

THE FOUR
TENDENCIES: THE
INDISPENSABLE
PERSONALITY
PROFILES THAT
REVEAL HOW TO
MAKE YOUR LIFE
BETTER

by Gretchen Rubin

INSIGHTS BY:

Ivaylo Durmonski

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ABOUT:

This is a comprehensive summary of the book *The Four Tendencies: The Indispensable Personality Profiles That Reveal How to Make Your Life Better (and Other People's Lives Better, Too)* by Gretchen Rubin. Covering the key ideas and proposing practical ways for achieving what's mentioned in the text. Written by book fanatic and online librarian Ivaylo Durmonski. (Printable available only for supporting members.)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- How you handle outer expectations and inner expectations says a lot about you.
- Create outer accountability depending on your personality type. This is crucial for making progress. We all need a tap on the back.
- There is a positive side to selfishness. Working towards your own goals and your own well-being without feeling regret, while also not being a jerk.

ABSTRACT:

After conducting “thorough” research on her blog, the self-proclaimed expert on human nature sorts humanity into four buckets: Upholders, Questioners, Obligers, and Rebels. The classification of the Four Tendencies is all based on how someone responds to expectations. And while the text is absent of hard scientific proofs, the book does deliver. The separation made by the author makes a lot of sense, and it can definitely help the reader understand himself. Plus, also get others – why they do what they do. All of this, ultimately, helping us have better relationships with both others and ourselves.

THE CORE IDEA:

We tie happiness and success to income and status. But is this the right approach? Gretchen believes that we can *only* stay happy, productive, inspired when we uncover our true personality. When we’re able to exploit our strengths while also properly manage our weaknesses. Figuring out your tendency allows you to get to know yourself better. Find the right inner combinations to ignite motivation when all seems lost, plus tactics to manage stress, uncertainty, and overall deal with the daily challenge well all face: “How do I get people—including myself—to do what I want?”

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KEY LESSONS FROM THE FOUR TENDENCIES:

- LESSON #1: WHY IT'S HELPFUL TO IDENTIFY OUR OWN TENDENCY?
- LESSON #2: UPHOLDERS: SELF-MOTIVATED AND TRUSTWORTHY
- LESSON #3: QUESTIONERS: INNER-DIRECTED AND DATA-DRIVEN
- LESSON #4: OBLIGERS: UNDYING DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS
- LESSON #5: REBELS: STRIVING TO BE AUTHENTIC WHILE BREAKING THE RULES
- LESSON #6: TAKE THE BEST OUT OF THE FOUR TENDENCIES WHILE AVOIDING THE WORST

LESSON #1:

WHY IT'S HELPFUL TO IDENTIFY OUR OWN TENDENCY?

You're not as unique as you think you are. In fact, based on your behavior and part of a narrow, four-sided pattern you're either a disciplined freak, annoying fact-seeker, accountability addict, or unreliable egoist.

That's the overview of the book.

After having an "Aha" moment. The author discovers that humanity can be divided into four tendencies:

- **Upholders:** Meets outer expectations; Meets inner expectations.
- **Questioners:** Resists outer expectations; Meets inner expectations.
- **Obligers:** Meets outer expectations; Resists inner expectations.
- **Rebels:** Resists outer expectations; Resists inner expectations.

The above is all based on one simple question: “How do people respond to expectations?”

This might sound unconvincing – to create a detailed framework and put all living humans into 4 buckets based on simply how they handle expectations.

But actually, it’s quite smart.

After all, our actions, whether we like them or not, are influenced by two things: outer expectations and inner expectations.

This makes us constantly living on the verge. Asking ourselves questions like: “I want to eat this delicious chocolate pudding (inner expectations) but I told John that this week I’ll only eat fruits (outer expectations). What should I do?”

We are constantly comparing our inner desire to do something with the outside expectations of the surrounding people. The result based on these two leads to either action or inaction.

Measuring how we respond to expectations might not give us a complete overview of all humanity. Yet, after reading the book and assessing myself and the people I know, I do agree that the information inside The Four Tendencies can give you something quite useful.

You get to understand yourself – your motivations and limitations. You also get answers to these questions: “What prompts me to act in certain situations? Why do I stay idle in

others?”

And on top of this, the book helps you categorize your friends and family members. Providing you with a good framework to better meet the needs of the people closest to you.

“When we consider the Four Tendencies, we’re better able to understand ourselves. This self-knowledge is crucial because we can build a happy life only on the foundation of our own nature, our own interests, and our own values.” Gretchen Rubin

LESSON #2:

UPHOLDERS: SELF- MOTIVATED AND TRUSTWORTHY

The first tendency, Upholders.

Upholders readily meet both outer and inner expectations.

Self-starters. Love schedules. Reliable when something needs to be done and are eager to meet outer expectations while also ensuring that their desires are met.

My tendency, apparently.

I'm not surprised. I won't stop working until what is expected of me is delivered on time in the right format while diligently following the provided instructions. But it doesn't stop there, I constantly set inner goals that probably look insane for an outside viewer (like getting at 5 am) and I commit to them without needing an extra hand or reminders from others.

For example, for more than 10 years I have run at least 25 km a week. Nobody told me I had to do it. I did it because I wanted to.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

“Discipline is my freedom.” Gretchen Rubin

STRENGTHS:

Upholders are committed and stick to their goals. They diligently follow the rules while simultaneously obey their self-imposed routines.

They rarely need supervision. Reliable and self-directed, Upholders can be categorized as a weird combination of autonomous robot-like task-performing weirdo with intolerance to excuses when the job is not done.

The power to make themselves do things they don't feel like doing at this current moment is probably their secret superpower.

WEAKNESSES:

Unable to delegate because they don't believe that other people can do the job as they envision it.

Blindly following rules without thinking of the bigger pictures can sometimes hurt their progress.

Since Upholders don't need a helping hand to do something or to

commit to a certain activity, they don't understand other people who need accountability (Obligors). They expect things to be done after giving the assignment but when it's not, they can treat others harshly.

HANDLING UPHOLDERS:

Having an Upholder in your house is like having a dedicated coach that is always there to motivate you and get you out of bed every day at the exact same time.

It can be helpful, but more often than not it can be irritating to deal with your stick spouse who gets angry when the plan is slightly changed or when you need emotional support not a reminder about your to-do list.

Plainly, emotions are secondary for Upholders. They focus on the task first and then think about the emotional part (I speak from experience).

It's important to understand that Upholders are eager to make others and themselves happy. They want to follow the rules and to do what is written on the label. When this becomes unbearable for the other party, he/she can remind their stiff partner that they, too, have needs. When Upholders are reminded of that, they will place the needs (expectations) of their spouse in their to-do list and readily meet them – or at least eventually.

“Upholders do well in roles that require people to be self-starters, such as starting a business, solo consulting, or freelancing,

because once they decide to meet an aim, they can work toward it without supervision or accountability. Upholders have a deep capacity to make themselves do things they don't feel like doing, which is invaluable for people who work for themselves and lack coworkers to help with the details or drudge work." Gretchen Rubins

LESSON #3:

QUESTIONERS: INNER-DIRECTED AND DATA-DRIVEN

People in this tendency are interested in meeting only inner expectations.

Questioners love data and love spending hours analyzing it. They are far more interested in creating automated systems instead of doing boring tasks.

On another note, don't expect them to worship you even if you're considered the boss, a doctor, or whatever title you think sounds cool. Questioners will only follow someone's command after they have enough proof about his qualities and that the mentioned instruction by the person sounds logical.

I'm sure you know representatives of this group. Folks who, after an overview of a task or a to-do item, never say, "OK, let's do it!" They cross their arms, give you a suspicious look, and when given the opportunity, start with asking endless questions. In order to

begin working on a project, they need to understand the main reason the project exists and why these specific tasks need to be completed.

Questioners won't start working on a task or do something unless solid, preferably backed by data, arguments are presented.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

"I'll comply—if you convince me why." Gretchen Rubin

STRENGTHS:

They don't blindly follow the herd. Questioners question pretty much everything. Common no-brainer activities or orders like taking advice from the doctor or doing what your boss is commanding are put under the loop. Before they do something, they want to know why it's needed. What's the purpose?

Furthermore, they don't obey rules set by society. They decide depending on the case whether they'll drive within the limit or step on the gas.

Or if we can use one word to describe the superpower of Questioners, this word will be: thinking.

They deliberately refuse to obey rules. Also, "we've always done it that way" thinking is not sufficient for them. They imagine things beyond what's accepted and search for the best way for a job to be done. All of this questioning helps the whole group to think more

critically about a case and ensures that the right job will be done.

WEAKNESSES:

If the justification for an activity is not reasonable for Questioners, they will refuse to do the task. Which, as you can guess, can get them in trouble. The boss will go crazy or their spouse will start to yell because the dishes are still dirty.

Additionally, putting up with their endless questions is annoying. Since they want to understand everything down to the smallest detail, they will bombard you with questions for even the simplest things.

But there is even more... Since Questioners adore data, they are 1) super slow when deciding to purchase something and, 2) super slow when they need to act because they crave perfect information. They might spend hours researching and eventually not move forward because they want even more data (analysis-paralysis).

HANDLING QUESTIONERS:

If you're a Questioner, and you're about to design your new house, it's best to leave this to an expert. Researching for the best flooring, tiles, air conditioning can drive you insane, plus irritate everyone around you. It's best to outsource this activity to a reliable firm. In other words, instead of making a thousand decisions for every element in the house, make one decision by picking up a trusty contractor.

If you're dealing with a Questioner, remember that they won't do anything unless there is clarity. Enough instructions, data, and logical explanations to convince them that what is required from them is actually important.

“Questioners struggle to end the research phase and move into action. One Questioner wrote: “I can't stop researching different approaches for various goals (diet, exercise, finances, work). I'm obsessed with finding the most efficient way—which is entirely inefficient. I'm distracted by every shiny new theory or approach.” Gretchen Rubin

LESSON #4:

OBLIGERS: UNDYING DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS

Obligers are the opposite of Questioners. They will happily meet the outside expectations but will do little work to satisfy their own interests.

Imagine Obligers as a carrying mother who does everything for her child but neglects her own wellness.

The fuel that is giving Obligers power is finding someone to keep them accountable. That's why Obligers are great family members and great colleagues – they are always ready to help. Always ready to go all-in when asked for a favor. Sadly, this usually backfires because people often take advantage of them.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

“You can count on me, and I’m counting on you to count on me.”

Gretchen Rubin

STRENGTHS:

According to the author, Obligers are the biggest group. Meaning that they represent the majority of humanity. This is good. Good for society.

Obligers are the people who we can count on the most. When summoned, they will, without hesitation, stop what they're doing and lend you their hand.

Contributing to different causes is not considered a chore for them. They love it. It's a way for them to help others while receiving praise. That's the thing that motivates them most.

WEAKNESSES:

Self-motivation is their biggest struggle. They can't function without accountability. If there is no one to tell them what to do, or to remind them of their obligations, they will quickly fall into a downward spiral. Unable to move, and not knowing what to do.

Additionally, if they constantly meet outside expectations but don't receive the praise or the appreciation they think they deserve, they quickly transition into rebellious outrage.

This makes sense a lot of sense. After all, if you always give but you don't receive, you will grow frustrated with the person and snap. Go berserk mode and end a relationship for good, for example.

HANDLING OBLIGERS:

Creating outer accountability is your main priority if you're an Obliger.

One example in the book is of a person leaving his job to start a business but struggling to keep working on the business he just started because there is now no one to keep him accountable. I know, sad. But important to understand if you're an Obliger – or have an Obliger friend.

Obligees need constant supervision and deadlines. Otherwise, they won't produce any results.

For some, a to-do list and regular notifications can be enough. Others, though, need more. They need to *feel* accountable. For them, finding a support group, an accountability partner, is the best way to move forward.

And lastly, to avoid entering, or pushing an Obliger to go rebellious. Don't forget to give back. Don't take advantage of Obligees. They will love to help. But at some point will snap and leave without notice if you only take from them.

“Obliger-rebellion can erupt not just when Obligees feel exploited but also when they realize that they're meeting expectations established by others, which aren't truly fulfilling.” Gretchen Rubin

LESSON #5:

REBELS: STRIVING TO BE AUTHENTIC WHILE BREAKING THE RULES

Being a Rebel sounds... complicated.

These disobeying creatures cannot be forced to do anything.

Not only do Rebels feel that they should do the opposite of what others ask them to do. But also, they avoid doing what they want for themselves because it sounds too limiting to follow any type of commands.

Rebels resist all attempts for control and want to do what they feel like doing *right now*. Their character comes flavored with a sip of pure arrogance and an I-don't-care attitude.

Unless they find a cause to commit to – a higher ideal. They're lost in a world of ever resisting doing anything.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

“You can’t make me, and neither can I.” Gretchen Rubin

STRENGTHS:

Since Rebels don’t follow rules and tend to do the opposite of what people tell them. If you’re a Rebel, find someone to tell you “You can’t lose weight!”, for example. Or, “You can’t start your own business!”

These words will make the Rebel lose control and ignite the “I’ll show you” attitude. Hence, give him the power to lose weight and actually start a business.

Or in other words, Rebels get their high when they disobey the rules. They will do something only because they 1) choose to do it, 2) they are challenged, or 3) it’s the opposite of the rule.

And when they choose to do something, they go all in.

WEAKNESSES:

Resisting all expectations is self-destructive. Rebels react impulsively and with great force against even the slightest attempt for control. Invitations to parties or company rules will always be avoided. Even worse, Rebels will do the opposite of what is asked of them.

This type of behavior puts them in an unfavorable position. They want to be free, but since freedom requires some sort of rule-

following, they often end up being controlled in a job they hate.

HANDLING REBELS:

How to handle people who consider even an invitation to a party as a restriction? A way to limit their freedom?

Constantly introduce them to challenging tasks and don't interfere. Let them figure out the solutions without trying to control them.

Trying to micro-manage a Rebel is like trying to put a saddle on a wild horse - only leads to complications. Rebels thrive only when they are given complete freedom to execute a project.

Lastly, if you're a Rebel and you have a hard time motivating yourself to do anything, do this: figure out the person you want to be. When you pair expectations with your desired identity, you will stick to a certain schedule.

For instance, don't register for a 30-day writing challenge, it won't work for you. You will do everything possible to disobey the rule of writing every day. Simply tell yourself that you want to be the type of person who writes every day. This will work better.

“Of course, when we must do something, we do it—even Rebels. Often, however, when Rebels must do something, they find a Rebel way to get it done. I asked a Rebel friend how she managed to pay her bills on time, and without skipping a beat, she answered, “I pay them when I'm at the office, when I should

be working.” When another Rebel friend attends mandatory meetings, he does crossword puzzles on his iPad—conspicuously. The organization can make him come to the meeting, but they can’t make him listen.” Gretchen Rubin

LESSON #6:

TAKE THE BEST OUT OF THE FOUR TENDENCIES WHILE AVOIDING THE WORST

Let me tell you what I think about the four tendencies presented in the book: Regardless of what your tendency is, don't simply study it, understand all four.

The classification done by the author gives us a good overview of how a person might behave. However, the individual tendencies won't give you the whole picture.

Based on the test presented on the author's site, I'm an Upholder. However, I also find a lot of qualities in me that are in the other three buckets. After all, we are complex organisms with ever-evolving "software" based on our ever-growing library of experiences. You can't put a label on someone by simply taking a 6 question test on a website.

That's why, what I think you should do, is this: Consider the strengths of all tendencies and use them to upgrade your life

while you simultaneously strategically avoid the weaknesses.

Here's a short checklist of what you can do based on the qualities mentioned in the book:

QUALITIES TO ADOPT:

- **From the Upholder tendency:** Create a schedule and stick to it; Self-motivation is the best motivation; People trust and want to hang around reliable people.
- **From the Questioner tendency:** Fact-checking before doing something; Get comfortable questioning the norms; Find ways to automate repetitive tasks.
- **From the Obliger tendency:** Show up for your closest friends when they need help; Volunteer and contribute to important causes.
- **From the Rebel tendency:** Carve out your own way based on your own desires; Practice thinking outside the box - avoid being biased by the conventional way of thinking.

QUALITIES TO AVOID:

- **From the Upholder tendency:** Breaking down mentally when your plan or schedule changes; Feeling uncomfortable when the rules of the game are not properly defined.
- **From the Questioner tendency:** Going crazy by overanalyzing and overthinking a situation; Questioning every little aspect of your life.
- **From the Obliger tendency:** Stop trying to please everyone around you; Unable to function when outside accountability

disappears; Never taking time for yourself.

- **From the Rebel tendency:** Thinking that rules don't apply to you; Being uncooperative; Skipping repetitive tasks.

Studying your tendency is a great way to find your core motivators and use them strategically. And also, acknowledging the limitations trying to sabotage you.

But it's not enough to just take the strengths and the weaknesses of your own tendency. I think it's far more important to learn all of them and create an all-inclusive fragrance that can lift you in different situations.

“Which Tendency is the most successful?” I realized that the answer is—as it is so often—‘It depends.’ It depends on how a particular person deals with the upside and downside of a Tendency. The happiest and most successful people are those who have figured out ways to exploit their Tendency to their benefit and, just as important, found ways to counterbalance its limitations.” Gretchen Rubin

ACTIONABLE NOTES:

- **Create outer accountability:** Obligers have a hard time achieving their goals. As noted by the author, they thrive when they have someone to serve. Someone to give them orders. But surely this will break their spirit at some point. It's definitely OK to be helpful, but besides ensuring that others are good, you should also ensure that your plate is not left empty. For this to happen, Obligers need to add outer accountability even for their personal goals. For instance, if you want to go to the gym, find a workout buddy. If you want to read more, join a book club. Personally, I believe that it's not only Obligers who need accountability. We all need support. So, if your motivation is fleeting, find a support group that will help you to stay on track.
- **Be a bit selfish:** Constantly saying yes to everyone leads to two things: Burnout and eventually rebellion. I've been in this position myself, trying to please everyone around me while neglecting my personal desires. You give, give, give. But if you're not taking, you feel exhausted and betrayed. Then, you suddenly stop. Gretchen Rubin notices this phenomenon mainly in Obligers. When others take advantage of them for a long period of time without praise and proper appreciation, they go into an Obliger-rebellion phase. Meaning that they flip the coin and go full savage mode. Escape a bad relationship or an unbearable job in a flash. Pack their bags without saying a word. To avoid this state, make sure that you leave some time for yourself. Be a bit selfish. Do *you*. Seek for balance. Yes, others need attention but your goals are important too.

- **Define who you want to be:** Rebels have a hard time doing repetitive tasks. That's what the author shares in the book. But is it just Rebels? I don't think so. We all hate chores. We all hate schedules and boring tasks that make our days look like we are working on an assembly line. I mean, waking up at 5 am, working out, writing, reading every single day can make you extremely productive, but it surely feels lifeless at some point. What can you do? There is a handy twist the author suggests that will help you commit to a certain schedule, lifestyle. Don't consider what you do as a habit. Or a "must-do". Think of the tasks you want/ need as your personality. Don't say, "I want to adopt the habit of exercising every day." Reframe it like this: "I want to be the type of person who exercises every day." When you connect a certain activity to your personality – or desired personality – it will be harder to steer away. It's no longer a chore. It's who you are. An authentic person.
- **A could-do list:** Change the label of your to-do list to a "could-do" list. A to-do list can make you feel like you're caged to a certain order. It's like you're never acting spontaneous. A could-do list, on the other hand, can give you a list of things to do. Options to choose from. It's a simple trick, but it can exponentially raise the level of your participation. As you can imagine, this trick was invented by Rebels who tend to resist doing scheduled things. However, when the needed tasks are presented as optional, a rebellious person no longer sees them as things to avoid doing. He sees them as opportunities. I think that we all can benefit from this simple toolset.
- **Information, consequences, and choice:** Probably the most useful part of the book is the following framework: information, consequences, and choice. When dealing with Rebels and

Questioners - but I also think that it can help for all tendencies - we don't want to pressure them to make a certain decision. We need to give them 3 things: 1) Proper information in regard to the current situation; 2) Explain the consequences when they act or don't act; 3) List possible options and give them space to choose without further lecturing. Plainly, we are setting a scene where they can make an informed decision within reasonable boundaries, but making it sound like there aren't boundaries. For example, we might tell our kid the following: "If you go outside on a really hot day, you will get a sunburn (information). A sunburn will hurt and we should also probably go to the hospital - making you stuck inside the apartment without the option to play outside (consequences). So, do you want to put a sunscreen lotion or do you want a long-sleeved t-shirt (choice)?"

COMMENTARY

Pause for a moment and ask yourself: "How do you respond to expectations?"

What's your initial response when someone – say a friend – asks you to walk his dog?

If you say, "Sorry. I'm busy. I have my own responsibilities" means that you're an Upholder. You balance outside expectations with your inner desires.

Responding with a question like, "Why should I walk your dog?" makes you a Questioner. A person who wants proper justification for

everything.

Picking up the dog and dutifully going around the neighborhood even if your schedule is crowded means that you are an Obliger. Others always take advantage of you.

And finally, if you simply say, “No, thank you. I don’t want to do that.” Doesn’t mean that you’re necessarily rude. It means that you’re a Rebel type and you value your freedom regardless of the situation.

As the insanely long title states – *The Four Tendencies: The Indispensable Personality Profiles That Reveal How to Make Your Life Better (and Other People’s Lives Better, Too)* – there are four personality profiles that determine how we behave.

Gretchen Rubin, apparently a blogger turned into a self-proclaimed expert in human nature, says that we fall in one of the four buckets: Upholders, Questioners, Obligers, and Rebels.

And while we can question the legitimacy of her expertise, the information, and the classification in the book is really intriguing.

Figuring out your own profile, and the profile of the people you regularly communicate with, can help you in a lot of different ways.

Some of these are: Summon motivation when you need to get things done. Understand the real needs of others and what triggers them. Communicate better with yourself and others.

Key takeaway:

Understanding your personality type will unlock important insights. You will finally get what drives you and what can derail you. You will learn what to keep doing and finally realize what to cease. But don't stop there. Spot what works for the other tendencies and steal qualities that you want/need in your life.

NOTABLE QUOTES:

“My very favorite accountability device came from the Obliger who told me, ‘I wanted to get up earlier, but I live alone. So I created an embarrassing Facebook post and use Hootsuite to set it to post every morning at 8:00 a.m. unless I get up ahead of time to disable it.’”

Gretchen Rubin

“Rebels place a very high value on authenticity and self-determination, and want their lives to be a true expression of their values. Others (especially Obligers) can find it very freeing to be with Rebels, because they’re so in touch with what they want and have no trouble refusing obligations.” Gretchen Rubin

“One parent of a Rebel explained, ‘The best way to wrangle the Rebel child is to give the kid the information to make a decision, present the issue as a question that he alone can answer, and let him make a decision and act without telling you. Let him make a decision without an audience. Audiences = expectations. If he thinks you’re not watching, he won’t need to rebel against your expectations.’”

Gretchen Rubin

WORKSHEET

Reading alone won't help you understand the actionable notes. You need to engage with the content. Answer the question below to plan your next steps:

1/ When your motivation is low, what do you do to keep going?

2/ What do you want the most in life? Is it selfish to pursue this desire?

3/ Instead drafting a to-do list. Create a could-do list:

4/ Take some time and define the person you want to be:

5/ How you can use the information, consequences, and choice framework?

THANKS FOR READING!

Ivaylo Durmonski

