

| <b>Officers</b> | <b>Industrious</b>                  | <b>Lazy</b>                                |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Clever</b>   | <b>Appoint to the General Staff</b> | <b>Appoint to Highest Leadership Posts</b> |
| <b>Stupid</b>   | <b>Dangerous</b>                    | <b>Use Under Certain Circumstances</b>     |

By Joel Smith

### **The Four Types of Officers**

As a young officer I read German General Kurt Von Hammerstein-Equord's four officer categories; they are 1) the clever, 2) the industrious, 3) the lazy, and 4) the stupid.

"I divide my officers into four classes as follows: the clever, the industrious, the lazy, and the stupid. Each officer always possesses two of these qualities. Those who are clever and industrious I appoint to the General Staff. Use can, under certain circumstances, be made of those who are stupid and lazy. The man who is clever and lazy qualifies for the highest leadership posts. He has the requisite nerves and the mental clarity for difficult decisions. But whoever is stupid and industrious must be got rid of, for he is too dangerous." (Von Hammerstein, 1933)

"You can use the brilliant but lazy man as a strategist, a brilliant but energetic man as a Chief of Staff, but God help you with a dumb but energetic man." (Gen Douglas McArthur)

By swapping out a few terms for contemporary ones, we get four base archetypes:

*Lazy and dumb:* Doesn't do much, but doesn't cause problems, can be of use under certain circumstances. Needs supervision and you can trust them with simple tasks.

*Lazy and intelligent:* Has the intellect necessary to make strategic decisions, and doesn't expel too much energy on inconsequential issues. They focus their energy on gaining

efficiency, saving cost, and reducing risk over the long-term.

*Hardworking and dumb:* Not self-aware, doesn't know what they don't know, and won't ask for directions. They actively make things worse. These people can be quite affable and charming. They often 'talk a big game' but can't deliver, they are dangerous.

*Hardworking and intelligent:* Tackles problems, relentless, does not accept defeat. This type, when armed with commander's intent and end state, will find a way to solve any problem necessary to achieve results.

I found these archetypes profound in their simplicity and accuracy. I have worked with hardworking and dumb officers who fouled things up. I witnessed hardworking and intelligent officers carry the weight of an organization. I also observed intelligent and lazy officers ponder big problems, yet struggle to implement innovative solutions within the rigid structure of the military.

In recent years, I have seen reference to the "Four Types of People" being those who 'cause problems,' 'identify problems,' 'solve problems,' or 'prevent problems.' This model overlaps somewhat with the categories above, but lacks nuance, and doesn't articulate specific strengths and weaknesses of each group, nor how to develop those people.

People are the most valuable asset in any organization, people fight and win wars, people develop novel solutions to complex problems. We need to fully understand ourselves, our individual strengths and weaknesses; and understand our people, how to develop them, and how to identify potential for advancement.

### **A Better Model**

Building on the general concepts above, I offer a model of four types of officers which recognizes the spectrum within each archetype, as well as identify the strengths and risks within each. A leader must know how to identify, employ, develop, and rate each category of officer.

Type 1: The "Problem Causer" - much like Von Hammerstein's "Hardworking and Dumb" archetype, this person actively causes issues. They get in the way, and they seek out excuses. These people have no place in an effective organization. Identify them quickly, develop them if possible, remove them if not. This person lacks self-awareness and does not want input. The main variable in the spectrum of the Type 1 is if they passively or actively cause problems.

The passive Type 1 can be as innocuous as one who schedules events on top of others, preventing routine operations, maintenance, or battle rhythm events; or as dangerous as a person who takes risky shortcuts, endangers personnel, and squanders resources. This is the leader who does not listen to input, and makes rash decisions which hurt morale and incur unreasonable risk to mission and people.

At worst, an energetic fool can be quite outgoing, engaging, affable, and charming. This person will overpromise and under-deliver. Learn to identify them quickly before they slip through the cracks and get promoted, worse yet, convince the boss they are the Type 3 and receive a high rating. I have witnessed several Type 1s promoted below zone, they typically end up failing in a spectacular way, but not before causing great harm to an organization. A fool is dangerous, but a high energy, charming fool is catastrophic.

Type 2: The “Problem Identifier” - Similar to Von Hammerstein’s “Lazy and Dumb,” except they may not be exceptionally dumb, just lack creativity. This person is happy to sit back, point out problems, and make excuses. They always have input to the final After Action Review (AAR), but rarely do anything to fix the problems, especially not on their own initiative. They can be an acceptable member of all but the highest performing teams. If you have one of these people, give clear guidance, and supervise closely. They can contribute, but do not place any high risk, or high visibility items on their shoulders. They will do exactly as told until they run into an obstacle, they will not move mountains, but may be very reliable within the limits of their skills. The main variables across the spectrum of the Type 2 is their level of cynicism and teamwork.

A cynical Type 2 is a chronic complainer and finds excuses to not do things. They are risk averse, avoid confrontation, passive, and counterproductive. They won’t go out of their way to hurt you; however, they will not go out of their way to help you either. A very passive 2 is not as dangerous as a Type 1, but they may be no value added outside of a limited skill set.

Some Type 2s can be coached, motivated, and led to success. With the right incentives, they may overcome their pessimism. Type 2s may be skilled and adept for certain tasks, use them to the limits of their abilities. A good 2 may be a great member of a larger team, they are not exceptionally bright or versatile, but can be helpful.

Type 3: The “Problem Solver” - Just like Von Hammerstein’s “Hardworking and Intelligent,” the Problem Solver is the workhorse of Army staffs. Reasonable intelligence, experience, competence, and drive are all it takes. These people make things happen; commanders rely on them. They get results, they do not accept excuses, and, ultimately (rightly), they get most of the recognition. This is the Iron Major who runs Division CHOPS, the planner, the

commanding general's aide. When Murphy derails equipment load-out, this officer knows exactly which civilian to call to adjust times, has a friend in the sustainment brigade who can move equipment, and can motivate Soldiers to roll with the punches. This is the leader who leads from the front. The main variable with a Type 3 is their level of aggressiveness.

Type 3s are helpful, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and likable. A great team player. A calm Type 3 is likely a quiet professional, doesn't seek to lead every group, but will help any way they can. They are reliable and trustworthy. They will stay late, they will take on additional tasks, and they never say "NO." A high energy Type 3 stands out in every room with infectious enthusiasm, this is your go-to person for the most challenging problems. They consistently receive the 'top block' evaluations. The best Type 3s can be a team member or team leader, and not only don't say 'NO' they will always ask "what's next?"

Overly aggressive, assertive, and demanding Type 3s risk becoming toxic. They may be so used to achieving results, that they seek results at any cost. There is a fine line between highly effective, and abusive. The aggressive Type 3 could be a great team leader, but not a good team player. Look to their peers and how an organization works after they leave to identify if they are a team builder, or a burner. A toxic Type 3 is no better than a Type 1.

Type 4: The "Problem Preventer" - this can be Von Hammerstein's "Intelligent and Lazy" officer, but with more nuance. This officer identifies problems and long-term risk. They look for innovative solutions, and they like to apply resources now to reduce risk later. They plan an operation with multiple branch and sequel options for command decision. When the Type 3 asks "what's next?" the Type 4 already has options. However, the Army tends to care more about near-term risk, and rightfully so. If a commander is staring at an enemy force, they don't care about revamping a staff process to gain efficiency.

Ultimately, the problem preventer can face intense resistance to change in a rigid organization, and commanders may view an active problem preventer as a mere problem identifier if the problems they look to prevent are too intangible, or too long-term. The main variable within the Type 4 category is versatility.

The intelligent and "energy efficient" officer enjoys the process of problem solving, they are excellent strategic planners, or academics. Rarely excited, they may come off as more aloof, or disconnected. They are less concerned with near-term objectives and focus their energy on systemic, or strategic issues. They may care so much about individual trees, that they can't see the forest in front of them.

The Type 4 who is versatile enough to focus energy on a commander's priorities walks the

line between Type 3 and 4; they can solve problems, they are high energy but not easily excitable. They have a deep strategic understanding and can energize a team to solve near-term problems. This person is exceptionally rare and has the most long term potential. They easily learn new skills, will tackle any problem, and will adapt to any role the organization needs.

### **A Hypothetical Team**

A commander has a problem and stands up an Operational Planning Team (OPT) to conduct Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). The S/G-3 is in charge, and they have various Subject Matter Experts (SME) from plans, logistics, signal, intel, etc. In an OPT of ten people, one person was sent there by their staff section to get them out of the way because they cause too many problems (Type 1), there is one in nearly every group, particularly on conventional staffs. Perhaps they were sent to take notes and report back to that section, knowing that they are not a crucial SME for the assigned task. That person will actively get in the way: identify them early, ignore them, or give them some menial and non-critical task. Out of ten people, four will be a Type 2, great at helping to analyze the problem and identify issues. Mission analysis is the most important step, and even a Type 2 is competent and useful. Type 3s will make up another four out of the ten. They are, once again, the workhorses; the ones compiling notes after everyone else leaves, building slides, creating Courses of Action (COA), and developing the decision brief. Lastly, there should be one Type 4 on the OPT. This person is mostly quiet, they are looking at strategic risk and implications, they are looking for what *could* go wrong, the worst case scenario, and how to buy down risk. They are great for COA assessment and ranking. Too many “big thinkers” on the team can bog it down, but you need to have one.

### **Leading the Four Types**

If you are leading a large group you will have a mix of these four types. If you find a Type 1 counsel them with clear expectations, give them simple tasks and no significant responsibility. Types 2 and 3 are doing most of the work. Place the more competent and driven of the group in key leadership roles. Use the Type 3 to lead critical tasks and test how much responsibility they can handle. Always ensure you have a good Type 4 in any team, often one is enough, and two is too many.

Type 1s need detailed counseling, coaching, and mentoring, pair them with a seasoned NCO or officer who can coach, mentor, or conversely, babysit them until you can get rid of them. Evaluations must be accurate to prevent them slipping through the promotion system. They need help becoming self-aware. If they are still junior enough to be taught, you may be able

to salvage them with timely, direct, and clear behavior based feedback. However, if they are the loud, boisterous, likable, over-promiser, you need to be careful. At times, extremely likable, energetic officers are selected for key jobs, and promoted over peers, only to find out that once they are fairly senior their bravado was a house of cards. If you've ever thought "he's a great guy, but..." that is a Type 1 trying to look like a Type 3, a "used car salesman," and they are dangerous. Be honest, it doesn't help anyone to "sugar-coat" evaluations.

Type 2s make up a significant percentage of staffs and typically fall within the promotion range, so you cannot overlook them. During counseling, focus on their ability to identify problems, hone that skill, and give them deliberate tasks to develop their problem-solving abilities. After a major event, the Type 2s provide a lot of input to AARs. Give them the task of reviewing the AAR, identifying trends, prioritize issues, and have them generate ideas, or have them write policy or procedural changes. Type 2s may not have a wide range of skills, but can be very adept in their trade, leverage their expertise.

If a Type 2 is low energy, not creative, and a chronic complainer, there may be no salvaging them. If that is the case, lump them in with Type 1, make sure they are supervised, can do no harm, and provide appropriate ratings so they fall below the promotion line. Do not pass the problem on to future leaders if they cannot grow.

The Army loves Type 3 officers and NCOs, they make things happen and execute the commander's intent; they solve problems in line with the commander's priorities. They get the most attention, however, you must beware of overly aggressive Type 3s who run the risk of "toxic" or "counterproductive" leadership styles. The Type 3 is the go-to action officer for special projects and key assignments, they have spent their careers consistently in the "Top 25%, Top 10%, or #1."

The major risk with a Type 3 is that they become so engrained with the identity of being a fixer, that they become a "Yes-Man" never telling the boss no. They never want to fail, and may force a bad plan into action. Long-term, this person can become overly aggressive, never willing to accept defeat. If you are leading one of these types, remind them that it is okay to fail a mission, but you can never fail your people. People remain the greatest asset to any organization, and a good team can fix a bad plan, or know enough to throw it out and start from scratch. A responsibility of being a top performer and having access to senior leaders is to provide honest assessments and speak truth to power. An aggressive "Yes-Man" is no better than a Type 1 in the long run - help them better see themselves and understand how others view them. A peer evaluation or 360 degree assessment can be a useful tool.

Type 4 officers are rare, and they require special mentorship. The Type 4 is passionate about systems and processes, assessing risk, and aggressively seeks improvement to gain efficiency. The Type 4 can be frustrated when confronted with an attitude of “if it aint broke, don’t fix it,” or “this is the way we’ve always done it.” Just because something is good enough, doesn’t mean it can’t be better, and the Type 4 is a perfectionist, never satisfied with the status-quo. The Type 4 can also be aloof and appear unconcerned with routine issues because they are routine, and the Type 4 loves big problems. Remind a Type 4 that in a fast-paced, high-risk environment, good enough is ideal. Reduce risk to an acceptable level, and move on to the next problem.

This person is highly intelligent and passionate about what they do. If a Type 4 cannot put aside pet projects in order to solve immediate needs in line with commander priorities, they do not need to work at the tactical level. This type should look into functional areas such as Operational Research Statistics Analysis (ORSA), Strategic Planner, Academy Professor, the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), or any number of niche fields where the Army can benefit from their analytical thinking.

If a Type 4 is flexible, and can be whatever the organization needs them to be, they can walk the line between problem solver, and identifying risk reduction measures. Coach the Type 4 to focus efforts on command priorities, broaden their skills, and fill holes in the staff as needed. The best Type 4 knows how to assess strategic risk, as well as how to articulate that risk in terms the commander cares about, tie that risk to a commander’s priorities, and understand when timing is optimal to ask for the resources necessary to improve the organization.

### **Ranking the 4 Types**

Most people in a random population are going to be Type 2s and 3s (~70%). 15% will be poor performers, and another 15% will be the top performers. If you are part of a career field or organization that assesses, screens and selects high performers, you will undoubtedly have a higher percentage of Type 3s and 4s, a smaller percentage of 2s, and – ideally – zero 1s. In the Army, occupations with high Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) score requirements, grueling schools, and units which conduct specialized assessments seek to only hire the best.

Army centralized boards assess past performance in order to retain and promote the most capable people. There is an aphorism that “everyone is promoted to the level of incompetence.” If the Army keeps promoting people who are proven successful in their current rank, they will eventually reach a rank for which they are not capable. Ultimately,

the Army has manning requirements, and the Army will promote the number needed. If we fail to retain the best, most capable people, we will end up promoting to the point where “need” overlaps “mediocrity.”

Raters must assess their officers, provide candid feedback, coach and mentor to the best of their ability, and then render honest evaluations. Honest evaluations, based on potential, not just past performance, are crucial to retain and promote the best. Providing adequate incentives to retain the best and brightest is a separate topic in itself.

I offer this guide: Aggressive 3s and versatile 4s - promote ahead of peers (unless toxic), future commanders, place in competitive and nominative assignments. More passive 3s and inflexible 4s - promote with peers and send to challenging assignments (unless too passive). Type 2s - promote below peers or based on needs of the Army, assign to staff positions. Type 1s - do not promote, do not retain, make sure to document poor performance and be clear, do not trust the board to read between the lines.

### **Which type are you? And what to do about it**

Self-awareness is a critical skill for leaders. Knowing yourself, your strengths and weaknesses and how each applies to your specific position; how you process information; your blind spots; your biases; and how others perceive you. Knowing which of the 4 types you are can help assess your abilities and gauge where you need to improve compared to your peers. This is just one tool, and not a comprehensive assessment, you should seek feedback from as many sources as possible to create a holistic picture of yourself. Other tools include the [Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory](#), Multi-Modal Personality Inventory, [FIRO-B](#), Business 5, 360 degree evaluations, and many others.

If you are not trusted with major projects, if you are given menial tasks, you may be a Type 1. Ask for feedback, some bosses are not good about delivering candid (negative) feedback. Ask for specifics, ask for more responsibility. You aren't going to go from a Type 1 to a Type 3 overnight, but you might be able to turn into a humble Type 2. Accept your limitations. Focus your efforts on honing the fundamental skills of your trade, and build credibility. Ask how you can help with a task, before you ask to lead a major project.

A Type 1 who is self-aware, and humble can find niche roles and develop into a trustworthy Type 2 over time. Ultimately, you may not be suited for your current career path, do some self-reflection, and find something you can be better at, which plays to your strengths. People will respect you more for recognizing your limitations rather than being that loud, boisterous, used car salesman who insists on getting in the way.



If your boss trusts you with routine tasks, but never gives you the big project; or ranks you in the top 40-60%, you might be a Type 2. You are trustworthy, reliable, and competent, but not part of the inner circle. You may be very good at your job, but fail to demonstrate a wide diversity of skills. You may provide thoughtful and insightful input to an AAR, but you are not going out of your way to solve those problems. Try taking more initiative and ask how you can help the project leads. Learn new skills. Being a good team player can make a huge difference. No one wants a cynical or pessimistic person on their team. Being a trustworthy Type 2 will likely get you ahead of the promotion cut line and make for a reasonably successful career.

Type 3s, you are trusted agents, your bosses right-hand, and selected over peers for tough jobs. You likely know who you are, however, be wary of over-promising, and always give honest assessments and feedback. Your boss doesn't need a yes-man, they need an honest broker. You will be successful in any position if you know your limits, know when to ask for help, and know when to throw out a bad plan. Motivate and energize the people around you, invest in them, develop your team, and they will take care of you. If you want all the glory for yourself, you may be successful for a long time, but eventually karma will get you. Being a good team player is more important than being the best. Learn humility, and value input from diverse teams. Don't run full speed towards a goal without making sure it is the right goal.

If you are that ideal Type 3 who does not sacrifice people for mission, you will go far. The next step is to hone strategic insight like the Type 4. You are likely a fast paced fixer, always on the go. Try slowing down, taking a step back, and learning to admire a problem longer. Buy time and space for your peer Type 4s to fully assess a problem and gain efficiencies.

If you love solving complex problems and have high intellectual curiosity you are likely a Type 4. You have superior intellect, but that is not enough to be successful. No one cares how smart you are if you cannot tackle the problems which are important to your boss and the organization as a whole. Your boss has told you that your pet project is mildly interesting, or had to re-direct your efforts. You may become frustrated with the rigidity of Army systems and processes. You think that you are smarter than your boss because they don't understand a particular problem you believe exists. That's fine, get over it, and accept the fact that the operational Army may not be for you. Focus on a functional area, such as ORSA or Strategist. Your skills are very useful if focused on the right problems.

Conversely, you can learn to focus your energy on 50 meter targets and multitask like the Type 3. A Type 4 may be of great service to the military, but you may lack the aggressiveness or emotional intelligence necessary to be an operational unit commander.

The best officers must balance short-term and long-term risk. Learn how to inform and influence senior leaders by tying your solutions to the boss' problems and priorities. As Von Hammerstein says, the clever and lazy may be suited for the highest levels of leadership; however, in the modern military, an officer won't survive long years on staff surrounded by high-energy, high-output (Type 3) officers if you can't match their strengths.

## Conclusion

Of course, the four archetypes introduced in this article are an imperfect model. Each person has a unique combination of personality traits, and not every person will fall neatly within the four categories above. This is just one tool to help recognize the strengths and weaknesses in yourself and others, where to focus development programs, and how to evaluate potential. Ultimately self-awareness and teamwork are the most important factors to success.

Self-awareness is critical to be an effective leader and maximize your potential. Everyone has a unique set of raw talents, skills, knowledge, and behaviors. Understanding yourself enables you to leverage your strengths, and find strategies to offset your weaknesses. These strengths and weaknesses change over time and based on position. Being intelligent and analytical is a strength as a planner or program manager; however, for the Type 4 those skills may come with a lack of aggressiveness or interpersonal skills necessary to being a good commander of a line unit. Understanding yourself can shape your career decisions, choosing a path which makes best use of your skills, and maximizes your long-term potential.

Self-awareness also enables you to form teams of people around you to balance organizational requirements. The more we learn about our people, the better we can employ them. Seek to understand those people for whom you are responsible. Help them gain self-awareness, coach and mentor them in order to get the most out of their individual talents. Take advantage of assessment tools to learn more about yourself and others. Invest in your people, develop them according to their needs, and rate them honestly in order to maximize the return on investment.

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