

Using the MBTI tool to train police at the Canadian Police College

A Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer who facilitates training at the Canadian Police College in Ottawa likes to move here trainees far outside their comfort zone. But why?

Sgt. Damian delivers workshops for senior executive officers and non-commissioned officers in charge (NCO i/c's) with the RCMP and other police services across the country. She is a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) Step II™ certified facilitator.

Whether she's doing a three-day leadership workshop for police senior executives or a single session with NCO i/c's, there's something she looks for in all participants: "I want to know if they know themselves."

Company Profile

The Canadian Police College was established in 1976 to provide specialized training and executive development to law enforcement officers. The college offers more than 60 courses and workshops, and is based in Ottawa, Ontario.

Canadian Police College

Solution

She has devised some unique ways of finding out. For her 'executive' weekend workshops, she asks participants to do a hands-on activity that is so far out of the law enforcement context (and out of their four-letter personality type preference), that participants at the end of the day get "in the grip."

She won't give away what the activity is—she wants officers to come in with no advance knowledge or pre-conceived notions—but there is method to her mischief. By helping police officers realize how they feel and act in the grip, Damian helps them handle the real-world stress they face, whether on the street or in the boardroom.

"People get in the grip when they have to do something that is least in line with their personality type preferences," she explains. The unexpected situation, the sudden change that derails weeks of careful planning, even the coveted promotion, can all lead to overwhelming stress and anxiety if people don't know themselves well enough to cope.

Damian says the simulated stress she creates gives participants a chance to learn how their preferences can help them handle the real thing. For example, she offers this advice to those in the grip: "When you reach that stage, do something within your preferences that calms you down. If you're an extrovert, go interact with people and talk it over; if you're an introvert, take a walk, go to a quiet room and read, do a Sudoku. Fifteen minutes is all it takes."

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Sgt. Damian,
Certified Facilitator,
Canadian Police College

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Results

Damian's approach seems to be working. "I get callbacks to do group MBTI exercises," she says, adding that only one or two out of hundreds of people she has worked with didn't feel they got something significant from their experience with the MBTI tool.

People's expectations are a big reason Damian likes to keep them unaware of what will happen during her workshops. In her initial sessions with NCO i/c's, she noticed that some police officers were trying to match their questionnaire responses to a perceived "best type" for police senior executive promotion.

"There is no best type. Anyone can do the job," she emphasizes. In fact, she says she has noticed a wider variety of personality types are being drawn to police service. "I'm seeing more diversity, more openness to difference."

That diversity in personality type is encouraging because, as she puts it, "the idea of the MBTI tool is not to select who has the right 'four-letter personality type' to be a police officer or be promoted at the executive rank. Imagine a house with 16 rooms. You might prefer one room—the bathroom, the bedroom, maybe the kitchen—but you still live in the house. And at one time or another you need them all."

The home is a fitting analogy, because once police officers understand their own four-letter personality type or that of others, the benefits go beyond their workplace.

"It's a wake-up call," says Damian. "I often hear people saying, 'Now I understand why some officers on my team are the way they are, why my wife does this, why my son does that.' It's about team dynamics, mutual respect, and mutual support, at work or at home. Get to know and discover who you are, and you'll contribute more to your team, your family or your friends."



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