

# COMMUNICATION STYLES

“Communication Styles” refers to the manner in which we give and receive information. In discussing communication styles, there are several points to keep in mind:

1. **There is no one best style.** Each style has its own advantages and challenges. For any given task or situation, certain styles may be more effective or appropriate than others.
2. **Rarely are people only one style.** Usually, people are a combination of several styles----they may approach their work in a very structured, detailed way (task-focused behavior) but approach people very openly and spontaneously (people-focused).
3. **The goal in understanding and analyzing styles is to enhance your effectiveness as a communicator.** Ideally you should operate from all 4 styles by adapting to the style of your listener so they can hear your message, understand it, and act on it.
4. **Your primary style today may be somewhat different from your primary style 5 years ago.** Your style can change over time due to what type of communication is being rewarded in your current job situation, personal relationships, etc. However, these changes represent only shifts. Communication style is driven by personal needs (for control, safety, order, recognition, achievement, or affiliation). Since your personal needs don't tend to change much over your life, neither does your communication style.

The components of communication can be represented by two continuums:

- On the vertical axis: **People to Task**
- On the horizontal axis: **Present to Future**

The intersection of these two continuums results in four different styles:

- **Connector** (intersection of People and Present)
- **Seeker** (intersection of People and Future)
- **Planner** (intersection of Task and Present)
- **Driver** (intersection Task and Future)

On the following pages we will first look at the two different continuums of communication, and then look at the four styles that result from them.

## CONTINUUMS OF COMMUNICATION

The first continuum contrasts emphasis on **relationship** with emphasis on **tasks**, preference for **spontaneity** versus preference for **structure**, and reliance on **intuition** rather than reliance on **facts**. At one end is **PEOPLE FOCUS**, where trustworthiness is established by getting to know a colleague personally; at the other end is **TASK FOCUS**, where it is established by follow through, track record and expertise.

### **PEOPLE FOCUS**

The goal of people-focused behaviors is to produce good outcomes with people. These behaviors include:

- using facial expressions and body language to convey message: it's not just what you say, it's how you say it
- talking about your feelings
- asking about and sharing information about your personal lives outside of work
- determining your trustworthiness at work by learning about your outside-of-work life
- positioning yourself closer to people when you speak, touching them
- making decisions based on intuition, how it "feels"
- talking circuitously: juggling multiple topics at once, little closure, weaving personal and business conversations together
- being easily distracted, going "with the flow" of the conversation
- preferring a free-flow of time: fluid time schedules; comfortable with arriving late, staying late
- preferring the "big picture" to details
- being gregarious, talkative
- preferring to work with people, on a team

Public figures who exhibit a lot of open behaviors include Bill Clinton, Katie Curic, and Oprah Winfrey.

### **TASK FOCUS**

The goal of task-focused behaviors is to produce good outcomes independently. These behaviors include:

- using words to convey message, and not facial expressions (exhibiting a "poker face") or gestures
- preferring to keep the discussion on the business topic, not on personal items
- keeping your feelings private
- determining your trustworthiness by your track record and follow through on promises and agreements
- keeping people at a distance physically, oftentimes with a barrier such as a table, or crossed arms
- making decisions based on evidence, facts
- talking linearly: one topic at a time, taking turns, coming to closure on one before moving on to the next
- being disciplined with time, being punctual
- using a more formal tone
- wanting data, details, the sources, second opinions, contingency plans
- preferring structure: clarity on authority, role, expectations, and a deliberate, precise system of working
- being shy, introverted around people
- preferring to work alone

Public figures who exhibit self-contained behaviors include Al Gore, Bob Dole, Dick Cheney, Condolezza Rice, and George H. W. Bush.

## CONTINUUMS OF COMMUNICATION (continued)

The second continuum deals with **control**, attitudes towards **conflict**, and management of **change**. At the one end of the continuum is a **FUTURE FOCUS**, which reflects a desire to influence decisions, tasks, and people, willingness to challenge, preference for change and risk, and comfort with moving quickly. At the other end is a **PRESENT FOCUS**, which represents a preference for what is familiar, a desire to keep things peaceful and calm, and an inclination to approach change carefully.

### **FUTURE FOCUS**

The goal of future-focused behaviors is to finish what is current (present) to get to the next (future). These behaviors include:

- approaching risk, decisions, and change quickly
- using direct language, which includes exaggeration (“ASAP”), the use of superlatives (“the best”) and absolutes (“always”)
- preferring to take action and then think (“leaping before you look”)
- being a frequent and early contributor in meetings and conversations; interrupting to get into the conversation
- addressing conflicts head on
- using passion, volume, repetition to win disagreements
- seeing rules as boundaries that can be moved: it is "easier to seek forgiveness than permission"

Public figures exhibiting direct behaviors include Donald Rumsford, Judge Judy, Donald Trump, Newt Gingrich, and Rush Limbaugh.

### **PRESENT FOCUS**

The goal of present-focused behaviors is to optimize the present to prepare for the future. These behaviors include:

- approaching risk, decisions, and change slowly and cautiously
- using indirect language, which includes qualifiers (“possibly”), accurate (“two” vs. “many”), and self-deprecating (“we” v.s ‘I’)
- preferring to think and then act (“look before you leap”)
- infrequently contributing at meetings: it is OK for someone else to put your thoughts on the table; waiting to be invited into the conversation; waiting for a pause instead of interrupting
- addressing conflicts in a problem solving way; picking battles very carefully and infrequently
- stating your disagreement once, taking turns presenting views, and willing to accommodate, negotiate, compromise
- following the rules and respecting authority as a way of avoiding conflict

Public figures exhibiting these behaviors include Kofi Anon, Alan Greenspan, Jimmy Carter, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell.

## COMMUNICATION STYLES

The intersection of these two continuums results in following four communication styles.

### THE CONNECTOR

The Connector combines **people** and **present** behaviors. As one you tend to:

- prefer working with people and in teams rather than working alone
- prefer a collaborative, friendly, and polite work environment
- prefer verbal communication; one person at a time; use a chatty informal email style
- look at the details, and gather perspectives from multiple people
- make decisions by consensus as a means of building agreement and ownership; often with subjective criteria
- look at the impact on people when making decisions
- prefer incremental change, with the full participation of all affected parties in the planning process
- appreciate others who are diplomatic, accommodating, willing to compromise
- prioritize people over the task
- enjoy solving people's problems and conflicts, harnessing synergy within a group

Connectors tend to gravitate to those careers/functions which most likely appreciate their skills: teaching, Human Resources, social work, arbitration, negotiation, team leaders, politics, customer service, therapy, public defense, fund development for non-profits. These are people who "grease the wheel", getting people to work together across organizational silos, across departments, across differences.

### THE SEEKER

The Seeker combines the **people** and **future** behaviors. As one you tend to:

- prefer leading people in new ventures
- prefer an energetic, multi-focused, fun and fluid environment
- prefer verbal communication in groups; emails are short, pithy, informal.
- look at the big picture and see the "forest not the trees"
- make decisions based on intuition, spontaneously, often with subjective criteria; rely on persuasion to build agreement
- look at the impact on reputation as innovator and change agent
- prefer sweeping innovative change, first of its kind
- appreciate others who are risk takers, willing to try new things, speak quickly, and energetic
- prioritize action over people and task details
- enjoy taking the initiative, taking the lead, taking risks

Seekers gravitate into sales, public relations, acting and broadcasting, marketing, courtroom law. Many of our modern CEOs are seekers, creating a vision for their organization and motivating others to follow that vision. Many of our top government officials and policy makers are seekers.

### THE PLANNER

The Planner combines **task** and **present** behaviors.

As one you tend to:

- prefer working independently on tasks and projects
- prefer an orderly and efficient work environment with clear roles, authority, responsibilities, and metrics of success
- prefer written communication; emails tend to be textually dense with many attachments
- look at details, data
- make decisions based on analysis, a systematic deliberation of data with objective criteria
- look at the impact on how work is done; how the work process is more error-free, efficient
- prefer incremental change with complete plans and contingency plans; keep what works, slowly test and implement solutions
- appreciate accuracy, thoroughness, punctuality, compliance with plans
- prioritize task over people
- enjoy being creative inside a structured process

Planners tend to gravitate into engineering, accounting, estate planning, CPA, analyst, scientist, computer programming, tax law, research, librarian. Their primary challenge is moving from being a functional expert into management: leaving the functional component of their job that they love, and taking on the people-management aspect which they would rather avoid.

### THE DRIVER

The Driver combines **task** and **future** behaviors.

As one you tend to:

- prefer leading people towards task completion
- prefer an efficient, fast-paced work environment with clear authority
- prefer written communication that is concise; emails are brief, in bullet format
- look at top level detail and data
- make decisions based on data, quickly, with objective criteria; prefer to make decisions unilaterally; intent on besting past records or the competition
- look at the impact on the bottom line, and speed to results
- prefer whatever change is necessary; thorough and deep so change only needs to be made once
- appreciate task completion on time, on budget, according to specifications
- prioritize the task over people; focus on the outcome versus *how* you got there
- enjoy being in charge, in urgent situations that require decisive action
- take charge of situations in a vacuum of leadership

Drivers tend to gravitate into operations, production, journalism, emergency teams, any function where deadlines are critical (ie, publication, news broadcasting), any function where the product has to get out the door by a specified time, cost, specifications. The prototypical American entrepreneur is often a director.

## IDENTIFYING COMMUNICATION STYLES

Each communication style has its own observable behaviors and appearance.

<b>BODY LANGUAGE</b>	
<p><b>CONNECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stands or sits close to you, touches you</li> <li>• hands are often open with palms up</li> <li>• lots of gestures and animated face</li> <li>• appropriate eye contact</li> <li>• casual dress</li> </ul>	<p><b>SEEKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• moves around and rarely sits, touches you</li> <li>• uses wide gestures</li> <li>• large gestures and animated face</li> <li>• eye contact upward or long on you</li> <li>• stylish dress</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLANNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sits with a barrier between you</li> <li>• doesn't touch you</li> <li>• very minimal gestures and quiet body</li> <li>• often writing down what you say</li> <li>• often averted eye contact</li> <li>• functional dress</li> </ul>	<p><b>DRIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stands while you sit</li> <li>• doesn't touch you</li> <li>• gestures often, arms crossed, or pointing at you</li> <li>• long direct eye contact</li> <li>• formal dress</li> </ul>

<b>HOW THEY APPROACH DECISION MAKING</b>	
<p><b>CONNECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slow, thoughtful</li> <li>• concern for people</li> <li>• prefers consensus</li> </ul>	<p><b>SEEKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fast, spontaneous</li> <li>• concern for future, innovation, change</li> <li>• unilateral</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLANNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slow, calculated</li> <li>• concern for process, accuracy</li> <li>• based on what the data say</li> </ul>	<p><b>DRIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fast, spontaneous</li> <li>• concern for bottom line</li> <li>• unilateral</li> </ul>

<b>HOW THEY WRITE</b>	
<p><b>CONNECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• moderate, informal, personal, chatty</li> <li>• details</li> </ul>	<p><b>SEEKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concise, brief, informal, chatty</li> <li>• lots of graphics, photos</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLANNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dense text, formal</li> <li>• lots of spreadsheets, tables, appendixes</li> </ul>	<p><b>DRIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concise, formal</li> <li>• bullet format</li> </ul>

### **WHAT THEIR OFFICE LOOKS LIKE**

<p><b>CONNECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comfortable and “homey”</li> <li>• love seat and/or round table</li> <li>• pictures of family, teams</li> <li>• candy dish</li> </ul>	<p><b>SEEKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bold, contemporary, futuristic</li> <li>• colorful artwork</li> <li>• flowers, playtoys</li> <li>• pictures of them with important people</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLANNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sparse or cluttered</li> <li>• standard-issue office furniture</li> <li>• PERT charts and schedules on walls</li> </ul>	<p><b>DRIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal</li> <li>• large, heavy dark desk, furniture</li> <li>• diplomas, certificates on walls</li> </ul>

### **INTERACTING WITH SOMEONE WITH A DIFFERENT STYLES**

So now that you know you are a Seeker and you are speaking to a Planner, how do you package your message so that it makes sense to them? There are a few strategies when dealing with them:

<p><b>CONNECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stop by daily (no appointment necessary) and frequently</li> <li>• start with social/ personal topics</li> <li>• ask about their personal life, and share yours</li> <li>• expect to spend a lot of time</li> <li>• show emotions</li> <li>• stand in close proximity, touch them</li> <li>• spend time with them in social settings</li> <li>• use face to face communication</li> <li>• use voicemail or videoconferencing as back up</li> <li>• give them lots of leadtime for decisions</li> <li>• remember birthdays, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>SEEKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• catch them wherever you can; meet “on the fly”</li> <li>• meet away from office to minimize distractions</li> <li>• talk fast; talk big picture</li> <li>• give bottom line first and let them ask questions</li> <li>• use graphics and charts to convey main points</li> <li>• allow them time to talk; give opportunities to contribute</li> <li>• imbed message in colorful graphics</li> <li>• use face to face communication; voicemail as backup</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLANNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• take as little face-time as possible</li> <li>• make an appointment and arrive/leave on time</li> <li>• keep emotions and personal life out of the conversation</li> <li>• provide a regular reporting schedule/format</li> <li>• give report first, then meet later to discuss/decide</li> <li>• have most contact in writing</li> <li>• use attachments with e-mail</li> <li>• give them lots of lead time for decisions</li> </ul>	<p><b>DRIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• take as little of their time as possible</li> <li>• make an appointment and arrive/leave on time</li> <li>• get to the point/ keep discussion focused on business</li> <li>• give them the bottom line upfront and let them ask questions</li> <li>• focus on results, bottom line</li> <li>• bring solutions not problems</li> <li>• use executive summary</li> <li>• use e-mail to keep informed (no attachments)</li> <li>• keep writing concise with bullets, one page</li> </ul>

## GAINING THEIR RESPECT

An essential part of creating good working relationships is gaining their respect. How you do that across styles differs greatly.

<p><b>CONNECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spend time with them; be patient with their slow pace</li><li>• Reveal who you are personally: share information about who you are outside of work</li><li>• Ask them about their outside-work life</li><li>• Handle conflict and disagreement diplomatically</li><li>• Listen, don't interrupt</li><li>• Be willing to compromise and collaborate</li><li>• Be supportive of others; develop a track record of being "a team player"</li></ul>	<p><b>SEEKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make efficient use of their time; keep up with their quick pace</li><li>• Ask questions about them: both their work and outside-work lives</li><li>• Be energetic, fun</li><li>• Be willing to think outside the box, take risks</li><li>• Allow time for their creativity and "what if" thinking by temporarily suspending data and reality</li><li>• Show appreciation for their creativity</li><li>• Give them opportunities for visibility</li></ul>
<p><b>PLANNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be patient with their slow pace; give long lead time for decisions or advance warning about changes</li><li>• Be accurate and do not exaggerate</li><li>• Follow through on task responsibilities and meet deadlines</li><li>• Develop a track record of functional excellence</li><li>• Be punctual and prepared</li><li>• Follow the rules, policies, procedures...or have very objective reasons for changing or violating rules</li><li>• Keep emotions out of conversations</li><li>• Be consistent and reliable</li></ul>	<p><b>DRIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make efficient use of their time; keep up with their quick pace</li><li>• Be willing to take risks and assume responsibility and leadership</li><li>• Follow through on task responsibilities and meet deadlines</li><li>• Develop a track record of doing whatever it takes (including bending the rules) to get a job done</li><li>• Be punctual and prepared</li><li>• Be willing to make decisions quickly, without full information or time for full deliberation</li></ul>