

INFJ: What it's like to be one: A personal reflection, Rachel Green, INFJ.

Introduction from the book - September 2018.

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## **INTRODUCTION: WHY A BOOK ON THE INFJ?**

This book is for INFJs, about INFJs, and by INFJs. It is for all INFJs irrespective of their background, gender or age. It is not written with anyone else in mind.

It considers the mysteries and challenges of life as an INFJ, and in a way no other book has. So much else that is written about INFJs is written through the lenses of other types. Not this book; this is a rare view of the INFJ world from inside INFJs looking out, a description of life through the lenses of INFJs, as they see it.

What's more, it is an optimistic book about INFJs, written by happy, healthy and successful INFJs.

It is a complete rebuff of the view that INFJs are some form of miserable, airy-fairy loners, trawling through the empathic misery of their emotions, unable to socialise or form positive friendships, or find a valuable role in society. And it will fundamentally argue against the notion that being an INFJ is more like "having a mental disorder than a personality type", as someone stated on Facebook recently. That is false news!

The book will highlight the many strengths that INFJs can bring to society, to their work and to their relationships. By the end of it, I hope that every INFJ who reads it will hold their head high and shower the world with the goodness that this type inherently has.

INFJs, as this book proves, can be highly successful leaders, role models, social advocates, and refreshingly steady and powerful contributors to life. Bravo INFJs! I want us to stand up and show our INFJ skills and strengths and redress the negativity that has been unfairly rocketed against us.

I also hope that every Introvert who has felt put-down and demeaned by the Extraverted world, who has been indoctrinated in the belief that Introversion is a failure to overcome, will also realise how gifted we can be as Introverts. Introversion is on a par with Extraversion, and the evidence presented here proves that the pathologising of Introversion is misinformed and dangerous.

Whilst I am the main author of the book, other INFJs have contributed. Their poems, pieces of prose, stories or portrayals are placed at the end of most chapters. These INFJs come from a variety of backgrounds and countries: there is a counsellor, a mining geologist, a medical doctor, a sexologist, writers, a software developer, a professional speaker, a customer success manager, an early childhood educator, an environmental scientist, a coffee shop entrepreneur, an SEO copywriter, and more ... and all are thriving as INFJs. They demonstrate that INFJs are successful,

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have fulfilling relationships, and can be positively engaged in worthwhile occupations. None of them knew what anyone else had written here, and yet several have reinforced each others' views. At the same time, the book does acknowledge that being a healthy, happy INFJ is not always an easy journey. The INFJ is a scarce type and swims against the norms of other types, in so many ways.

Why the focus on INFJs? There are many reasons:

1. I've been an INFJ my whole life, but didn't realise it until I was in my early thirties. My mother accidentally tried to squeeze much of my INFJ character out of me when I was growing up. I ended up not liking myself. I was so relieved to find out that I am an INFJ as I finally made sense to myself. Since then, I have tried to understand and use my INFJ strengths and to honour my type, despite being different from most of the people I meet, live and work with. Now I am in mid-life, I am at a stage where telling my story may help other INFJs. I would have been so thrilled to have had an INFJ mentor when I was younger.
2. INFJs are one of the rarest types - only about 1% of the population are INFJs. This makes it hard for INFJs to find other INFJs to relate to and thus they can hunger for more information.
3. INFJs can feel alienated because other types are not like them. As a result of this they can end up questioning their own normality, their right to be themselves, and the validity of their perceptions, opinions and observations. I wish to offer support, encouragement and reassurance to those INFJs who feel discouraged and isolated by society. I have been in that place and it has only been by knowing and understanding myself as an INFJ that I have come through to find an exciting, enriching and fulfilling life on the other side.
4. INFJs can get frequent negative kick-backs from other types, become upset by them, and be unsure how to respond in a way that is respectful to themselves and to others. I have learnt that there are many skills that an INFJ can learn so they can cope easily in these situations and remain feeling heard and understood. It took me a long time to work them out and my INFJ life as a teenager and young adult would have been far happier had I developed them earlier.
5. INFJs, by their very nature, are usually skilled at reading the emotions of others and being empathic around people and situations. These can be prized skills but only if the INFJ involved in this emotional harvesting wisely knows how to manage the emotions. For some INFJs, their empathy and emotional antennae can lead them into a gloomy, emotional turmoil from which they find it tough to extricate themselves. Some even start to think this is the lot for an INFJ. I want to show them that it's not. INFJs can learn sophisticated skills of emotional self-management and can rise above this tough downside. I want to share what I have learnt about how not to pick up everyone's emotions and instead how to show

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love, care and compassion whilst retaining our emotional boundaries and emotional wellbeing.

6. INFJs are deeply invested in personal development and becoming their absolute best, so they naturally seek out as many ways as possible to achieve this. I have tried and benefitted from many self-development and self-actualisation techniques and hope that by identifying these other INFJs may profit from them too.
7. I often read questions on social media from INFJs which suggest they have many problems. Sadly, many seem to attribute their problems to being an INFJ. This is not always correct. Some are simply depressed because they have depression, not because they are an INFJ. Some are lonely because they lack social skills, not because they are an INFJ. Some find it hard to progress at work because they don't have good job interview skills, not because they are an INFJ. I am keen to help INFJs recognise the classic INFJ strengths, behaviours and weaknesses and to separate out what is typical of an INFJ and what, if they have any problems, is due to other factors.

I have four clear aims in writing the book. They are to assist us as INFJs to:

1. Find comfort and acceptance in being an INFJ.
2. More fully understand who we are, rather than who others want us or expect us to be.
3. Become more emotionally skilled and healthier.
4. Journey happily through the minefields set by other types, as they rule the world we live in.

This book is mainly about my INFJ journey and how the typical INFJ characteristics have played out and can be seen through my life. This is not a theoretical book about the MBTI model, nor a detailed examination of the INFJ from an academic perspective, nor a discussion of Jungian psychology. It is not meant to be any of those things.

It is mainly a personal reflection of a lived experience by an INFJ - me. It is predominantly my story and intentionally so. Many of us as INFJs appreciate hearing or understanding about other people's lives, especially if they help us understand ourselves better.

By sharing my INFJ story, and the understanding I have gained through living it, my goal is that I will, in some way, help other INFJs to accept themselves at an even deeper, more satisfying level. I hope that it will help INFJs to grow, to become even more of who they truly are, and to feel increasingly content.

I don't go around, usually, talking about my personality type and, in fact, prefer to keep it private and within myself. This is partly because I want to protect myself from ridicule and abuse as I

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work in the corporate and business sectors. But also, because much of what I do and think goes on in my own private world and I have no need or inclination to share it with anyone.

However, time and again, when I meet other INFJs, especially my coaching clients, they seem to gain comfort from knowing that I am also an INFJ. When they hear my explanations of their behaviour, they often come to understand themselves more. Knowing the background and experiences of other healthy INFJs, such as myself, in some way, for some reason, appears to help them be themselves more truly and more authentically.

At one time, I remember a client bursting out with gratitude that she had met me and had found out that I am an INFJ, as she was. Her gratitude was towards the fact that I was, in her eyes, "a successful INFJ". She had become concerned that INFJs simply didn't fit in with the prevailing worldview, (they don't) and, therefore, she was never going to find a way to be successful. Afterwards she said how much lighter she felt. This was not because of me, (because there are plenty of successful INFJs), but because she had finally understood her potential. Many INFJs don't have the opportunity to meet other INFJs, so they remain in the inky grey of ignorance, bewilderment or self-doubt.

It was this person who finally convinced me that sharing my INFJ story may also help other INFJs.

As I investigate my INFJ journey I'll be gaining more cohesion and integration of my personal narrative. I strive to be all that I can be and to be the best that I can be. INFJs typically invest in their own personal growth and development. This applies to me too; much of my life has been a quest towards developing myself and growing my strengths. Thankfully, I am a nicer person because of it.

However, the book is not only about the good side of the INFJ. All types have a dark side too. All types have faults and weaknesses including INFJs, however much we wish it weren't true. It is only fair that I consider these along with the good. I am here to be truthful and at times the truth hurts. Sometimes, when I hold up a mirror to myself I find traits and habits that are unpleasant.

As INFJs, we can get stuck down self-made rabbit holes which we blame others for building, and we can appear as precious, selfish, conflict avoiders with a vindictive streak. Ouch! Sorry, I don't mean to offend. It may be challenging to read of these darker aspects of INFJs but I will own my own failings in the book and point the finger at myself. Please know, it pains me and embarrasses me to admit to these ugly aspects of myself and my pride would prefer it if I hid them from you. However, growth is only possible by continually admitting to and uncovering the unpleasant

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aspects of ourselves, so with a shudder and a desire to run, hide and feel less exposed, I will admit, at least to those faults I know about, others may still be hidden from me.

By the way, a part of me doesn't want to talk about me at all. I feel uncomfortable disclosing myself, in this way, and making myself the centre of attention, as it appears egocentric and unwarranted.

I also know that people will be critical and judgemental and use my admissions as weapons against me. It is so easy to dismiss, belittle or mock others, "Oh yes, I've heard you do that", (cringe), or, "You said in your book that you didn't do that anymore, (stupid)". People can be cruel even when they themselves are far from perfect, including, I am sad to say, judgmental INFJs. With a wry smile, I remember once a Canadian writing to me about my website. It is a huge website with hundreds and hundreds of pages. She stated, "There is a typo on a page on your website, I would have thought that you, of all people, as a communication consultant would be able to avoid such a thing." She never mentioned any of the good things I had done. Maybe she didn't have anything better to do with her time than pull others down? No wonder INFJs prefer to stay private!

However, despite feeling vulnerable I can see the benefits of sharing. I have a primary INFJ drive to work with and help people. INFJs have a native instinct to help people. I am deeply gratified if I think I have helped to mentor other INFJs. Choosing to write a book, as my way of achieving this, is typical of an INFJ. I love writing.

In addition to being an INFJ, I have used the MBTI for over 24 years as an accredited user. As a result, I have met many other INFJs. This gives me a rare practical perspective, rather than just a theoretical or personal perspective, of the INFJ world.

I do not know everything about INFJs nor everything about all INFJs. No one does. However, the concepts and personality characteristics described are typical of many INFJs and will fit other INFJs to varying degrees, even if the specific details don't. I am aware though, that what I have written are my personal interpretations of INFJs, and so please, don't take my word for it but check against your own experiences. My journey is presented as a source of reflection not agreement.

I don't fully understand myself either. I have blind spots, as all people do. Some of my faults and weaknesses have not yet been brought to consciousness. However, I have worked painstakingly throughout my life to shine a light on these dark corners of myself and have brought many into

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awareness. Despite this, some still lurk in the fog of my unconscious, unknown and not keen to come out. I apologise in advance if you can see these and I can't!

Also, included in the book are selective explanations from other MBTI experts and authors that I think sum us up well, most are written by INFJs, but not all. I have also gone to the source and added quotes from Carl Jung, upon whose work the MBTI is based, and from Isabel Briggs Myer, one of the two people who designed the MBTI instrument. I have deliberately included material from across time as some of the classic MBTI texts have the best material in them. There is a full reference section at the end so anything quoted in the text can be easily found. An advantage of having an e-book is that readers can easily click on the links and go straight to the item.

I wrote my story before I searched elsewhere for input or included others' ideas, as I needed to be satisfied it was my perspective and lived experience of the INFJ world and not a diluted version of many. The extra components have been added at times when I thought they could enhance the story or make the point more clearly or expand, explain and reinforce my reflections.

This book is not written for any other type, or with any other type in mind, although I am including information on INTJs and INFPs to highlight our similarities and differences. INTJs may also find the content valuable as we are the only types who share the same dominant function: Introverted iNtuition. Other types are also mentioned in passing, but only when they are of relevance to the INFJ story.

Be that as it may, if you are not an INFJ but your partner, friend, family member or colleague is, you may gain a greater understanding of them and the seemingly inexplicable may be explained. Of course, you will judge what you read through the filters of your own personality type. You may therefore want to dismiss some comments as ridiculous or whacko, or think we're out of touch with reality, impractical and foolish, but that's only because we don't react, think, feel, value or communicate in the way that other types do. All types have equal merit and our way is no better or worse than that of the other 15 types. No type is special.

The book doesn't say everything about being an INFJ or everything about me. Many topics, such as INFJ romance, hobbies, communication, type differences and careers through to friendships, stress, health and emotions, are covered in a depth and complexity that INFJs like. Other topics, such as finances, religion or sex (yes, we have it and enhance it with fantasies), are not discussed in any depth, if at all. I had to stop at some point! There is so much to talk about.

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There are two key sections. The first addresses the MBTI framework of an INFJ: the way each type is constructed and the essential elements, functions and characteristics of the INFJ, and personal examples are given to illustrate these. It also has separate chapters comparing the INFJ with the INTJ and the INFP, and there are personal contributions from each of these types. The second section describes the personal stories of INFJs.

I need to clarify three aspects of the text. I have used the MBTI spelling "Extravert" with an /a/ because that is the official MBTI spelling. I have also indicated Intuition with a capital N, "iNtuition", because that is where the N in INFJ is derived, and it prevents confusion with the "I" for Introvert. Finally, when I use "We" as a reference point I am referring to myself as an INFJ in concert with other INFJs.

In conclusion, if this book, in any tiny way, fosters the blossoming of any INFJs and assists them to develop greater confidence, self-acceptance or understanding, my purpose is met. I dream that this book inspires, reaffirms and validates who we are as INFJs. Hidden amongst the words I hope people find sparkling gems that dance in their minds to bring meaning, understanding and acceptance to more parts of themselves.

As INFJs we deserve to find a truly rewarding, confident, happy place for ourselves in the world, if we haven't already found one. We also deserve to stop having to justify ourselves or stress ourselves working against our preferences.

This is our time. It doesn't often happen that a book is totally devoted to INFJs. Usually, through our schooling we are trying to fit in. Within our families or in our workplaces we may try to hide our true selves to avoid rejection or conflict. No longer! As INFJs, we can honour who we are, deeply and healthily. And, in so doing we can flourish, our relationships and work can be enriched, and we can lead our communities.

Only a lucky few INFJs live and work in an environment that truly supports, nourishes and strengthens them. The rest may remain as square pegs in round holes. May this book lead them to greater happiness within so that the edges of the hole soften and the square can fit in more easily without any loss of the goodness contained within it.

Blessings,

*Rachel Green*

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Western Australia.