

THE TRIBUNE

MAKING A DIFFERENCE...DAILY

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Community personalities

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I had a brief conversation this week with Sally, a woman who, with good reason, is very unhappy with her job. In addition to clearly being underpaid and too often treated unfairly by her employer, she isn't in a place that allows her to utilize her creativity or pursue her longtime dream of interior decorating.

Knowing my husband and I had recently moved across the country to pursue our careers, Sally said rather wistfully that we were very brave. She then went on to say that while she knew she had to make a move, she also knew she wasn't a risk taker and didn't really like change.

Rather than let her beat herself up anymore, I suggested that perhaps it wasn't about her not being brave but rather more about the fact that we just happened to be wired in a different way. After all, in my case, both sets of grandparents left all they knew when they migrated to Canada. My maternal grandparents first settled in Toronto where my grandfather eventually owned a successful wholesale fruit distribution company. My paternal grandparents were drawn to the West and promise of free farm land. I'm quite convinced I inherited their genes - especially the one that reflects their openness to new experience.

Suspecting that happiness might be impacted by psychological as well as the economic and sociological factors he had been studying for years, Richard Florida in his newest book, *Who's Your City*, explores this connection between personality and where we live.

Florida summarizes the five dimensions to personality that psychologists have verified. These five traits, rooted in our biology, include openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. No one just fits into any one category as it is clear that each of our personalities is made up of a unique combination of all five.

I suspect my husband's and my dimension of openness to experience is high. Open types are curious and have a tendency to enjoy change, creativity, the arts and anything that exposes them to new facts, ideas and experiences.

Sally is likely high in conscientiousness as it describes those who work hard, are responsible, detail-oriented and strive for achievement.

The third type is extroversion or those who are talkative, outgoing, assertive and enthusiastic. They enjoy meeting new people and tend to maintain a consistent, positive mood. I think my husband and I both also fit here.

Agreeableness is the fourth type and describes those who are warm, friendly, compassionate and concerned about others. They trust others and expect others to trust them.

The fifth type is neuroticism or those who are emotionally unstable and likely to experience anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness and impulsiveness.

Using this proven research about personalities, Florida to his surprise, was able to determine that there are clusters of places with distinct personalities. In fact, cities may even be able to attract and energize certain types of personality.

Although his research was American-based he was able to draw some conclusions that may also be applicable to Canada. For instance, Florida was able to show that openness to experience was highest in the northeast and West Coast states and was related to the proportion of artists and entertainers working there, the percentage of votes cast for liberal candidates, support for same-sex marriage and patent production. In addition to these creative or experiential regions, he also found clusters of outgoing or extroverted regions (think Chicago or Atlanta), and conventional or dutiful regions (think Detroit).

What's beginning to emerge is that communities as well as individuals have personality. Not only that, personality may play a key role in regional innovation, talent, and economic growth.

Of the five personality factors, openness to experience is clearly the most important not only for our own growth, but also for the creative class that every community needs for the innovation, human capital and economic growth necessary for our knowledge economy.

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