Making the connection, making the dream happen: A personal story

"Over the years, my hopes and dreams for the future had been withering and dying. Although the lure of my goals was as strong as ever, I always felt the presence of an impassable barrier and my dreams remained unfulfilled. At past fifty, it was getting rather depressing.

They say that when the student is ready, the teacher appears, and so it was for me. My teacher came in the form of my Thinking Styles® profile. Thinking Styles looks at a number of aspects of the ways in which we think - how we receive and use information from our senses, how we interact with other people and how we approach tasks and problem solving. Other than for the sensory group, these thinking styles are grouped in related pairs, for example: collaborative or competitive; a detailed versus a strategic approach.

When I saw my results, I recognised myself easily – all my strengths and weaknesses were there. *But* I suddenly realised the profound implications of the *combinations* of certain thinking style preferences and the consequences of these combinations for my unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Thinking Styles identified those strengths that you'd have thought would equip me well for the challenge. I have a strong preference for difference over sameness, seeking variety over stability. I am powerfully motivated by the prospect of moving towards a positive goal, or a dream… My approach to tasks focuses on possibilities, handling complexity and detail rather than using tried-and-trusted procedures.

Why, therefore, had I never turned my dreams into reality?

Well, I had some other thinking style preferences. I am intensely anti-competitive and anti-confrontation, backing away as soon as I see the faintest mirage of potential conflict over the horizon. When I stop and think about it, I realise how insidious that approach has become; in almost every encounter, however everyday, there's a part of me that expects some kind of conflict and automatically adopts a defensive position. There are other styles that also get in the way. I have a mild preference, doubtless related to my dislike for conflict, to conform instead of challenging, preferring to belong. It's not helpful if you want to find a path through opposition. I also have a preference for altruism over selfishness – I will put another's dreams before my own.

It was at this point that I realised the impact that these preferences had when combined – how powerfully they opposed each other and locked me in a static conflict. *This* was why I had never turned my dreams into reality. On the one hand, I am strongly motivated towards a goal characterised by change and possibility; on the other hand I have a powerful, debilitating aversion to conflict. What happens? Stress! There are times when it has felt like a physical force tearing me in two: the clearer the vision, the more intense the desire to attain it, the clearer also were the bridges I had to cross in order to get there, bridges that I equated, rightly or wrongly, with conflict.

I only had two alternatives: abandon the dream – in effect, abandon even the *idea* of having dreams, or face up to the conflicts, whether real or imagined, and learn how to deal with them. It's clearly the former approach I've been using for so long now; it's time I took a look at using the latter. I need to examine those blockages which look, from the outside at least, like conflicts. Time also I think to look at those few conflicts in my experience that I know I have handled successfully and determine what was different on those occasions.

It doesn't matter to me whether this model is "true", after all, it is only a model. But it has opened up possibilities of action for me that weren't previously accessible. Who knows? Follow those possibilities and I might even start dreaming again…."

AB works for the BBC, based in the U.K. We would like to thank him for allowing us to share his story.