

Improving Communication Using Relationship Strategies



Podcast Transcript

Now, I don't know about you, but there are some people in my world that no matter what the topic, we tend to butt heads, disagree, or have static. Understanding each other is just difficult. While with other people I know, communicating is very simple and clear. We tend to be on the same page. Understanding each other is just easy. Why do you think this is?

Hi, I'm Ronda Mitchell with Training & Organizational Development, and today we will discuss how behavioral styles affect your ability to communicate effectively with others. By learning about these styles, we can identify our own behavioral preferences as well as those of the people we encounter every day. This knowledge helps us identify communication strengths and weaknesses (for ourselves and others) and consider how we might adapt our behaviors for more effective communication.

I would posit that the answer to the previous question could have something to do with our behavioral styles. Behavior style, as described by Dr. Tony Alessandra in his book *People Smart*, is a term to describe a particular pattern of observable behavior or habits that we have developed over time from influences in our environment.

There are 4 distinct behavior styles and we all regularly behave in ways that would fall into any of the four. However, we tend to have a favorite or dominant style where we feel the most comfortable and where we tend to retreat when we are under unhealthy stress. The four styles are distributed across two intersecting scales. One scale ranks how supporting or controlling we are based on perceived priority. The other scale ranks how direct or indirect we are based on our pacing comfort level.

The four behavioral styles are named after birds to help us remember the major characteristics of that style:

Eagle – the dominant director. The Eagle likes to take charge, likes you to get to the point, and is motivated by getting things done. The Eagle is direct and task-oriented, fast moving and business like. It's about getting things done and moving on and as such they tend to have great administrative and operational skills. When under stress, the Eagle may dictate.

Peacock – the positive, social contributor. The Peacock is supportive and direct. The Peacock likes environments that are fast-paced, friendly and lively. Nothing is worse than boredom to a Peacock. Peacocks are motivated by interaction and are not overly concerned with details. They are the idea people and are very influential. When under stress a Peacock may appear to waste time, be unfocused and possibly miss deadlines.

Dove – the understanding relator. The Dove is easy-going, diplomatic and excels at one-on-one communication. Doves are supportive and indirect. They are warm, reliable, open with their feelings and they desire security. Doves are great listeners, they dislike conflict and make excellent counselors. The focus of a Dove is on preserving a healthy relationship. When under stress a Dove may submit.

Owl – the detailed thinker. Accurate information is the focus of the Owl. The details are extremely important because the Owl doesn't want to just get it done, but to get it done right. Owls are naturally indirect and task-oriented. They are persistent, systematic problem-solvers. They will ask a lot of questions, they don't trust "gut instincts" and will take their time before making decisions or taking actions. When under stress an Owl may withdraw.

Those on the supporting end of the Priority spectrum are the Doves and Peacocks. These are "people people." They enjoy relating with others and prefer to work together rather than alone. They are subjective, flexible, communicate easily both verbally and non-verbally and support the "spirit of the law".

Those on the controlling end of the Priority spectrum are the Owls and Eagles. These are the "task-oriented people." They are more private, objective, time-conscious, and follow the "letter of the law."

Those on the direct end of the Pacing spectrum are Peacocks and Eagles. They are the fast thinkers and risk takers. They make statements over asking questions, appear more assertive, and comfortably challenge authority, which can make them appear confrontational at times.

Those on the indirect end of the Pacing spectrum are Doves and Owls. They are more cautious, make qualified statements and ask more questions. They are more thoughtful and take their time before making decisions or taking action. As such they can appear to be slow moving.

Do you see yourself? Do you see others that you know?

Being aware of one's own behavioral style is important for self-discovery and understanding. Being able to determine another's behavior style allows you to adapt your predominate style for the benefit of another person and to open the conduits of communication – so you are both speaking the same language.

Behavioral flexibility is the ability to temporarily modify your natural style in areas of pace and priority, so communication is clearer and easier with someone of a different style.

I'm sure you can see how the direct and controlling Eagle communicating with the supporting and indirect Dove could be challenging. The same struggle could occur between an indirect and controlling Owl communicating with a supporting and direct Peacock. The concept is to focus on the strengths each style brings to the table instead of focusing on the differences that can be frustrating. Another way of looking at things is to acknowledge what makes each of us unique and that the other styles make up for the natural talent/skills that you may lack. When we understand that, we set the foundation for communication to become easier and working together to be more productive.

How do you effectively communicate with another style?

Great question. The idea is to give people with another style what they need in order to understand you – to speak their language.

Eagles want accurate information in bullet points. Don't beat around the bush. Eagles want you to share their sense of urgency and productivity. They want you to communicate with a strong, confident voice and come with recommendations, not problems.

Peacocks want interactions to be fun, stimulating and engaging. Communicate with a Peacock in a relaxed, entertaining and friendly way. Don't hurry the discussion and try not to argue – you seldom can win. You can motivate a Peacock by explaining what's in it for them. Lessen the demand for detail wherever possible; Peacocks like the big picture.

Doves like things peaceful. They want everyone to get along and they like for others to show interest in them. Asking for their help is motivating for Doves. Saying "please" and "thank you" with warmth and sincerity will go a long way in creating a productive relationship with a Dove.

Owls like things to be accurate and their detailed approach to be supported. Having things organized with all specifics checked and double checked will please an Owl. Strive to give enough time for the Owl to inquire, research and prepare prior to contributing. Keep things business-oriented and leave their working space when business is over.

Learning to communicate more effectively with everyone is a life-skill that will enable you to build trusting relationships, make working with others more efficient, more productive and simply easier and more enjoyable.

So whether you are a Dove, Peacock, Eagle or Owl, you now have the tools to improve your communication and productivity when working with others.

References:

Alessandra, Tony and Michael J. O'Connor. *People Smart: Powerful Techniques for Turning Every Encounter into a Mutual Win*. La Jolla: Keynote Publishing Company, 1990. Print