she is less sociable than she perceives other people to be. In fact, we can even see to what extent.

the person sees herself as being less sociable. The first example (38/68/25) is a smaller gap. This individual may say something like "I am slightly less sociable than other people." The last example

(1/99/25) indicates a significant gap. This person is likely to say something like "I am significantly less sociable than most people." [Again, when we refer to "most people" we are referring to this person's perception of other people.]

So in the case of an Social Energy reversal, we have a person who is describing herself as a quiet, selectively sociable person. It would make sense then that when this person goes into stress, her tendency is to become a more exaggerated version of how she usually describes herself: more withdrawn, more detached and more impatient with people and groups in general.

But here is the surprise:

Her higher Need means she prefers for other people to be sociable, outgoing and communicative. She sees herself as the quiet one and expects others to be more friendly and outgoing. Sociable, outgoing people make her feel comfortable and her bring her out of her introverted Usual style. She expects other people to be more friendly. In Birkman, when our expectations are met, we stay in our Usual strength behavior. When our expectations are not met, we risk moving into that nasty Stress behavior. The challenge for those of us on the outside is that we see this quiet, selectively sociable person and immediately think we are doing this person a favor to just leave her alone. Unfortunately for her, our instincts couldn't be more wrong. The more hands off we are with this person, the more she feels rejected and hurt. Under stress, she may say think something like, "these people are rude and cliquish." Or, "they are purposefully excluding me because they don't like me." This, of course, is most likely not true. And yet that reality does little to temper the rejection felt by our person with the Social Energy reversal.

So now that you understand what the score is telling you, the next important piece of information is, what do you as the coach tell this person? What's the "so what"? How does this person move forward with more understanding and self-awareness?

The important takeaway is that people will not assume this person has a strong need to feel included and part of the group. In fact, people will assume the opposite is true. They will see a selectively sociable person. The person can manage this response by being upfront and forthright about her underlying need. "You may not assume this about me but I actually really appreciated being included with the group. Perhaps next time you go to lunch, I could come along." Now, I don't downplay how difficult this will be to say for a Low Social Energy Usual person. But the reality is, if you don't verbalize your underlying Need, people will think they are doing you a favor by leaving you alone.

Do you have a reversal on Social Energy? Have you had an "a-ha" with a client? I would love to hear you're about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let's continue our conversation on reversals.

Insistence Reversal

What is a “reversal” and how do you explain it? In Birkman, a “reversal” occurs when an individual’s Usual style (which can be seen by others) and his Stress behavior (unfortunately, also seen!) is the opposite of his underlying Need. This is where it can get difficult for him: because his displayed Usual and Stress behaviors are exactly the opposite, they continue to solicit and reinforce the wrong behavior from other people, and from the person’s environment. As a result, the person’s Needs are not as apparent to others, and they continue to not be met in many social situations. Thus the destructive cycle continues.

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The fix? Emphasize to the person the importance of being aware of his/her unique underlying Needs and communicating these needs to the rest of the world.

The Insistence Reversal

Examples: U/N/S

38/68/25

27/68/25

1/99/25

Let's take a closer look at how an Insistence reversal plays out:

In each of the above cases, the usual score is lower than the person's need score. To put that in layman's terms, the person needs more Insistence than they create in their usual style. A person with an Insistence reversal needs an environment that imposes scheduled activities and predictability. While this pattern doesn't risk the potential pain of the Social Energy reversal (see the Social Energy reversal booster for more explanation on this), it does potentially set-up the individual for failure.

In the Insistence reversal example, we have a person who is describing himself as a flexible, unstructured person. In fact, he distinctly sees and describes himself as being less structured and insistent than other people. How do I know this? Check out the examples above. In each case, the Usual score is lower than the Need. In other words, the person is identifying that he is less structured than he perceives other people to be. In fact, we can even see to what extent the person sees himself as being less structured and insistent. The first example (38/68/25) is a smaller gap. This individual may say something like "I am slightly less structured and insistent than other people." The last example (1/99/25) indicates a significant gap. This person is likely to say something like "I am significantly less structured and insistent than most people." [Again, when we refer to "most people" we are referring to this person's perception of other people.]

But here is the surprise:

His higher need for Insistence mean he prefers predictable situations in which he can plan and execute activities according to familiar methods. Stable and predictable life and work situations provide a secure anchor for him. He sees himself as less structured and therefore expects others to be more structured than he is himself. In Birkman, when our expectations are met, we stay in our Usual (strength) Behavior. When our expectations are not met, we risk moving into that nasty Stress behavior. The outside world will see this flexible, unstructured style and assume we should avoid putting undo systems, processes, and structure on him. Again, our instincts our wrong. The less structured the environment, the less stable the individual feels and the more details and tasks will start to fall through the cracks. And as is true with all reversals, we see a destructive, counterproductive cycle begin to emerge.

So, now that you understand what the score is telling you, the next important piece of information is, what do you as the coach tell this person? What's the "so what"? How does this person move forward with more understanding and self-awareness?

The important takeaway is that people will not assume this person has a need for imposed Insistence. In fact, people will assume the opposite is true. They will see a flexible, unstructured person and assume the last thing this individual would want is Insistence. The person can manage this response by being upfront and forthright about his underlying Need. "I prefer and thrive in a structured environment. I like more direction and detail about the best way to proceed with a project or assignment." Again, the burden lays on the person's shoulders. If you don't express your needs, others are very likely to get it wrong. Be self-aware and communicate your underlying need. You will be a more productive and effective person.

Do you have a reversal on Insistence? Have you had an "a-ha" with a client? I would love to hear you're about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let's continue our conversation on reversals.

Assertiveness Reversal

What is a “reversal” and how do you explain it? In Birkman, a “reversal” occurs when an individual’s Usual style (which can be seen by others) and his Stress behavior (unfortunately, also seen!) is the opposite of his underlying Need. This is where it can get difficult for him: because his displayed Usual and Stress behaviors are exactly the opposite, they continue to solicit and reinforce the wrong behavior from other people, and from the person’s environment. As a result, the person’s Needs are not as apparent to others, and they continue to not be met in many social situations. Thus, the destructive cycle continues.

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The fix? Emphasize to the person the importance of being aware of his/her unique underlying Needs and communicating these needs to the rest of the world.

The Assertiveness Reversal

Examples: U/N/S

45/37/75

51/3/75

91/37/75

The Assertiveness reversal has the distinction of being one of the most common reversals you will see especially if you are working management level and up. If we go back to the basics you will remember that Assertiveness is really measuring Verbal Dominance. The higher the score, the more comfortable the individual is disagreeing openly, playing devil's advocate, or simply airing an opinion. In a nutshell, the Assertiveness reversal says, "I am happy to speak up and tell you what I think, but I would prefer if you would respond in a more suggestive way. Otherwise, you may see me become argumentative and domineering under Stress.

Let's see why this might be the case:

You will notice in the examples above that the Usual score is higher than the person's Need score. In other words, the individual sees himself as a person who speaks up, gives directions and disagrees openly when necessary. However, his lower Need means he prefers for other people to be suggestive, diplomatic and not argumentative. When he comes across more verbally dominant (high Assertiveness in Birkmanese), it creates a feeling of defensiveness. In response and under Stress, he responds by becoming increasingly argumentative and domineering.

Let's take a closer look at the mechanics of this reversal. In the Assertiveness reversal, we have an individual who describes himself as a verbally dominant person who is most effective when giving directions and sharing his opinion. In fact, he distinctly sees himself as being more verbally dominant than most people. In each case, the Usual score is higher than the Need. This person is making the statement that he sees himself as being more verbally dominant than he perceives other people to be. In fact, we can even see to what extent he sees himself as being more verbally dominant. The first example (45/37/75) is a smaller gap. This individual may say something like "I am slightly more verbally dominant than other people." The last example (99/37/75) indicates a significant gap. This person is likely to say something like "I am significantly more verbally dominant than most people." [Again, when we refer to "most people" we are referring to this person's perception of other people.]

So again, we have a person who is describing himself as an authoritative, opinionated person. This is how he is most effective. It would make sense that when this person goes into Stress, his tendency is to become a more exaggerated version of how he usually describes himself: more opinionated, more verbally aggressive, more domineering. And as is true with anyone, as we move into our Stress behavior we move from an effective style to an ineffective style.

But here is the surprise:

The big idea of a reversal is that the Need is hidden and the Assertiveness component is no exception. Despite this person's more forceful style, his lower Need means he does not prefer this aggressive style in return. In fact, he expects that others will be more low-key and less forceful than he typically shows up. As he comes across in a verbally dominant style (again, high Assertiveness Usual); it rubs him the wrong way and he can quickly feel defensive. As he becomes increasingly uncomfortable, he starts to raise his voice, argue louder and perhaps arguing for its own sake.

Of course, this will come as a surprise to people around him. We see his self-assertive style and immediately think this is a guy who doesn't mind a little friendly debate. "He tells me what he thinks, why shouldn't I do the same" we rationalize. And while our assumption is fair, it does little to keep our colleague in his usual, productive mode.

So now that you understand the mechanics of the Assertiveness reversal, the next important piece of information is, how do you coach this person? What's the "so what?" How does this person move forward with more understanding and self-awareness?

The important takeaway is that people will not assume this person prefers a low-key, diplomatic environment where everybody gets along. In fact, people will assume the opposite is true. They will see a self-assertive person and assume that style is desired in return. Our Assertiveness reversal friend can manage this response by being upfront and forthright about his underlying Need. "You may not assume this about me but I actually really appreciate working with people who are suggestive, pleasant and agreeable. People with very dominant, aggressive styles can make me uncomfortable." I would take it a step further and coach this person to try and temper their own style if they wish to receive a different response. Do you know the trick about what to do when a person is talking too loud? Lower your voice to a quiet level, just above a whisper. Almost immediately the other party will be conscious of their own volume level and start to lower their voice. The same is true with the Assertiveness component. If a high Assertiveness person borrows some behaviors from their low Assertiveness counterparts, he will find others will respond with a more suggestive style.

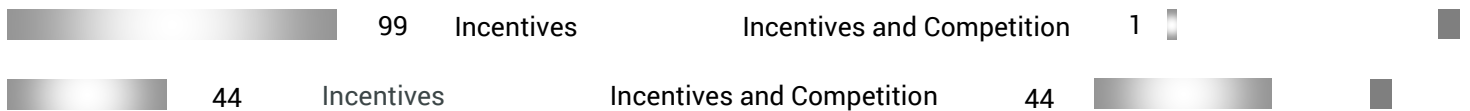
Do you have a reversal on Assertiveness? (I know you are out there!) Have you had an "a-ha" with a client? I would love to hear about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let's continue this conversation on reversals.

Incentives Reversal

The Incentives reversal has the distinction of being one of the more rare reversals and when you consider the Incentives construct and what it is actually measuring, it is not difficult to see why. If you could see the questions that load on to the Incentives component (you can't but I can) you would see they have a strong leaning towards winning, money, tangibles and getting ahead. As a society, we are very much conditioned to say these things are not important to us; especially not more important than people and relationships. High Incentives people thrive on winning and getting ahead. And this perspective helps them to see opportunities for themselves, other people and organizations. But before I get ahead of myself, let's start with the basics. What is an Incentives reversal and how does it play out?

The Incentives Reversal

Examples: U/N/S



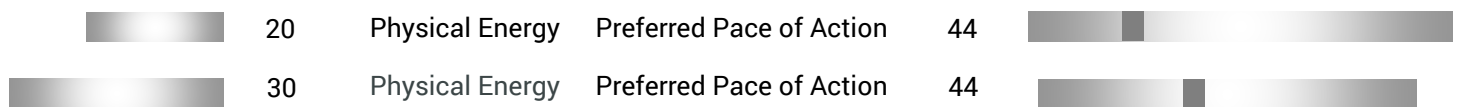
The Incentives construct measures how a person prefers to be incentivized. Individual's with high scores are competitive and like to win. Those with low scores value long terms rewards and prefer to work together towards a common goal instead of in a competitive situation. In the case of an Incentives reversal, we have a person who sees and describes themselves as a competitive person who likes to get ahead. They see this characteristic as being distinct about themselves and different from the rest of the population. We know this because when we ask them to describe Most People they describe them as being more idealistic, less competitive and less concerned about winning. And we know in Birkman, how we see Most People becomes our underlying Needs; that is, what we need to be comfortable, at ease and productive.

A person with an Incentives reversal will thrive in an environment where they can be the competitive person who wheels and deals and see opportunities where others see none. However, they expect other people to be less so to the extent that other high Incentives people will likely make them feel uneasy or uncomfortable. We know this by the individual's Need score which is derived from how the person described other people. The surprise in this case is that despite this person having a competitive, opportunistic style, he prefers to work with people who are more idealistic and less focused on winning. Interactions with other high Incentives people put him on alert and make him feel like he has to be looking out for himself or that he will be taken advantage of. Under stress he becomes a more exaggerated (negative) version of his Usual self.

This, of course, will come as a surprise to people around him. We see his competitive nature and falsely believe he will respond to an equally competitive style. Of course, our instincts lead us down the wrong path. And faulty assumption is only corrected through trial and error or by our Incentives reversal friend telling us what he needs. "This may surprise you but I am actually most effective when I work in collaborative environments where we are all working towards the same goal. Competitive, cut-throat situations tend to put me into stress and I can find myself becoming more aggressive. Do you have a reversal on Incentives reversal? Have you had an "a-ha" moment with a client? I would love to hear about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let's continue our conversation on reversals.

Physical Energy Reversal

The Physical Energy component measures our preferred pace for action; how much physical energy we have (Usual score) and how busy we like our environment to keep us (Need score). High scores have energy in spades. They like to be busy and they are adept at creating activity in their environment. Low scores have to be more purposeful in how they use their energy since their natural reserves are lower. Let's take a look at the underlying mechanics of a Physical Energy Reversal.



Take a look at the examples above. In both cases, we have a situation where a person describes themselves as being a low Physical Energy person. This individual is not going to come across as having an energetic, forceful style. Instead they will be more purposeful in how they use what they consider their limited amount of physical energy. Again, what is interesting about this pattern is the unexpected higher Need. We would assume a low Physical Energy person would need downtime, not too much on their plate and an environment where the individual can control the level of business. But alas, this is not the case. Our Physical Energy reversal people do best when they are kept busy, when there is energy in the environment and most importantly, when activities are structured and imposed. These people are stressed not by too much activity but by too little. A lack of activity zaps the energy of our low Physical Energy friend. They will find themselves becoming tired, fatigued and having a hard time finding the motivation to do anything. The problem is that we see this person as being low Physical Energy. Then, under stress this person loses even more energy and appears to drag along. Our gut instinct is to back off on the imposed schedule and give this person less to do. And again, as is always the case in a reversal, our instincts are wrong and we continue the counterproductive cycle.

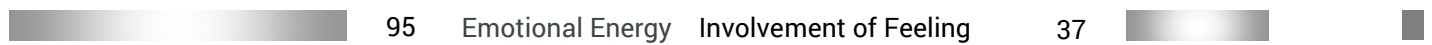
I happen to have a reversal on Physical Energy myself. Even though I know this about myself I inevitably find myself trying to minimize the amount of scheduled activities I have resulting in a loss of overall energy for myself. I do best and find I have throngs of energy the busier I am. Over the years I have consultants mention that my Physical Energy scores must be off the charts high when they see me at our conferences. I know that is not the case but during these marathon-like events my energy level soars.

Do keep in mind that while a busier environment yields a more energetic style you must still be realistic about the amount of energy you can expect from a person with a Physical Energy reversal. After all, at the end of the day you are still dealing with a person who must be careful about how they expend their energy. I can go full-throttle for three days and be okay. But if this type of schedule became routine I would undoubtedly crash.

Do you have a Physical Energy reversal? Have you had an “a-ha” moment with a client? I would love to hear about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let’s continue our conversation on reversals.

Emotional Energy Reversal

The Emotional Energy Component measures comfort level with emotional expression and involvement of feelings. High scores tend to be more open and expressive with their emotions, both positive and negative. When a high Emotional Energy person is happy, you know it – you can see it. And when they are feeling down it is usually obvious from their demeanor. Low scores on the other hand tend to be more restrained in their display. It is usually more difficult to get a read on how they are feeling. This is not to say they don't experience emotions but their natural style is to deal with emotions in a more practical, objective way.



So let's talk about the Emotional Energy reversal. In the case of the reversal, we have a person who describes his Usual style as being high Emotional Energy or emotionally expressive. The interesting part, or the surprise, is his Need score. Even though he describes himself as being emotionally expressive, he doesn't see other people as being emotional. He is making a distinct statement about his level of emotionality here. Not only does he see himself as being as emotional, he sees himself as being significantly more emotional than other people. Our assumption in dealing with him would be that he needs emotional support as well as an outlet for his feelings. We may think he needs a warm hug or sympathy when he seems upset. Again, our natural assumptions in the case of a reversal tend to be wrong. Not only does he not appreciate our empathetic style, it actually makes him flat out uncomfortable. His Need indicates that he expects others to be more practical and objective in their dealings with him. He sees himself as the more emotional one, not other people. He expects others to be more pragmatic and detached. As a reminder, having our expectations met is what keeps us in our productive Usual style. When our expectations are not met we risk going into our Stress behavior. As always with a reversal, the Stress behavior is an exaggerated, negative version of his Usual style. He becomes emotional in an unproductive way; worrying unnecessarily, becoming discouraged, or exaggerating his problems.

I have a good friend with the score pattern above. She is empathetic, emotionally expressive and very often moved to tears by both happy and sad events. On more than one occasion this friend has come to me frustrated, discouraged or upset. Every time I switch on my High Emotional Energy Usual Style and try to hug her, my friend recoils in discomfort. Light bulb! That Low Emotional Energy Need gets me every time.

ASK AMY: REVERSAL BOOSTER SERIES



I always check out the Emotional Energy Need score before my Birkman feedbacks. I like to see if the individual is going to prefer a supportive, empathetic ear or if he or she prefers to keep the conversation objective and based on facts. This helps me cater my feedback session to the Needs of the person I am giving the feedback to instead of my own preferences and needs.

Do you have an Emotional Energy reversal? Have you had an “a-ha” moment with a client? I would love to hear about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let’s continue our conversation on reversals.

Restlessness Reversal

The Restlessness Component measures excitability. High scores reflect quickly shifting attention, attending to intrusions easily, a preference for many quick, attention shifting tasks and a tendency to appear to be excessively restless and unfocused when stressed by tasks perceived to be boring or that demand focus on one goal for long periods of time. Low scores reflect patient attention to the task at hand, resistance to distraction, a preference for tasks that allow protection from interruption and a tendency to appear to be resistant to demands for shifts of attention or demands for quick shifts of goal.

So let's talk about the Restlessness reversal. In the case of a Restlessness reversal, we have a person who describes his Usual style as being high Restlessness or responsive, attentive and easy to stimulate with new ideas. The interesting part, or the surprise, is his Need score. Even though he describes himself as being able to initiate frequent change, he sees other people as being more focused and concentrated. As Birkman experts, we know he is making a pronounced statement about how he sees himself versus how he sees other people. Not only does he see himself as responsive and attentive, he sees himself as distinctly more responsive than other people.

Our assumption in dealing with him would be that he invites interruptions and enjoys frequent changes in activity. Unfortunately, for our Restlessness reversal friend, we couldn't be more wrong. His low Need for Restlessness says he prefers and will be most productive in an environment where he can be protected from interruptions, a minimum of abrupt changes and an opportunity to complete one task before starting the next. Remember, his Need says he expects others to be concentrative, patient and focused with the task at hand. When people don't show up the way he expects, his Needs/Expectations are not met and he is at risk of moving into his Stress behavior.

His Stress behavior moves into the high range which means he will show up as having difficulty concentrating, looking restless and becoming easily annoyed by delays. We see the visual cues of distractibility and think, "Boy, we must be bogging him down and not giving him enough variety. Let's switch it up a little for him." And while our intentions are good, our instincts are wrong. Our friend's Low Need for Restlessness is not met and the Stress cycle continues. As always with a reversal, the Stress behavior is an exaggerated, negative version of his Usual style. He becomes restless, has a hard time concentrating and he is easily distracted.

As always, the panacea to this dilemma is self-awareness. Know your Needs and be comfortable communicating your Needs especially in the areas you easily find yourself getting into trouble.

Do you have a Restlessness reversal? Have you had an “a-ha” moment with a client? I would love to hear about your experiences. Jump over to LinkedIn and let’s continue our conversation on reversals.

When you have your own article, you have the luxury of hopping on a soapbox every once in a while. Well, this is one of those moments so feel free to stop reading and head back to the Birkman Newsletter. Over the last ten years I have often heard high Restlessness people often tout their ability to multitask. I have High Restlessness scores myself so I feel absolutely comfortable expressing that this is a misnomer and science has proven this to be the case.* Our brains only have a certain amount of attention and productivity that can be attributed to any given task meaning that in reality we are switching back and forth from one task to the other quickly, not accomplishing more than one task at the same time. Task switching yields low productivity. In this era of information, gadgets, and news screens with ten different lists scrolling simultaneously, we could all benefit from being more present to the task or person at hand. End of soapbox.

*<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ilyapozin/2015/01/07/theres-no-such-thing-as-multitasking>

Thought Reversal

It's hard to believe this is the last article in our Reversal Booster series. I hope this series has been helpful in understanding the mechanics and the underpinnings of the Birkman Components.

The Thought Component measures decision vs. indecision. Low scores generally make decisions quickly while those with High scores like to take time to consider all the options available. People with Low Needs prefer an environment where decisions are made quickly while those with High prefer an environment where they can think, gather suggestions and talk with others about the best course of action.

So let's take a closer look at the Thought Reversal. How does the score operate and how does that play out in the real world?



The above is clearly an extreme example but I prefer to use extreme examples because I think it drives the point home. In this case we have an individual, we'll call him John for our purposes, who has a high score on his Usual Thought score. John is thoughtful and reflective. He takes time to think before making a decision. He generally eats at the same restaurants but he still prefers to peruse the menu each time to consider what he wants to eat. Bigger decisions means more time to think. He likes to talk to other people to get their input and he may change his mind several times before finally settling on a decision. Even then, new information may cause him to change his final position. John is a cautious decision maker. We can tell this by how he described his usual style. What is interesting though is John expects/needs other people to make decision more quickly. We know this by how John described other people. What he is saying is, "I really like to take time to make decisions. However, other people are not like me. Other people prefer to make decision very quickly." When other people are decisive and matter-of-fact, that makes sense to John. What throws John off is when he runs into other people who second-guess or have a hard time making up a decision themselves. The indecisiveness triggers John's indecisiveness and before he knows it, he is in full swing high anxiety stress.

Of course, the issue here is that those who interact with John see a guy who really likes to take his time making decision. Once again, we assume by his observable style in Usual and Stress that he wants time to make decisions and have opportunities for more suggestions. The more ambiguity we introduce, the more we send poor John in analysis

paralysis stress. He wants other people to be decisive. He will be the one to introduce ambiguity and shades of gray into the decision making process. When other people show up decisive, it gives John the security to consider other options and be his productive High Thought self.

As always, there is only one way out of this particularly confusing scenario. The person with the Thought reversal has to verbalize the hidden need to those he interacts with. "I know I like to take time to make decisions and weigh the available options but I do best when you come to me with very concrete options."

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