How to Modify Your Communication Style

Each communication style is equally important and valuable. However, a particular style might be more effective in a given situation.

Each style excels in different situations.

- If you're trying to *brainstorm*, an Expresser style is valuable.
- If you're trying to *explain a process* to engineers, a Thinker style is valuable.
- If you want to *build trust*, a Harmonizer style is useful.
- If you're trying to *deal with a crisis*, a Director style can be valuable.

You can "flex" other styles as you would a muscle.

The more you practice flexing different styles in communication with other people, the stronger a communicator you become. You may find adopting a different style to be unnatural. And it can be. The trick is to act yourself into a way of believing. By adopting the body language, the style of speaking, the mannerisms of a particular style, you will find it less of a stretch than you think.

Speaking to Directors	**Speaking to Expressers**
▪ Adopt a direct, serious tone ▪ Give information in "bottom line" terms ▪ Keep meetings short and succinct ▪ Assert your own ideas ▪ Don't wait for them to invite feedback ▪ Don't misinterpret their abruptness as a sign of disrespect or criticism	▪ Express ideas, regardless of how fanciful ▪ Show you understand their feelings ▪ Talk about your own feelings ▪ Use gestures; get excited ▪ Let yourself "think aloud" ▪ Touch them lightly on the arm (but only if appropriate)
Speaking to Thinkers	**Speaking to Harmonizers**
▪ Be precise in giving information ▪ Break down problems into specific parts ▪ Take time to review every point thoroughly ▪ Ask them questions and solicit their advice ▪ Keep a moderate tone and body language	▪ Lighten up and relax ▪ Make them feel comfortable; chit-chat ▪ Give information in the form of questions ▪ Converse in a quiet manner ▪ Avoid saying "no;" find a more gentle way ▪ Keep your distance; touching isn't okay

Directors

Directors are goal-oriented, they tell it like it is, make decisions quickly, are always on the go, speak crisply, and may seem insensitive or intimidating.

Traits of Directors:

- **Fears**: Weakness, dependence, losing control, being taken advantage of.
- **Needs**: Freedom, with limits; help with details.
- **Likes**: Action, speed, status, challenge, opportunities, direct answers, risks.
- **Strengths**: Results-oriented, candid, pragmatic.
- **If overused**: Lacks details, poor collaborator, impersonal, abrasive.

Assumptions of Directors:

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

Listening to Directors:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Stand or sit squarely facing him/her.
- Match his or her demeanor.
- Breathe deeply; relax.
- React subtly; nod occasionally.
- Don't interrupt until the Director is finished speaking.
- Remember that most Directors don't intend to be intimidating.

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Expressers

Expressers are people oriented, animated, easily excited, use expressive gestures , are entertaining, think out loud, speak rapidly, and may be imprecise.

Traits of Expressers:

- **Fears**: Disapproval, social rejection, loss of influence.
- **Needs**: Attention, people contact, help with organization.
- **Likes**: Speed, big picture, social praise, novelty, group activities, planning.
- **Strengths**: Articulate, fast-paced, fun, visionary, persuasive, optimistic.
- **If overused**: Poor listener, lack follow-through/depth, impatient, impractical, distracting.

Assumptions of Expressers:

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

Listening to Expressers:

- Use facial gestures and/or your hands to show you're listening.
- Keep a smile on your face.
- Nod your head vigorously in agreement.
- Interrupt if something's not clear.
- Ask them to clarify exactly what they mean.
- Keep written agreements on actions and deadlines.

Speaking to Expressers:

- Express appreciation for their ideas.
- Express your ideas, regardless of how fanciful.
- Present material in terms of options.
- Use gestures; get excited.
- Let yourself "think aloud."
- Reach agreements on actions and deadlines.

Thinkers

Thinkers are task-oriented, make lists, do things "by the book," speak deliberately, believe there is a right and wrong way to do things, and may procrastinate.

Traits of Thinkers:

- **Fears**: Irrationality, mistakes, criticism of their work, slipshod methods.
- **Needs**: Caution, reasoning, facts, time to contemplate ideas, explanation.
- **Likes**: Organization, quality, details, written data, clear expectations.
- **Strengths**: Logical, cautious, accurate, analytical, methodical.
- **If overused**: Indecisive, highly critical, miss deadlines, bureaucratic.

Assumptions of Thinkers:

- 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.

Listening to Thinkers:

- Keep a thoughtful expression on your face.
- Maintain intermittent eye contact.
- Be patient, agree on time amount for discussion.
- Keep notes.
- Ask questions whenever you're unclear.
- Nod; interject comments to show you understand.
- Reach agreements on scope of task, deadlines.

Speaking to Thinkers:

- Be precise in giving information.
- Make detailed lists and use charts.
- Break down problems into specifics.
- Take time to review every point thoroughly.
- Ask them questions and solicit their advice.
- Maintain moderate body language and tone.
- Inquire whether they need additional information. Provide information in writing.

Harmonizers

Harmonizers are relationship-oriented, sensitive to others, dedicated and loyal, speak softly, tend to avoid conflict and may over-commit.

Traits of Harmonizers:

- **Fears**: Change, conflict, loss of stability.
- **Needs**: Appreciation, reassurance, group identity, encouragement.
- **Likes**: Quiet, steadiness, predictable routine.
- **Strengths**: Good listener, dependable, loyal, team player, follows-through.
- **If overused**: Permissive, puts their needs last, avoids risks, inattentive.

Assumptions of Harmonizers:

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

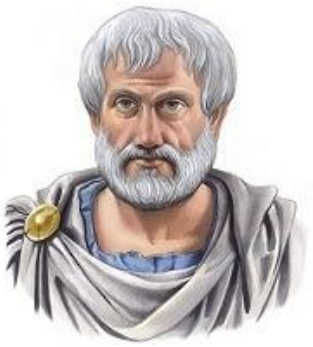
Listening to Harmonizers:

- Maintain intermittent eye contact.
- Keep a smile on your face.
- Don't use too much body language; remain composed.
- Be prepared for chitchat.
- Listen carefully; real issues may only be raised obliquely.
- Ask questions when unclear.

Speaking to Harmonizers:

- Make them feel comfortable; use chitchat.
- Vary your eye contact.
- Present information in people-friendly terms.
- Resolve conflicts by talking about what's best for the group.
- Give info in the form of questions where possible.
- Converse in a quiet manner.
- Avoid saying "no;" find a gentler way of putting it.
- Inquire whether they need additional information.

The Rule of the Center



The Greek philosopher Aristotle espoused a simple philosophy of life. “All things in moderation,” he said. Being too courageous meant you were foolhardy. Being too talkative, you were a gossip. If you were too quiet, you were a recluse.

The best course lay in the center.

The Matrix has a law of the center, too. **Here’s how it works**: Put your finger on one of the four middle styles. You’ll see that your finger is surrounded by eight different styles. Therefore, if you occupy a middle square, you are adjacent to eight different styles without moving at all.

Dictator 3	Initiator 5	Charmer 5	Entertainer 3
Explorer 5	Persuader 8	Diplomat 8	Socializer 5
Investigator 5	Organizer 8	Counselor 8	Nurturer 5
Analyzer 3	Supporter 5	Provider 5	Pleaser 3

The number of styles adjacent to each square on the Matrix.

What does this mean? If you need to communicate frequently with many different styles, then it helps to modify your style toward the center of the Matrix. The Rule of the Center is simply a formula for being successful in many different settings with many different people.

If you’re not already there, the Rule of the Center will initially seem uncomfortable. For example, if you are an Initiator who moves toward Organizer, there will be a period of adjustment. After all, it’s contrary to your nature to think things over and ask questions before you speak your mind. But as your symbolic step begins to pay off, the inner discomfort will disappear.

Here's a set of rules to help you apply the Rule of the Center:

Directors	Expressers
▪ Be more personal, warmer in your delivery ▪ Ask more questions about other people ▪ Acknowledge and validate priorities other than your own ▪ Show patience ▪ Walk in other people's shoes ▪ Express the dilemmas you feel	▪ Be more precise, analytical in your approach to problems ▪ Follow through and complete your projects ▪ Learn to manage time by planning daily ▪ Set your priorities and focus on them ▪ Avoid wasting time—yours or anyone else ▪ Express the dilemmas you feel
Thinkers	**Harmonizers**
▪ Focus on big picture, not just the details ▪ Ask only relevant questions ▪ Once a decision is made, put it behind you ▪ Focus on deadlines ▪ Expect the unexpected ▪ Communicate the full scope of the problem, not just one aspect ▪ Express the dilemmas you feel	▪ Keep work issues separate from personal ▪ Remember it's not always important to be liked ▪ Learn to say "no" and to argue your position ▪ Prioritize your tasks ▪ Address problems in a bottom-line fashion ▪ Express the dilemmas you feel

Conclusion

Modifying your style of communicating will ensure a clearer line of communication between you and another person. Once you know someone's place on the Matrix, a single step can mean the difference between a conversation that falters, and one that exceeds your expectations.

People who learn how to modify their styles with each other can form permanent changes in their relationship. Often it helps to codify this change in the form of ground rules for each person. Most of the time, these ground rules need not be brought up. But if a touch subject is on the table, it can benefit both parties to review the ground rules first.

Master communicators can flow easily from one style of communicating to another. Often their natural style lies somewhere in the center of the Matrix. While not everyone needs to be a master communicator, managers and leaders will invariably benefit by learning how to effortlessly shift from one style to the next.