

The Four Leadership Styles

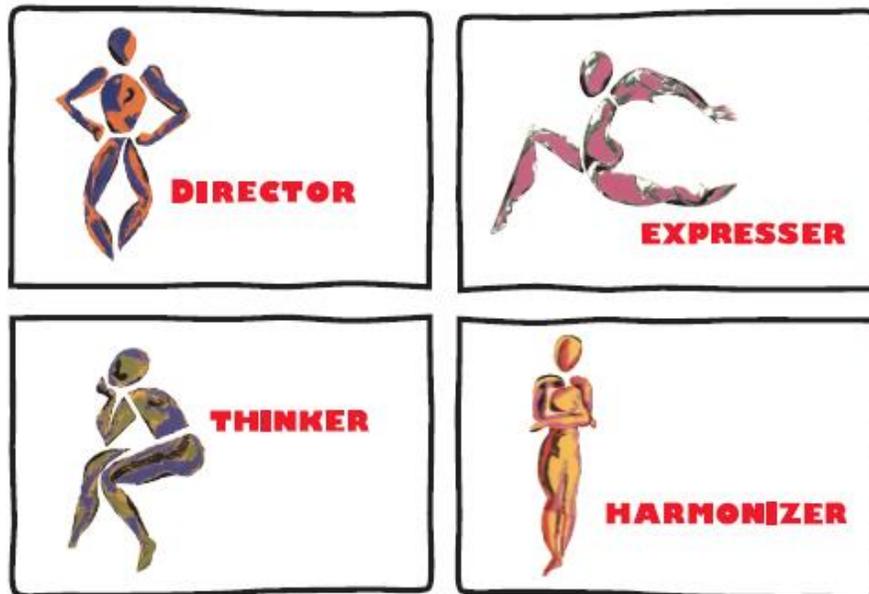
By [Eric Douglas](#), President and CEO of Leading Resources, Inc.

Skillful leadership requires many things. Among them is being aware of your own **leadership style** – and how it affects other people. Knowing your style, and adjusting it to fit the needs of the situation, helps build trust.

This [tool](#) describes **four leadership styles**. It shows you [how to identify your own communication style](#), and provides a chart showing the strengths and weaknesses of each style. Finally, it concludes with two exercises to help you become a more successful leader.

The Starting Point

Everyone has a “natural” leadership style that corresponds to his or her communication style. There are [four basic communication styles](#): Director, Expresser, Thinker, and Harmonizer.



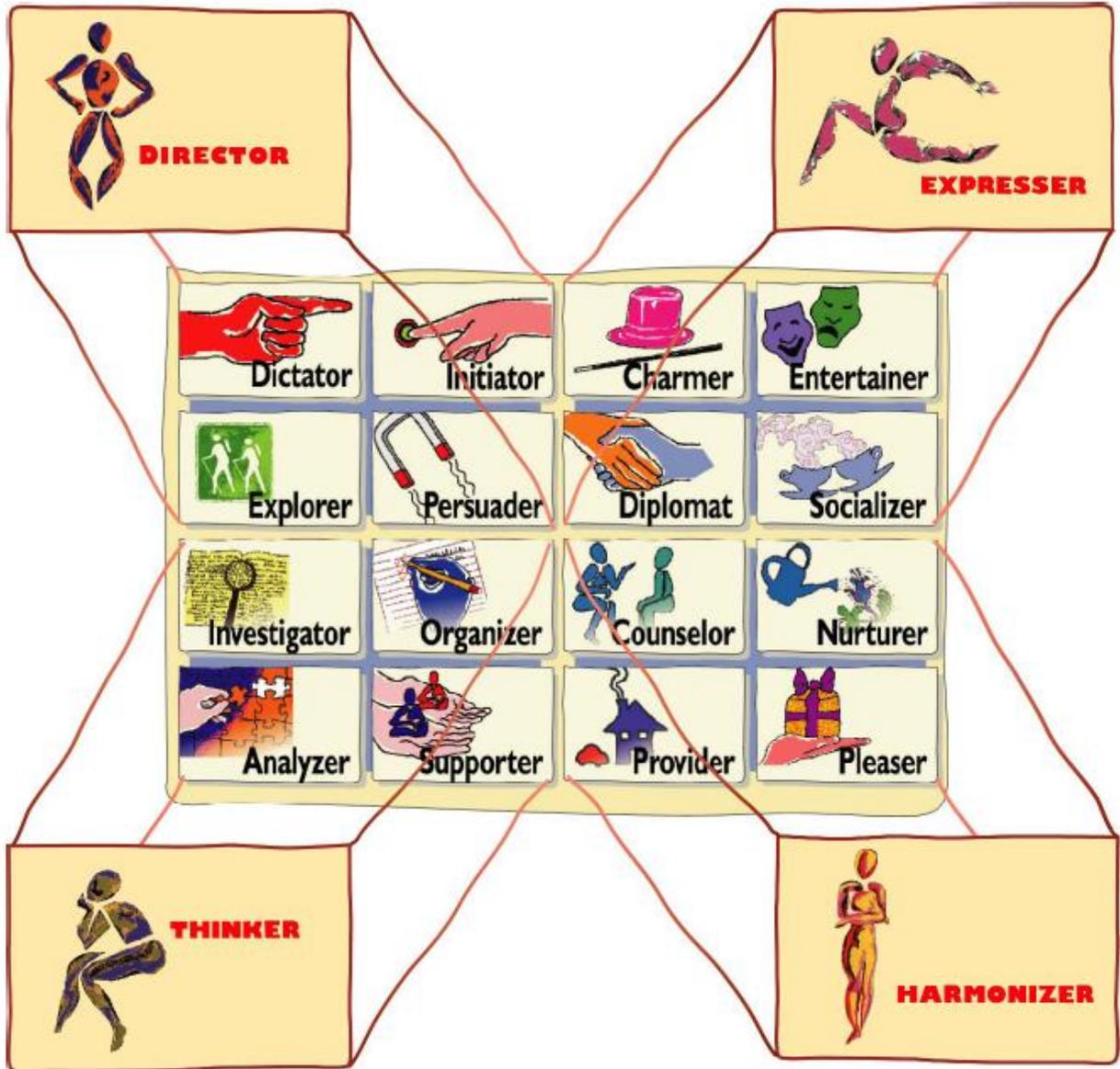
To determine your communication style, take the [Straight Talk® survey](#) and discover whether you are a Director, Expresser, Thinker or Harmonizer.

- **Directors** are goal and action oriented.
- **Expressers** are idea and people oriented.
- **Thinkers** are fact and task oriented.
- **Harmonizers** are team and relationship oriented.

Each style has a different way of seeing the world. Each favors a certain way of listening, responding, making decisions, and solving problems.

Interpreting Your Results

When you take the Straight Talk survey, you discover where you “fit” on the [communication styles matrix](#) below. Each of the four quadrants reflects one of the four basic styles. For example, if you are a Persuader, Dictator, Explorer or Initiator, your basic style of communicating is **Director**. If you are a Charmer, Entertainer, Diplomat or Socializer, then your basic style is **Expresser**, as shown below.



A few notes about communication styles:

- We tend to favor two styles over the others, but we can use any style.
- It's especially important to understand your primary style, the one you use most often.
- No one style is better than the others, each style is valuable depending on the situation.
- This isn't a recruiting/hiring tool—these don't measure skill, experience, or knowledge.
- This should not be used to pigeonhole a person—"Oh....you must be a Thinker because you work in Accounting."

Leadership Styles

Once you've figured out your communication style, refer to the chart below for the corresponding leadership style:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Directors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-oriented • Emphasis on the bottom line • Makes quick decisions • Willing to take risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursues big, risky challenges • Makes abrupt decisions • Lack of esprit de corps • Lack of communication
Expressers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idea oriented • Emphasis on people • Entertaining, fun • Willing to take risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of ideas, goals • Lack of clear priorities • Difficulty with follow-through • Hard to gain commitment
Thinkers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact and process-oriented • Emphasis on precision • Stress academic credentials • Lots of quality control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear thinking • Unwilling to take risks • Tends to miss deadlines • May not focus on the big picture
Harmonizers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship oriented • Emphasis on team • Fun, warm, friendly • Loyal to the cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids conflict, change • Makes decisions slowly • Not clear about purpose, goals • Tendency toward bureaucracy

[Download Image – “Leadership Styles: Strengths and Weaknesses”](#)

Assumptions of Each Leadership Style

Each leadership style makes assumptions about others because of the way that style processes and interprets information.

Directors assume:

- People don't see the big picture.
- People don't get enough done.
- People aren't decisive.
- People take too much time.
- People shouldn't waste time talking about their feelings.

Expressers assume:

- People aren't creative enough.
- People need to be more daring.
- People need to lighten up and have a good time.
- People should say what's really on their minds.

Thinkers assume:

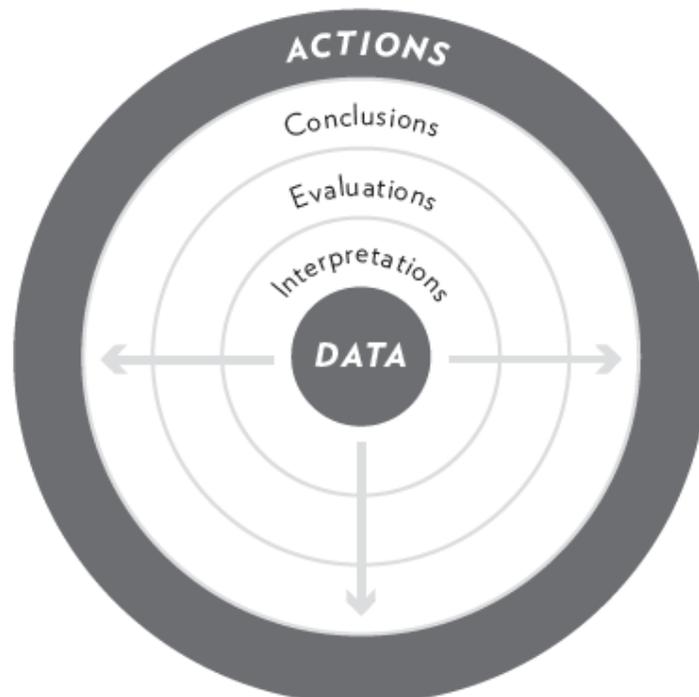
- People don't focus enough on details.
- People don't care about getting things done right.
- People don't understand what's involved.
- People don't understand how we do things here.

Harmonizers assume:

- People aren't sensitive enough to other people's feelings.
- People don't give us enough time to get things done.
- People don't value small talk.
- People argue too much.

[Download Image – “Leadership Styles: Assumptions”](#)

Check out the [Circle of Assumptions](#) tool to guide difficult conversations.



Modifying Your Leadership Style

Effective leaders change their leadership style depending on the needs of their organizations. At times they are forceful and directive. At other times they are empathetic and caring. In the box below appear some typical management challenges along with the leadership style best suited to it.

Situation	Best leadership style
A team is faced with a crisis.	Director
A team is lacking a creative spark.	Expresser
A team is lacking trust and cohesion.	Harmonizer
A team needs to solve a tough problem.	Thinker

[Download Image – “Leadership Styles: Best Style for the Situation”](#)

Leading Groups

As a leader of a group, you should try to help a group move toward a balanced style of communicating. For example, if a group is paralyzed by indecision, then a commanding style will get them moving. If a group is acting too quickly, then a deliberating or caring style is appropriate.

Here are four types of groups – again using the [Straight Talk model](#) – and the behaviors that typically accompany each group:

Director Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action is better than inaction. We should act more quickly. We should reward bold decisions.
Expresser Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every idea is worth considering. People should be willing to try anything once. We should reward creativity.
Thinker Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis can solve any problem. There’s a right way to do things – and a wrong way. We reward people who do things the right way.
Harmonizer Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good relationships are essential to our success. People shouldn’t argue, but seek to understand. We should reward people who work well together.

[Download Image – “Leadership Styles: Team Styles”](#)

Exercise 1: Reflect on 2-3 decisions you made that didn’t work out very well. Then reflect on your leadership style. Think about the actual situation and remember how you performed. What could you have done differently? There are no right or wrong answers. However, your appraisal will help you develop your leadership skills.

Decision you made	Characteristics of your leadership style	Things you could have done differently

Exercise 2: Reflect on 2-3 decisions made by a group you supervise that didn't work out very well. Then reflect on your leadership style. Think of the actual situation and remember how you performed. What could you have done differently? There are no right or wrong answers. However, your appraisal will help you develop your leadership skills.

Decision made by a team you supervise	Characteristics of your leadership style	Things you could have done differently

Approach to Management and Conflict

Directors' Approach to Management

As someone whose primary style is Director, you're at your best when boiling a complex situation into a few key goals. You have that big-picture vision that enables you to see what others cannot – what needs to be done, by when, and by whom. But you don't like to spend a lot of time with details, so your planning efforts may fall short when it comes to actual implementation.



Directors tend to want to control things. So delegating can be a challenge! Once they delegate a task, Directors tend to assume that other people will do the job quickly and efficiently. But that's not necessarily the case. Directors need to practice checking in, making sure people have the resources they need, answering questions, weighing priorities, and monitoring progress.

Directors excel at setting big, bold goals. They can be inspiring and charismatic. But they can also be perceived as insensitive. Directors need to warm up their style in order to manage people successfully. Take the time to ask questions, make casual chitchat, and invite other people's input.

As a Director, you'll be tempted to step in and take control of a project that goes off course. Try to avoid taking dramatic action that causes everyone to feel confused and resentful. By planning carefully and communicating in a sensitive manner, you can prevent management mayhem from ensuing.

As a Director, your approach to time management is to try to do everything now. You view time as a rare commodity, always in short supply. You tend to impose short deadlines, not allowing enough room for unexpected changes. You also tend to view deadlines as hard and fixed rules. So when a project misses its deadline, ask questions before you do or say something you'll regret later.

The key for you is to carve out enough time to involve everyone in the planning. By involving others, you'll gain invaluable buy-in. You'll also set more realistic schedules for yourself and others.

The Director's Approach to Conflict

With other Directors:

It's natural for you to butt heads with other Directors, since you're both forceful personalities, focused on your own agendas and tasks at hand. You need to take the time to state your case, cite supporting evidence, and then ask good questions, keeping an open mind until all the evidence is in.

Directors tend to jump to conclusions, and you may find to your surprise that you completely misunderstood one another! It's important for Directors to set aside enough time to listen, ask questions, and clarify your assumptions.

In talking with another Director, remember to lay all your cards on the table. Directors prefer straightforward, direct communication. They would prefer to decide now, rather than engage in long, protracted negotiations.

With Expressers:

In a stressful situation, Directors need to let Expressers vent their feelings. Avoid your first thought, which is to cut the conversation short. Let the Expresser talk it through. Then help the Expresser organize his or her thoughts. Use your skill at seeing the big picture to round out the Expresser's view of the situation. Help him or her review the long-term consequences. Remember, the Expresser wants to open up to you, so be patient.

Directors should remember not to assume the Expresser has determined his or her priorities. The Expresser may appear to know what's most important, when in fact he's still trying to assess the situation. Again, by clarifying the situation for the Expresser, you can become an ally.

With Thinkers:

A major source of conflict for these two is time management. The Director wants things done right away, and the Thinker wants things done right. Typically, the Director will say: “We need this by Friday.” When the Thinker protests, the Director will listen with only half an ear. The Thinker will be reluctant to press further because of the Director’s obvious lack of patience. Once a conflict arises, Directors need to be careful in handling it. Both of you can be stubborn – you don’t want to cross the line to an unacceptable level of conflict. Set aside time when the two of you can dissect what went wrong and reach clear agreements on the steps you’re going to take. Failure to invest time in understanding what went wrong will leave the Thinker with the clear impression you don’t really care about the process – or the outcome – and cannot be trusted in the future.

With Harmonizers:

Directors need to check their desire to be blunt and direct when dealing with Harmonizers in stressful situations. When working with a Harmonizer, start the conversation with some small talk and banter. Take the time to build your relationship. If you have bad news, underscore your sensitivity to the situation. Empathize. Make sure you choose a moment when the Harmonizer has plenty of privacy in which to react and plenty of time to discuss his or her thoughts about what ought to be done.

The Expresser’s Approach to Management

As someone whose primary style is Expresser, you excel at brainstorming. You love to imagine possible scenarios and come up with bold, creative solutions. You can dazzle people with your ability to think on your feet. But if none of your ideas catch fire, you may become frustrated and turn to something else instead.



Expressers aren’t natural project managers. They would prefer to wing it rather than take the time to plan carefully what resources are required or who’s best for the job. To be more effective, the Expresser needs to commit to a specific set of outcomes and deadlines. By writing a detailed draft of a project, the Expresser can learn to translate his or her ideas and develop a final set of specs. Putting the project into words also compels a certain level of logical analysis – an invaluable exercise for an Expresser.

When projects go awry, the Expressers’ natural enthusiasm and optimism may blind them to the damage done. They may need to seek the counsel of others to grasp the full impact of a situation. By focusing on the full ramifications, the Expresser can set the stage for finding a successful resolution.

The Expresser’s Approach to Conflict

With other Expressers:

Expressers want to express themselves. So, conflicts can typically be avoided by listening and understanding and giving people equal talk time. In a meeting of Expressers, for example, the

group leader should emphasize the need to balance listening with advocating. Make it a ground-rule. By doing so, you set the stage for a productive meeting.

Another source of conflict surrounds commitments. Expressers tend to make vague commitments and consider deadlines “flexible.” People are likely to be frustrated by Expresser’s lack of follow-through. A good rule is for Expressers to force themselves to make written agreements whenever possible. And remember to go “the last mile” to finish a project completely.

When communicating, two Expressers will tend to think out loud, to brainstorm, and to think out of the box. This can be very productive, but it can also lead to a disorganized conversation. Expressers may need an outside party to help steer the conversation. Again, when agreements are reached, it is very important to write them down.

When delivering bad news to an Expresser, do what comes naturally. Say: “I’m terribly sorry to upset you. But...” Then proceed to lay out the story with as much evidence as possible. But don’t forget to ask questions and listen!

With Directors:

If you’re an Expresser, you have three challenges in dealing with a Director. First, you like to think aloud, which is likely to confuse the Director. You need to train yourself to say: “I’m thinking out loud right now, but here’s a thought.” Then listen carefully – and respond after you’ve had a chance to understand what others think.

Second, Directors want tough-minded analysis and action. Show them the numbers. Prepare two or three alternatives. Negotiate from a position of knowing what’s most important to you. This is hard for Expressers. But force yourself to make choices.

Finally, Expressers tend to focus on people, the Director on tasks and projects. To resolve a conflict with a Director, get on the same wavelength. Don’t say: “I’m teed off that our sales staff doesn’t seem to be using our new software.” Say: “Our sales team’s failure to adopt our sales management software is having a serious impact on our sales revenues this month.” Then offer two or three solutions.

With Thinkers:

For Expressers, a source of conflict with Thinkers is being imprecise. Expressers often portray things in broad, general terms: “We need to penetrate the market for organic foods.” Or: “We need to set aside money for the children’s education.” The Thinker prefers much more detail and precision. They’ll ask many questions. “What do we know about the market? How is it defined?” Typically, the Expresser will grow frustrated by all these questions.

When a conflict occurs, Expressers need to ask questions and find out what went wrong. Again, it’s going to require an investment of energy and time to listen. But in order to maintain trust with a Thinker, the Expresser must show respect for the Thinker’s way of doing things. Only then can you reach an agreement on what to do next.

When delivering bad news, the Expresser should take the time to organize his thoughts. Give the Thinker ample warning that you need to discuss something important. Find out when it will fit into his schedule. Then make sure you’re prepared to offer lots of details and give yourself enough time to answer questions.

With Harmonizers:

Expressers enjoy free-flowing conversations filled with imaginative ideas and have a high tolerance for ambiguity. The Harmonizer likes order, structure, and predictability. Put these two together and you have a recipe for conflict.

For example, the Expresser may think he's being clear when he says: "We need to totally rethink the way we're handling this client. Put the team together and give me your best thoughts tomorrow." But the Expresser has failed to define the issues or the goals. As a result, the Harmonizer is baffled about how to approach the problem.

When a conflict occurs, the Expresser needs to handle the situation gingerly. You need to recognize the need for a detailed context setting and clarity of expectations. You should point out to the Harmonizer exactly where the misunderstanding occurred. You should state your resolve to help repair the situation. And then the two of you should decide what steps to take. In presenting bad news to a Harmonizer, demonstrate your concern for everyone involved. If you have a solution, show how it benefits other people.

The Thinker's Approach to Management

As someone whose primary style is Thinker, you excel at planning. You enjoy knowing that you've covered every contingency. But planning alone cannot guarantee success. You may overlook the kind of bold, creative thinking that allows you to identify the best alternatives. Rather than starting a project by looking at the logistics and timetable, a better approach is to talk about the broader goal first, then the context then invites creative brain-storming, and only afterward give rein to your natural planning abilities.



Thinkers like to process things logically. They're typically capable of setting up a project management plan that spells out the tasks and timelines, the roles and responsibilities. You're also good at monitoring progress, giving praise to people who've completed their tasks. To become more effective managers, Thinkers may need to be more open-minded and warmer toward others. If you ask people for feedback, don't forget to first affirm the value of their input. Give people the chance to express opposing points of view. Above all, keep an open mind and use your logical gift to sift through and select the best ideas.

As a Thinker, you're aware of time. But you view deadlines as a necessary evil. You're much more concerned about the quality of the work than about the time it takes. Thinkers need to be aware that once they've set a deadline, for themselves or anyone else, it costs the organization every day that it is delayed.

As a Thinker, you can be overly reliant on old, proven ways of doing things. You may display reluctance to try out new technology or embrace a new way of doing things. This conservative approach could limit your growth as a manager. Counter it by promising to teach your staff new techniques and technologies. Keeping that promise will force you to learn them first.

The Thinker's Approach to Conflict

With other Thinkers:

As a Thinker, you are careful, precise and focused. You can also be inflexible. So your conflicts with another Thinker typically arise over the correct approach to accomplishing a task or solving a problem.

The proper approach to resolving a conflict between Thinkers is to analyze the assumptions that underlie each person's approach. On a sheet of paper layout each person's rationale. Make sure you capture all of their arguments. Then break down the assumptions reflected in each rationale. Once you've written down each assumption, ask each other: What do we need to know that we don't know in order to resolve this conflict? By partaking in a collaborative process to resolve the problem logically, Thinkers can overcome almost any conflict.

With Directors:

If you're a Thinker, you share with Directors the quality of following your head, not your heart. Conflicts can arise because you take too much time to get something done, whereas the Director is more impatient. When you find yourself at odds with a Director, curb your tendency to dissect things. Instead, get right to the point, state what you think ought to be done, and negotiate an agreement. It's a good idea to follow up in writing. The Director will appreciate your "take charge" approach.

Don't try to gild bad news for the Director. He wants it straight and factual, right away. Your matter-of-fact style will help the Director think you've got everything under control.

With Expressers:

Thinkers are organized, precise and logical. Expressers are free-wheeling, adventurous, and imprecise. Since they view things from opposite poles, conflicts are not uncommon. As a Thinker, you can handle conflict with Expressers by listening attentively, giving logical feedback, and helping the Expresser weigh the options. Thinkers can help the Expresser by logically analyzing different options, playing the role of the sage counselor, reviewing the best alternatives and pointing out the pros and cons.

With Harmonizers:

Thinkers get into conflicts with Harmonizers over the process. For example, a Thinker may view a Harmonizer as lacking the necessary precision and attention to detail. Direct criticism will cause the Harmonizer to become defensive and withdrawn. Instead, the Thinker should demonstrate his concern for the Harmonizer, stressing the importance of their relationship. Having laid a foundation of trust, the Thinker can then focus on the problem. Rather than state the criticism directly, pose it as a question: "Have you figured out what went wrong with the batch process yesterday?"

The same technique applies when the Thinker is the bearer of bad news to the Harmonizer. Make sure you demonstrate your sensitivity to how each individual will be affected while delivering the message.

The Harmonizer's Approach to Management



As someone whose primary style is Harmonizer, your approach to planning is to do what's best for the people around you. This team approach gives you a natural gift for management. People know you'll go to bat for them, so they'll go to bat for you. Your drive to please makes you a highly popular manager. But as a manager, one of your responsibilities is to set priorities. The quality of pleasing others may cause inconsistent or contradictory priorities to get incorporated into your plans. Sometimes, these contradictions don't emerge until much later. When they do come to light, you may be genuinely shocked and either look for help – or give up in frustration. All because you allowed yourself to get caught between needing to plan and wanting to please.

One strategy for the Harmonizer is to identify a sage counsel to ask for help in setting priorities. This person should have the hard-nosed, bottom-line approach you lack. By seeking good counsel, you'll learn to set priorities on others and yourself.

Another quality of a good manager is the ability to impart constructive criticism. As a Harmonizer, you may find it difficult to provide constructive feedback. However, once you learn that constructive feedback is a necessary role of a manager and that it can help people do a better job, you can become very adept at managing people.

Harmonizers need to practice time management. Set daily deadlines. If you can couple your natural skills with people with good project management skills, you can be a very successful manager.

The Harmonizer's Approach to Conflict

With other Harmonizers

As a Harmonizer, you're not likely to want to deal with a serious conflict – even with another Harmonizer. By nature, you'll want to smooth over any problem. Your desire to avoid confrontation can work against you, however. Harmonizers need to discuss conflicts openly and candidly. You can start by stressing how much you want the conflict to be resolved. Be sure to disclose your personal reactions to what happened. Ultimately, follow your desire to resolve the conflict by inviting other people to help you assess the options in a logical, objective fashion. Don't let your loyalties to other people cloud your judgment about what's best for all concerned.

When delivering bad news to another Harmonizer, reaffirm the value of the relationship and then gently let them know what's going on. Stress your desire to help them be successful. By citing evidence of how other people feel, it will help the Harmonizer grasp the situation.

With Directors:

For Harmonizers, handling a conflict with a Director can be very stressful. Remember to prepare what you're going to say, keep it short, and be assertive. Don't gloss over the facts or try to hide anything. State the bad news in headline fashion. Cite factual evidence and the major ramifications. Above all, don't dwell on extraneous details. The Director cares less about whose fault it is and more about whether the problem can be fixed.

When dealing with a Director, it's tempting for you to shelve bad news or pretend it's going to get better. Don't succumb. Remember to look at the Director straight in the eye and state your point of view clearly and succinctly. Don't let yourself be ambushed by a Director's abrupt questions. Make sure you've got adequate information to support your case. The Director needs to know, and he or she will react positively so long as he's assured you have the interests of the organization at heart.

With Expressers:

The Harmonizer typically puts the group's needs above his own, whereas the Expresser is often more focused on his or her own ideas. When Harmonizers experience conflicts with Expressers, it's typically over questions of whose interests are paramount.

When a conflict does occur, the Harmonizer should urge the Expresser to see things from the group's perspective. If the Expresser interrupts, the Harmonizer needs to say: "Please let me finish my point, then I'll be happy to hear what you have to say." By keeping a steady hand, the Harmonizer can help defuse a volatile situation.

If a Harmonizer is a bearer of bad news to an Expresser, take pains to underscore how much you value the Expresser's personal contributions. The Expresser will usually respond positively.

With Thinkers:

Harmonizers typically get along well with Thinkers. When a conflict does occur, it may be repressed, because neither Harmonizers nor Thinkers like open confrontation. Signs of repressed conflict might be avoidance, silence, or even forced amiability.

One successful technique is to issue a regular invitation to the Thinker to clear the air. After some initial chitchat, say to him: "I sure hope everything is going smoothly between us. Is everything okay from your perspective? I really want you to be honest with me." Having laid the groundwork, it should be easy to get any issues on the table.

As a bearer of bad news, the Harmonizer should inform the Thinker in careful detail about what happened. Keep the conversation focused on what actually happened, rather than conjecturing about how people are reacting. Thinkers like to be told things in a logical order, so start at the beginning and leave nothing out.

Team Leadership Styles

Here are four team leadership styles – again based on [Straight Talk®](#) – and the assumptions that accompany each style:

Director Teams	Action is better than inaction. We should act more quickly. We should reward bold decisions.
Expresser Teams	Every idea is worth considering. People should be willing to try anything once. We should reward creativity.
Thinker Teams	Analysis can solve any problem. There’s a right way to do things – and a wrong way. We should reward people who do things the right way.
Harmonizer Teams	Good relationships are essential to our success. People shouldn’t argue, but seek to understand. We should reward people who work well together.

As a leader of a team, you should try to help move the team toward a balanced style of communicating. For example, if a team is paralyzed by indecision, then injecting more people with the Expresser or Director style will get them moving. If a group is acting too quickly, then a Thinker or Harmonizer style should be added to the mix.

Exercise:

In the box below, make note of the potential strengths and shortcomings of your team, based on your understanding of its members’ styles. Then note 1-3 strategies to mitigate the weaknesses.

Potential strengths of the team	Potential weaknesses of the team
1-3 strategies to mitigate the potential weaknesses of the team	

Leadership Style Exercises

Here are two more exercises to help you build awareness of how your communication style affects your leadership style.

Exercise 1:

Reflect on a recent decision you've made that worked out well. Then reflect on your preferred communication style. What about your style contributed to the effectiveness of that decision?

Decision you made	How my leadership style affected the decision	The positive outcomes

Exercise 2:

Reflect on a decision you made that didn't work out very well. Then reflect on your style. What were the negative outcomes? What could you have done differently?

Decision you made	How my leadership style affected the decision	The negative outcomes
Things you could have done differently		

To learn more about the four styles, check out CommunicationStyles.org.

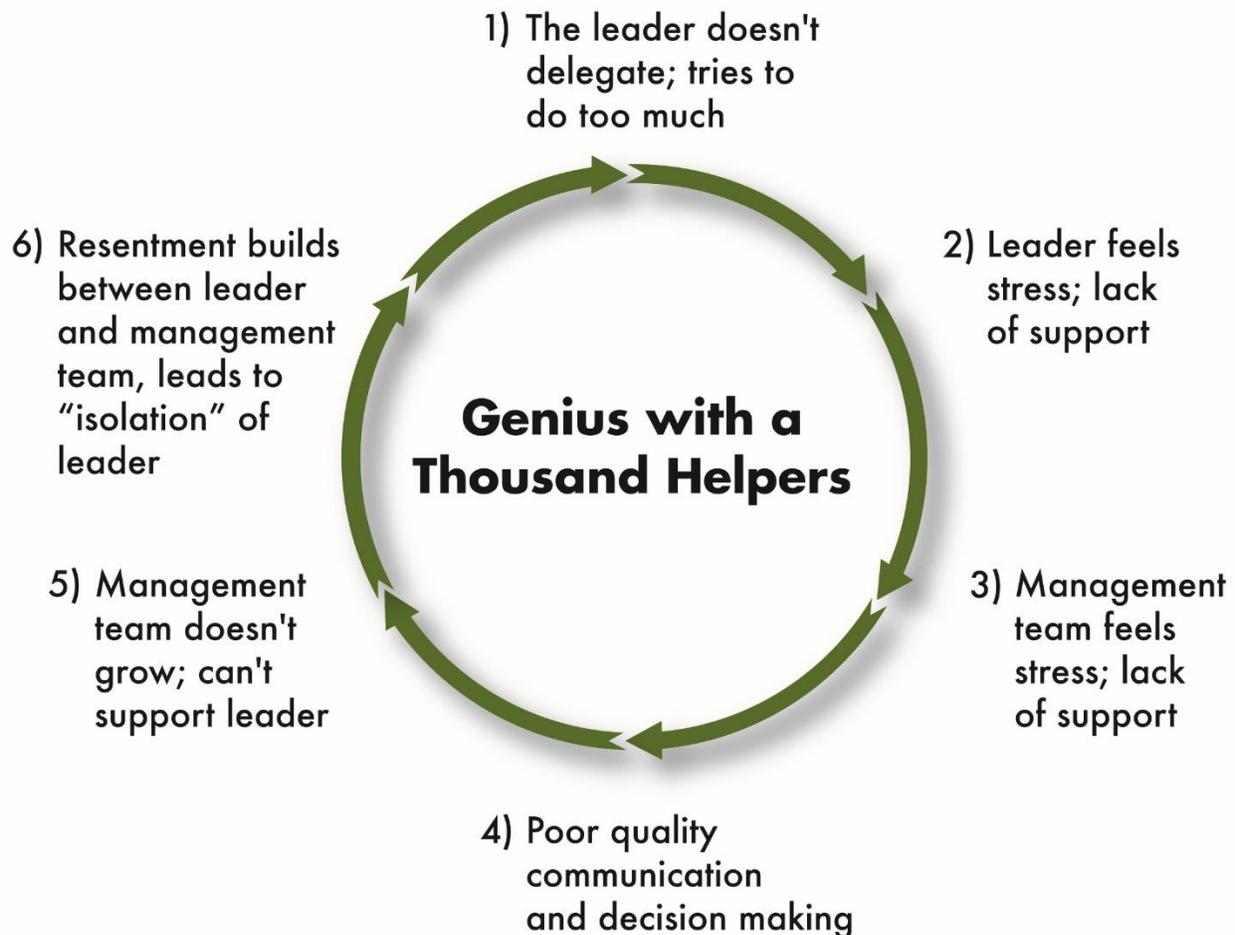
Two Common Leadership Styles That Set You Up for Failure

It's easy to fall into a pattern of ineffective leadership without realizing it. You may have picked up bad habits by watching other leaders who came before you. Poor leadership styles can contribute to mistakes and a reduced focus in the short term, as well as a lack of organizational growth and innovation over the long term. Learn to recognize—and avoid—these two common ineffective leadership styles.

1. The Genius with a Thousand Helpers:

These leaders are often high-performers who were superstars in their positions before they were elevated to a higher role. They feel the need to make every decision instead of trusting employees to use their own judgment. The Genius with a Thousand Helpers:

- Doesn't delegate effectively;
- Creates logjams of decisions waiting to be made;
- Stifles opportunities for innovation;
- Causes smart, talented professionals to grow frustrated – and leave the organization.



2. The Aloof Executive:

These leaders are often distracted by other obligations and give employees too much freedom to make decisions without providing sufficient direction. When things are going well, people may feel that the Aloof Executive is a “great boss who empowers people.” But when things go south, the Aloof Executive will:

- Blame people for not paying attention to key aspects of the organization;
- Take aim at people who disagree;
- Fail to implement solutions that address the underlying problems;
- Cause smart, talented employees to grow frustrated – and leave the organization.



Both of these styles need to find greater balance.

For the **Genius with a Thousand Helpers**, balance comes with:

- Delegating more – and being consistent in your delegations;
- Identifying talented team members and giving them more room to implement their own decisions and strategies;
- Debunking the notions that he or she is the smartest person on the team by highlighting the strengths of others.

For the **Aloof Executive**, balance comes with:

- Setting clear goals and checking in with employees to ensure that they have the tools and direction they need;
- Altering their delegation style by giving more comprehensive input to team members who aren't yet ready to make decisions on their own;
- Taking a systems view to understand the root cause of the problem;
- Using employee feedback and self-assessment tools to gauge his or her leadership style and maintain a healthy balance.



Looking Beyond Leadership Style

What **leadership traits** are common to all successful leadership styles? McKinsey surveyed more than 180,000 people at 81 organizations around the world and found that, of many different [leadership traits](#), four stood out as the most important.

1. **Solving problems effectively.** This is all about how leaders make decisions. This is not a solo activity. Effective [problem-solving](#) means engaging the right people at the right time with the right framing of the problem – and then identifying potential solutions and engaging people in exploring solutions in such a way that you build support for the eventual decision. At its essence, this is change management, and it is hard to do.
2. **Operating with a strong results orientation.** McKinsey says that leaders with strong results orientation tend to emphasize the importance of efficiency and productivity and to prioritize the highest-value work. But that's only part of it. Effective leaders know that results are both short- and long-term in nature. They set long-term goals and communicate them repeatedly. At the same time, they engage people in a fluid process of identifying short-term actions that support the goals, continually adjusting priorities based on what's working.
3. **Seeking different perspectives.** According to McKinsey, this trait is all about identifying trends, encouraging employees to contribute ideas, and differentiating between important and unimportant ideas. In my experience, people who do this well keep an open mind and don't allow themselves to be stampeded into a decision or stake out a position too early. Instead, effective leaders keep their options open, invite different points of view, and avoid confirmation bias.
4. **Supporting others.** This is all about having the [emotional intelligence](#) to build trust with people and genuinely care about their well-being. Leaders who do this well understand the importance of appreciative feedback, of giving people opportunities to grow, and building relationships on a personal as well as professional level. The leaders who do this exceptionally well know how to make people feel safe and inspired to come to work. As McKinsey says, they allay unwarranted fears about external threats and prevent the energy of employees from dissipating into internal conflict.

A workplace is ultimately a place where people make many decisions and choices each day. As I look at these four traits, I'm struck by their pragmatic quality. They align with the type of leader who understands how decisions are made spells the difference between a workplace that is productive and happy, or one that is miserable. McKinsey's research tells us [leadership styles](#) that focus on these four traits are key to higher productivity, higher levels of happiness, and ultimately greater success.

Check out our latest webinar replay, "[The Leadership Pipeline – Developing Leaders for Today and Tomorrow](#)" – thank you for reading.

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