

The Leader As Communicator: Understanding Behavior Styles

Leadership Outfitters, Inc.

www.leadershipoutfitters.com

Each of us brings something unique and valuable to any group with which we interact. In addition to our skills and talents, we each have different approaches to communication. Leadership and communication style are woven intimately together and your primary styles will often determine how you initially respond as a leader.

A variety of resources offer advice on being an “encouraging leader”, a “bold” leader, or an “inspiring” leader. But what if you aren’t naturally encouraging, bold, or inspiring? If you are not naturally comfortable as a risk taker or you don’t feel particularly warm and fuzzy about your team ... that’s OK. The fact is that everyone leads differently because we each have our own mix of styles and temperaments.

Your particular style of communicating and leading will influence how you approach, interact, and respond to others. Some of us are relaxed and thoughtful, others are driven and demanding. Sometimes our predominant style works to our advantage, but more often than not, relating to those with different styles is frustrating and may cause conflict on the group, in the community, and even at home. We expect others to see the situation like we do and expect people to respond and process the information in the same way we do, but often that’s just not what happens. The challenge for leaders is being aware of our own styles and learning how to interact effectively with those who do not share the same style mix.

The Greek physician and philosopher Hippocrates first recognized behavior styles in 400 BC. He identified four basic types of temperaments and linked them with liquids in the body. Today, we know that there is no link with bodily fluids, but Hypocrites’ original concept of four styles or temperaments has remained. He called them Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholy, and Phlegmatic. Since that time, others have identified these styles with a variety of names, many offering assessments that determine your predominant style. You may be familiar with names like DiSC, The Behavior Style Assessment, True Colors, or Myers-Briggs. Our base styles influence how we interact and, although we can adjust to other styles, we are most comfortable around our own particular style.

Below are four broadly categorized styles, of which most of us have one style or a combination of styles that is most comfortable. See if you recognize your style below.

Choleric, Directive, Assertive, Dominant, Controller

Directive leaders have high expectations of themselves and others. They make quick decisions, are self-reliant, are usually comfortable taking risks, and are

results oriented. However, these leaders can also be competitive, determined, have lower active listening skills and can crave power. Choleric leaders are often seen as demanding and driven. This is the leader that rushes in with a big idea that he/she thinks should be implemented right away. These folks want bottom-line answers and quick results and are often criticized for being impatient, single-minded, and heartless.

Getting along with these folks requires that you:

- ask specific questions;
- be as direct as you can;
- use goals and ends to get them on board;
- don't interrupt; and
- always deal with the fact, not the person.

Melancholy, Analytic, Logical, Compliant

Analytical leaders are those that examine the data and prefer process and order. They are accurate, conscientious, precise and deliberate. They may want additional time to make decisions, are considered to have their emotions under control, and may be hesitant to take risks. Logical leaders are often seen as being obsessed with data, unable to make a decision, and slow moving. This is the leader who has to have the chart "just so" before it is published, or that corrects all your spelling and grammar mistakes. They would probably have a map of where they are going before leaving home for a new destination.

Getting along with these folks requires that you:

- be prepared and know your facts;
- use specific data in an analytical form;
- use examples; and
- allow time for processing and decision making.

Sanguine, Creative, Persuader, Expressive, Influential

The creative leader is that motivating, energizing, outgoing person who inspires us all. Other characteristics include generous, influential, and socially confident. This leader may be seen as dramatic, emotional, and impulsive. Sanguine leaders are often seen as being eccentric and overly dramatic. These folks consider the environment around them and how things "feel". Often, this is the leader who suggests that everyone wear a funny hat to work for April Fool's day.

Getting along with these folks requires that you:

- spend time on the relationship,
- use ideas that elicit an emotional response,
- use incentives, and
- request their opinion.

Phlegmatic, Empathetic, Stabilizer, Amiable, Steady

Empathetic leaders care about including everyone, they are patient, supportive and considerate. These folks are easy going and dependable and would just like everyone to get along. They are often seen as deliberate, questioning, and too concerned with other's feelings. Phlegmatic leaders are often seen as the "softies" of the office; caring about others and considering how others might feel. These folks care for the team and will ask for input from everyone. They are often accused of caring too much and being too "touchy-feely".

Getting along with these folks requires that you:

- show concern;
- create a supportive environment;
- request input and suggestions; and
- ask a lot of questions.

We each have a combination of styles, some stronger in one area than others. The key to effective communication is being aware of your own style and accommodating others' styles. This accommodation can be uncomfortable and take a lot of energy, but it is worth it when improved communication is the result.

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