

choice

the magazine of professional coaching

Aha Moments &
Breakthroughs

Brief Brain-based
Coaching

Systemic
Constellations

Creativity
in Coaching
Tools, tips
& techniques

Focus Energy Balance Indicator (FEBI)

A creative tool to make shift happen through movement

By Ginny Whitelaw, PhD

I had just taken a group of leaders through an experience of the Driver, which is one of what we call “energy patterns”: patterns that operate in the nervous system and manifest in specific feelings, thoughts and actions.

As the name “Driver” suggests, this no-nonsense pattern leans into challenges, gets to the point, and moves quickly. In fact, you can get a feel for it right now by leaning forward, pushing your feet into the floor and boring your eyes into this article. Pretty intense, right? Well, this pushy pattern is not only one of four ways of moving, but also one of four dominant factors in human personality and one of four essential modes of leadership. Many personality instruments measure some aspect of this pattern; it’s a task extrovert in Myers-Briggs, the “D” of DISC, the “red” of Insights. While assessments such as these capture some characteris-

tics of this component of personality, with this group we had used an instrument called FEBI (Focus Energy Balance Indicator), as it was developed to go beyond the traditional cognitive view of personality to include physical movement in order to capture the full range of this energy.

A Watershed Moment

One benefit of the FEBI model is that it provides guidance on how to summon an energy by using certain stimuli, including movement. Once this group of leaders were *in* the Driver pattern, I started asking them about the emotions of this pattern (“Angry” “Aggressive” “Powerful”), its thought processes (“eye on the prize,” “narrow focus”) and how it would do things (“my way or the highway!”).

“Is this pattern a good listener?” I asked. “Oh my God, no!” one of the leaders, Janet, spontaneously erupted. “Driver already knows the answer!” This realization was a watershed

moment for Janet as I discovered in a one-on-one coaching session with her later that day. “When I felt myself enter the Driver pattern,” she reported, “I instantly knew that I use this pattern most of the time – always racing to get here and there.” It was no surprise to her that her FEBI report showed Driver as her strongest (i.e., Home) pattern. And no surprise that the multi-rater feedback she was getting in this course was saying that she didn’t listen or respect others’ ideas.

“I don’t want to be that person,” Janet said. She had recently taken on a big, new role and she knew she couldn’t do it alone or without listening to colleagues. “What I could feel for the first time today,” she went on, “is three other options, and how I’d have to move in myself to get others moving with me.”

She was perfectly describing how shift happens from inside out, and the options she was referring to were the three other patterns in which our nervous system can function: the disciplined, stepwise Organizer; the rhythmic, people-oriented Collaborator; and the open, imaginative Visionary.

While these patterns have been known since the 1930s as distinct patterns of movementⁱ, our research has further shown them as the dominant components (i.e., primary colors) of personality as well as essential modes of leadership. Each has its strengths and, if taken too far or used at the wrong time, each can get us in trouble (see Table 1). But working together, the four energy patterns comprise a marvelous inner team that equips leaders to excel using their natural strengths as well as their natural agility. It gives leaders the ability to make shift happen – first on the inside and then in the world

Moving Into Practice

Working from inside out is not new to coaching, nor is working with personality assessments. But there are two important and creative differences in coaching with FEBI and the energy patterns. First is moving beyond head to work with mind and body as one. As one of my Zen teachers used to say, “You can’t change the mind with the mind. But you can change through the body.”

I often illustrate this with groups by asking them to “grab hold” of the next thought they think and try to turn that thought around. No, wait, that’s a different thought – go back to the one you had a moment ago. It’s all so slippery: thoughts pop up and fade away like billboards on a highway. Trying to work with thought directly is, well, just another thought.

By contrast, I then ask people to fold their arms – you can play along if you like. I point out that they’ve put a particular arm on top. “Turn that around,” I ask. They fumble a bit, acknowledge that it’s not as comfortable, but everyone can do it. “And if you folded your arms the ‘wrong’ way every day for three weeks, do you think it would get easier?,” I ask. “Of course,” they reply. Physically putting ourselves in a particular pattern gives us access to the emotions, thoughts and behaviors that naturally emerge from that pattern. There may be no benefit to folding our arms this way or that. But since each pattern is best at a different set of skills and behaviors, there is huge advantage to having access to even our less comfortable patterns when they’re needed.

The second difference in coaching with the energy patterns

is moving beyond type to experiencing and owning all four energies as essential parts of one’s whole self. Our research comparing FEBI results with multi-rater feedback has shown that, in most cases, the weaknesses others say a person needs to work on relate to overuse of that person’s strongest pattern and/or underuse of weaker patterns (especially when differences are statistically significant)

Janet, for example, was not only strong in Driver, but her weakest patterns were the people-oriented Collaborator and the best listener of the four patterns, the Organizer. Her FEBI report gave her development tables for strengthening these weaker patterns with ways to access them physically through movement or use

Table 1: Characteristics of Each Patternⁱⁱ

	Driver	Organizer	Collaborator	Visionary
Sample Qualities	Pushing Hitting targets, goals Sense of urgency, determined Aggressive, powerful Gets to the Point Loves to win	Holds form, stepwise movement Does the right thing Takes responsibility Wants to be correct Listens carefully Follows directions	Rhythmic, to and fro Plays in give and take of relationships People oriented Playful, has fun Positive, enthusiastic See both sides	Extending, open Imaginative, creative Sees the big picture Intuitive, seeking essence, purpose Flexible Learning oriented
Too Much	Win at all costs Runs over people Overly competitive	Puts form over substance Too slow, gets anxious Overly cautious	Too much on plate, may not deliver Not taken seriously Caught up in drama	Loss of focus, dreamy Many ideas, nothing gets done Disorganized

of the senses, as well as through work behaviors (see examples in Table 2).

We worked together in coaching to design a plan of practice that included a simple breathing exercise for Janet to consciously slow down enough to enter the Organizer pattern where she could hold a listening space with people. We also included a Collaborator practice for when Janet attended meetings. She agreed that whenever she'd make a point, she'd invite others to offer an opposing point of view – and then *listen*.

“I’ve known before that I’m a strong Driver type and not a good listener,” Janet admitted, “But what I love about this approach is that it’s more than just playing to my strengths or telling myself to listen. I can *feel* when I’m in Driver versus the other patterns.”

The Payoff

For a while, shifting to Organizer or Collaborator will feel to Janet like folding her arms the “wrong” way. But as she sticks with it, she’ll find easier access to her weaker patterns and the natural agility of using the right energy at the right time. That’s a shift worth making for anyone. I’ve found the energy patterns help me enormously as a coach by giving me a clear framework for working somatically with my clients, and also for working with myself. The more completely I’m able to enter each energy pattern, the more easily I can shift between each phase of coaching: the Collaborator’s warmth in connecting with a client, the Visionary’s curiosity and ability to get to the essence, the Organizer’s listening and ability to hold a safe space, and the Driver’s ability to cut through excuses and get to the point of action.

No matter what personality model you use, it’s clear that we all have preferences for some components of personality over others. What I like about working with FEBI and the energy patterns is that it constantly reminds us that we – and our clients

Table 2: Ways to Develop Each Patternⁱⁱⁱ

	Driver	Organizer	Collaborator	Visionary
At Work	Know your top 3 priorities Measure something you're doing and cut it in half Get to the point Set stretch goals Reduce distractions Enforce clarity, action, and accountability	Make a list Organize your day Preserve time for planning Break big jobs down into steps Always know your next step Under-promise and over-deliver	Put fun into your day, celebrate Build your network Bond a team you're working with See both sides Find your way around obstacles; play in the give and take Work through people	Add spontaneity to your day Make time for reflection Brainstorm, ideate Widen your perspective (e.g., surf the net, solicit many points of view) Create some chaos, stir things up
Physical Activities	Running; activities done hard and fast Weightlifting Competitive sports Competitive martial arts Activities done sharply, with edge, pushing, or cutting movements	Walking; activities done step-by-step Activities done holding form, e.g., yoga, ballet, dressage, meditation Activities to create order, e.g., cleaning house, office or desk Activities that shape things: woodworking, needlepoint, ceramics Anything done to a process	Rocking; activities done with people and rhythm Dance (with partner) Aikido Social sports, especially with swinging movements, e.g., golf, bowling Team sports Funny games, improvisational comedy Playing with children or pets	Expanding; activities that explore and be Activities emphasizing energy or being in the moment, e.g., Tai Chi, Chi Kung, meditation (Samadhi) Activities done out in nature, e.g., hiking in mountains, sailing Activities with drifting movements, e.g., hang-gliding, snorkeling Aesthetic arts
Sensory Support	Office: Stark and sparse furnishings, Music: Rock & Roll, Rap; hit on the beat Art: Sharp, high contrast, sports posters, “Winning”	Office: Neat and tidy, a place for everything Music: Classical; place on the beat Art: Still life, perfectly composed, “Quality is...”	Office: fun and colorful, over-stuffed furnishings Music: Jazz; swing on the beat Art: family photos, comic strip characters, “Hang in there, Baby”	Office: light and airy, harmony with nature Music: New Age; hang on the beat, if there is one Art: Enigmatic, evocative, outer space posters, “Imagine...”

– can use those preferences without being prisoners of them, and make outer shifts happen by inner shifts of movement.

NOTES:

ⁱ Rathbone, Josephine. 1936. *Residual Neuromuscular Hypertension*. NY, Bureau of Publication, Columbia University.

ⁱⁱ Based on Whitelaw, G. and B. Wetzig, *Move to Greatness* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2008). See also www.febiassessment.com.

ⁱⁱⁱ From Whitelaw, G. *The Zen Leader* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Career Press)