How to Improve Team Communication

The Straight Talk survey reveals your communication style, but it also sheds light on how you listen, think, and frame the world. When team members understand these things about each other, communication starts to flow.

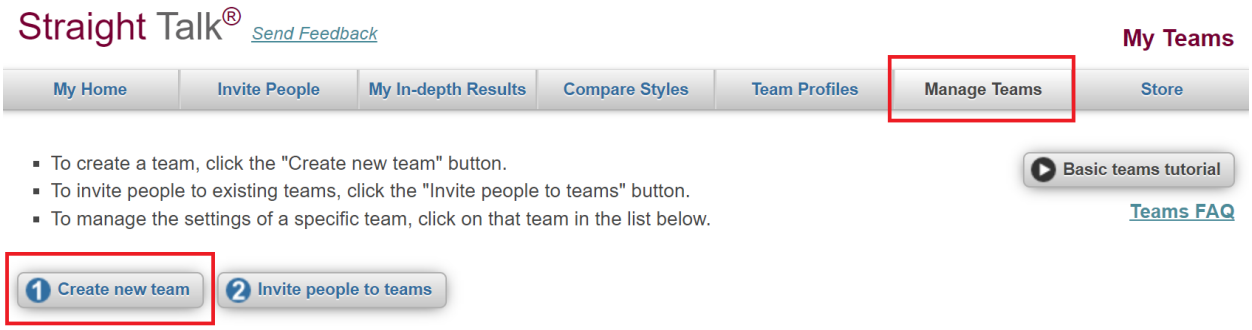
Here are examples of how groups put Straight Talk® to use:

- **A volunteer group**: “We are much more patient with each other because we appreciate how different our learning styles are.”
- **A management team**: “We have much more effective discussions now because we ask each other better questions. The other day, someone asked: ‘Given my style, I need a holistic picture of how this fits into our suite of services. Where are the synergies? Why does it make sense?”
- **A group of students**: “We use Straight Talk to make up our study teams. We try to match people with different styles in order to expand our thinking and maximize our collective brainpower.”'

How can you put Straight Talk to work in your own team or workgroup?

1) The first step is to create a free account at GoStraightTalk.com.

Navigate to "Manage Teams" in your free account to create a team and invite your co-workers.



Each member can compare styles and see a visual breakdown of the overall team style.

2) Teach the basic concepts of Straight Talk®

We publish a free blog at CommunicationStyles.org and offer a few training products:

Team Workshop The Straight Talk Training and Participant Guide has everything you need to create a highly successful workshop on the topic of communication styles. Great for workgroups and teams, coaches, and facilitators.	**Team Profile** The Straight Talk Team Profile is a printable report for each member that includes the team overview and style comparisons. Each member receives specific insights to improve communication with each person.
The Book The Straight Talk book provides a set of tools for people who aspire to be part of a learning organization. Includes exercises, surveys, and real-life case studies.	**Video Workshop** The Straight Talk video course offers 10 lessons to improve your communication skills. Based on the workshop guide above. Learn at your own pace.

When teammates understand each other and know the value of each style, the culture shifts to appreciate the subtleties in people's communications – the hidden levels of meaning behind what they say, the things they pay attention to. This leads to more satisfying interactions.

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3) Discover your team/organizational style

If it's a small team, start with the team leader. Nine times out of ten, his or her style will dictate the style of the team. For a larger team or organization, with more than 100 employees, division heads or senior management team will determine the culture. If they tilt toward a particular style, the organization will mirror that.

A lack of balance in senior management will affect the styles of hundreds, even thousands, of subordinates, and cause the organization to behave in predictable ways.

The following chart shows the predictable tendencies of each different culture:

Director Culture ▪ Goal oriented ▪ Emphasis on bottom line ▪ Makes quick decisions ▪ Always on the go ▪ Willing to take risks ▪ Abrupt, not communicative ▪ Lack of meeting time	**Expresser Culture** ▪ Idea oriented ▪ Emphasis on people ▪ Entertaining, fun ▪ Willing to take risks ▪ Many meetings ▪ Lack of clear priorities ▪ Difficulty with follow through
Thinker Culture ▪ Fact and process oriented ▪ Emphasis on precision ▪ Stresses academic credentials ▪ Lots of quality control ▪ Unwilling to take risks ▪ Tendency toward missing deadlines	**Harmonizer Culture** ▪ Relationship oriented ▪ Emphasis on team ▪ Avoids conflict, change ▪ Makes decisions slowly ▪ Not clear about purpose, goals ▪ Tendency toward bureaucracy

4) Strive to achieve a balanced culture

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 Rule of the Center is as true for organizations as it is for individuals. It’s just that organizations can’t shift styles as easily as individuals. When an organization is out of balance, it has only three options:

1. Add senior-level people with styles that balance the prevailing style
2. Create systems to correct imbalances by rewarding specific behaviors
3. Accept the status quo

CEOs and presidents of organizations, in particular, need to recognize their role in shaping a culture. When a boss is aware of their style, they can make a conscientious effort to motivate behaviors in the organization that balance his or her style. Typically, these behaviors can be induced by creating specific systems and processes within the organization.

For example, in a *Director culture*, you can make sure that enough meetings are scheduled to keep people informed and involved. In a *Harmonizer culture*, you can create an executive team and empower it to make critical decisions. In an *Expresser culture*, you can insist that people form tight agreements about what needs to be done when. In a *Thinker culture*, you can reward people for innovative thinking.

The following chart contains a checklist of possible actions that can be taken to address the weaknesses that crop up in each type of culture:

For a Director Culture	**For an Expresser Culture**
▪ Hold regular Q&A meetings with all staff ▪ Recognize importance of people ▪ Push decision-making down through increased information sharing ▪ Make it a rule to decide at each meeting who needs information ▪ Hire people with strong people skills in key jobs	▪ Create system for tight agreements on next steps and follow-through ▪ Eliminate unnecessary meetings ▪ Induce people to write tight, concise reports ▪ Emphasize financial analysis in all reports and plans ▪ Hire people with strong analytical skills in key jobs
For a Thinker Culture	**For a Harmonizer Culture**
▪ Hold strategic reviews to focus on big picture ▪ Create rewards program for innovation ▪ Use “work out meetings” to eliminate bureaucracy ▪ Reward risk taking in new projects ▪ Hire people with strong people skills in key jobs	▪ Form executive team to make fast decisions ▪ Streamline decision making wherever possible ▪ Use “work out meetings” to eliminate bureaucracy ▪ Motivate project teams to take risk ▪ Hire people with strong analytical skills in key jobs

Conclusion

Knowing how to achieve a balance of styles is a sign of mature management. But the reverse occurs more frequently. The boss selects subordinates who are similar in style to his own; key managers reinforce behaviors they're comfortable with, rather than those that might provide the necessary balance.

The managers of every organization imbue its culture with certain habits and tendencies. Over time, these habits become the source of discontent and unresolved conflict. By analyzing the style of top managers, using the Communication Styles Profile, one can discern the source of an organization's culture, and isolate possible causes. Finding the right balance of management styles is management's top responsibility – along with ensuring that each style understands its importance to the organization.