

HARNESSING THE POWER OF **YOU** EMBRACE THE FYI® TRAITS PHILOSOPHY FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Thought Leadership



Have you ever noticed how sometimes an exceptional person may be limited by a certain trait? They may be bursting with questions about a subject, but their curiosity cannot sustain the steady, ongoing effort required to overcome obstacles and bring a project to fruition. They might start numerous projects with enthusiasm, only to leave them unfinished when they encounter difficulties or simply lose interest. Or perhaps they're really great on projects that need close attention to detail and protocol, but they struggle in dynamic settings. Their dedication to details and rules may hinder their ability to adjust to new challenges. This person could be you, your teammate, your manager, or even a mentee.

Imagine how people could benefit from having a resource that helps them navigate challenges like these, especially in a rapidly changing business landscape where we are often asked to adapt and handle a variety of situations, all while staying true to their fundamental qualities.

In our new publication, *FYI® Traits*, Korn Ferry offers a transformative approach to harnessing the power of what makes you “you.” Rooted in decades of research, the *FYI® Traits* philosophy provides a pathway to better understanding ourselves and others. We also adapt these insights for professional and personal growth. In a world that often values conformity, *FYI® Traits* encourages us to break the mold and broaden our characteristics as a toolkit for success.

Personality evolved: Is personality forever?

Our personality and identity—those patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that shape our actions and decisions—are what make us unique. The widely accepted “Big Five” traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability) serve as the foundation of Korn Ferry’s personality model: Agility, Striving, Presence, Agreeableness, and Positivity.

Traits, akin to habits, represent repeated routines that often occur without much conscious thought. The enduring nature of traits means they tend to be stable over time, showing some consistency across situations. However, personality traits are not completely static. Although there was once a prevailing view that personality doesn’t change after age 30, recent studies have revealed that traits continue to develop throughout life. They evolve, influenced by both biological mechanisms (for example, a maturing brain in adolescence contributes to increased emotional stability) and life events (job changes, marriage, parenthood, health challenges, or retirement could prompt personality changes).

This offers hope for intentional development. Traits endure, but they also change over time.

It then begs the question: How do we gain traction in developing something so essential to who we are?

The *FYI® Traits* philosophy emphasizes awareness and intention over radical change. The goal is not to overhaul our personalities but to become more deliberate, broadening our behavioral repertoires. Trait-driven behaviors are habitual; we tend to act,

think, or feel in similar ways, in similar settings, often on autopilot. But we can stop our automatic tendencies by being more intentional in how we approach specific situations. Each personality trait represents a range of behaviors. A person who is always late may show up on time for an important meeting. This doesn't mean the tendency to be late has disappeared. Behavior, after all, does not change overnight. Yet, by intentionally cultivating our natural variations in behaviors, we can broaden our behavioral repertoire, gaining more choices without necessarily changing our enduring traits.

FYI® Traits in real life

Traits-related development may sound like:

- "I'm not always comfortable with public speaking, but I learned how to give a good presentation."
- "I'm not organized, but I figured out how to be on time for meetings."

Adaptability and authenticity: Is it possible to adapt and still be you?

Balancing authenticity and adaptability is a critical aspect of personal and professional growth. Authenticity, often associated with genuine behavior, is not necessarily tied to dispositional traits. The fear that showing out-of-character behaviors makes people less authentic can deter them from flexing and adapting their behaviors to various situations.

However, we can still be authentic even when breaking out of the mold of our typical, automatic behaviors. One's personality, values, purposes, and other factors can all affect authenticity. A non-confrontational person with a strong stance against bullying may feel good about their behaviors when they stand up for someone being harassed. This is because authenticity is less about our actions and more about staying true to our values—and sometimes, this could mean behaving in ways we wouldn't normally.

For professionals and leaders, authenticity is closely tied to the purpose of leadership. Believing in a common purpose rather than serving self-interest leads to a different

perspective on authenticity. Behaviors that contribute to collective goals are seen as authentic, even if they deviate from dispositional traits. When we shift from an egocentric view of authenticity to one that aligns with common objectives, we can foster behaviors that help achieve shared goals.

Trait-based development in action

Strategies for expanding and adapting behaviors are crucial for navigating different settings. People can apply existing behaviors to new situations or learn new behaviors altogether. Specific behavioral goals, such as having a conversation with a colleague on a non-work-related topic, are more effective than broad goals like "being more sociable at work."

Of course, behaving out of character may feel uncomfortable at first; it may require you to challenge your own beliefs, such as "working relationships should stay strictly professional." But with continual practice, these behaviors will become easier and feel more natural.

To broaden your range of actions and boost confidence, deliberately practice the same behavior in various situations. This not only boosts confidence but also helps develop an intuitive sense of "if ... then ..." scenarios. For example, when building influence, pitch a project proposal to diverse audiences. Observe how people respond to tailor the approach—whether they prefer facts or emotions. By intentionally practicing in diverse contexts, we can refine our intuition, enabling us to adapt our behaviors to resonate with someone else's personality, values, or interests. Having a variety of experiences is key to broadening our range of behaviors.

Why consider personality when working on your professional development?

No universally "right" personality exists. People are diverse, each with their own unique set of traits and characteristics. Personality is complex—a varied aspect of human nature that defies a generic attribute.

Understanding and reflecting on our personalities can significantly impact both our professional and personal lives. Aligning tasks with personal characteristics may lead to more effective job performance, engagement, and satisfaction. Beyond the workplace, recognizing personality traits can help us build relationships, choose

fulfilling activities, and manage stress and demands effectively. This encourages personal development by guiding us toward opportunities that resonate with our inherent qualities.

Enhancing professional success involves focusing on the adaptability of behaviors in varying work situations. Setting specific goals for acquiring new behaviors, gradually building confidence, and starting in familiar environments can facilitate the integration of these behaviors into professional life. The essence lies in remaining adaptable and responsive, continually expanding the behavioral repertoire to navigate diverse professional contexts effectively. This strategy emphasizes flexibility and responsiveness, key attributes for thriving in a dynamic and ever-changing workplace.

The *FYI® Traits* philosophy encourages people to blend self-awareness with developing behavioral versatility, creating a powerful foundation for success and fulfillment in all aspects of life.

Broadening behaviors nurtures progress

Traits are both stable and malleable, evolving in predictable patterns over time, whether through maturity or major life events. Throwing people into life-changing situations to stimulate personality adaptation is neither practical nor necessary. Nor do people have to try to overhaul who they are.

Instead, we should remember that personality traits reflect the average of what we do across different situations. We can expand our behaviors by applying them to new situations, mastering new skills, gaining confidence, and practicing in diverse contexts. By intentionally using our behavioral repertoires, we can achieve the outcomes we want without undermining authenticity.

As we embark on this journey of self-discovery and intentional growth, we should embrace the power of our unique traits, recognizing them not as limitations but as tools for success and fulfillment in the ever-evolving landscape of our personal and professional lives.

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About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

Business Advisors. Career Makers.