

FORTUNE

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FIELD TEST

career

Are You a Good Fit for Your Job?

The BIRKMAN METHOD claims to be able to tell people where their true strengths lie. It does, I think. *By Jennifer Reingold*

THE BIRKMAN METHOD

TIME REQUIRED: 30-45 minutes, plus minimum one-hour consultation / **COST:** \$495 (individuals)

WEBSITE: www.birkman.com

REPORT CARD

EXPENSE/EFFICIENCY: **B+**

DAY-JOB RELEVANCE: **A**

LIFE-CHANGING POTENTIAL: **B**

AS A MANAGEMENT WRITER, I had a good gig for a good long time: analyzing how others manage without having to do it myself. That recently changed. I became an editor at *Fortune* and found myself calling meetings, cajoling others to work with me, and doing the things I once loved to criticize.

So when a Houston company called the Birkman Method offered me the chance to get a read on my own flaws and faculties, I couldn't resist. Its test—developed by Roger Birkman in 1951 after the World War II pilot and Ph.D. noticed how people's perceptions of one another hurt teamwork—has been taken by more than 2.5 million people and used by the likes of Boeing and Procter & Gamble. At \$495 for individuals (corporate rates vary), it consists of 298 online questions and takes about 30 to 45 minutes. After that you get your results—presented in a one-hour feedback session with a Birkman-trained consultant.

I settled in at my desk, expecting something complex; what I got was a series of seemingly repetitive true-and-false questions. Most had to do with what I believed “most people” did—and alternatively what I believed I did. A sample: “Most people make excuses for their mistakes.” (I don't.)

It is within those contrasts that the science lies, Birkman, now 91, says. Another differentiation is that Birkman looks at a person's “usual” behaviors and “stress behaviors,” along with “underlying needs.” Stress behaviors happen when those needs aren't met; you've seen it when your boss goes nuclear in a heartbeat.

I soon received the Birkman Preview, a 50-odd-page personalized analysis (more extensive reports are available). I was surprised, wowed even, by what I learned—even though some of it was a tad disturbing. It has already affected the way I act at work.

The report placed me on a four-color grid in terms of my interests and activities, my “usual” style (me during normal times), my needs, and my stress behaviors. My interests put me deep in the blue quadrant, which means I'm a creative who likes working with ideas. My “usual” style fell into the green area, which correlates in my case to hav-

ing a people-oriented and forceful style. (Those who know me call that “big-mouthed” and “blunt.”)

Yet my own needs were the opposite. All that directness doesn't go over well when I'm on the receiving end. It turns out that I need to be appreciated and supported. It can be a problem in both managing and being managed, because I am an inadvertent hypocrite. If I don't get that support, stress behavior (evil Jennifer) appears. I become indecisive, pessimistic, and sensitive to criticism.

Another section, good for career changers, measures areas of interest. I'm in the right place. Literary was my best match, followed by music. (Did they know about my wedding-singer fantasies?) The worst: mechanical and outdoor work.

The Birkman Method's results weren't shocking, but they got me thinking about my interactions. The report provided several checklists of things such as “management style” (manages by delegation, a somewhat legalistic orientation) and “biggest mistakes you can make with her” (burdening her with unnecessary rules, interrupting).

The verdict? Very helpful in learning what I need to succeed. If only there were a Birkman Jr. for my kids. ■

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