

Communication Styles

SUBMITTED BY: WGYP Summer Instructor

SUBJECT(S): Communication, Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

In this lesson, students learn a great deal about communication styles and then analyze one another's style to understand what their preferred styles are. They should also think about the Platinum Rule that says the speaker should treat others however the other person would like to be treated and not how the speaker prefers it. By understanding that everyone has different communication styles, students will have greater awareness for differences and how to accommodate others' communication styles. This is fundamental to developing successful emotional intelligence — understanding the thoughts, views and feelings of others.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, III. Business Organization
- Communication, III. Workplace Communication
- Management, VI. Human Resource Management

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“The Art and Skill of Effective Public Speaking”](#)
- [“Learning to Embrace the Impractical and Think More Creatively”](#)
- [“Great Leaders Recognize and Value the Power of Emotions”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Speechwriter Sarah Hurwitz on Becoming a Strong Storyteller”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Adam Grant on What It Takes to Be Original and Get Your Ideas Heard”](#)
- [“American Express Embraces Privilege and Purpose”](#)

Core Standards:

Reading Informational Text—RI.9-10.1.; RI.9-10.2.

Speaking and Listening—SL.9-10.1.

Teacher Background Information:

— — — — — — — — *taken directly from Reference* — — — — — — — —

“It is important that you learn to vary your presentation, to vary your pace, to vary your language based on the type of people you are speaking to,” says Tony Alessandra, Ph.D., co-author with Michael J. O’Connor, Ph.D., of *The Platinum Rule*, a book that identifies four basic communication styles that people use in business.

While the “Golden Rule” advises us to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” the Platinum Rule says that the best way to connect with people and avoid conflict in business is to “Do unto others as they’d like done unto them.”

In other words, if you are communicating with someone who wants to immediately get to the point, you shouldn’t spend too much time trying to warm them up by chatting about the weather or how your weekend went.

According to the Platinum Rule, the four communication styles are based on two elements of interpersonal communication. The first is whether someone prefers to be “closed” or “open” in their communication.

People who are more closed in their communication prefer to keep their feelings private. If you are meeting with them to discuss what to do about a situation, they prefer to focus on the facts of the matter rather than opinions.

On the other hand, people who are more open in their communication like to share their feelings. When discussing something, they want to hear others’ opinions and share their own, instead of focusing strictly on facts.

The other element that determines someone’s preferred communication style is whether that person prefers to be “direct” or “indirect” in their communication.

People who are direct want to get to the point. They will typically do more talking and tell others what to do. When faced with conflict, they are more likely to confront someone directly to clear the air.

This is in contrast to people who prefer to be indirect. They are more easygoing in their communication and prefer to make small talk or discuss the background of a situation before getting to the point, and are more likely to ask questions and listen. Rather than confront someone, they prefer to withdraw from conflict.

Director (Closed and Direct)

Directors are “firm and forceful, confident and competitive, decisive and determined risk-takers,” say the authors.

Directors prefer higher-power positions and careers where they can take charge. So you may find them in the executive offices of a large company or as boss of their own business. You can improve your working relationship with Directors by getting to the point in your communication and telling them the bottom line. They want to know: “How much will it cost? What will I gain? When will it be done?”

Socializer (Open and Direct)

Socializers are outgoing, optimistic, enthusiastic people who like to be at the center of things.

They prefer to work in jobs “that maximize their influence with people, and where they can socialize, mingle, and gain positive feedback.” You may find them in careers from public relations to politics to party planning. If you’re dealing with a Socializer, you may find them more willing to help you achieve the results you want if you give them the opportunity to talk about themselves and share their ideas. Use their name in conversation and celebrate their successes.

Thinker (Closed and Indirect)

Thinkers are described by the authors as “serious analytical people” who thrive on “details and discipline.”

Thinkers “thrive in careers in which they can strive for perfection, creativity, and completeness.” Good career choices for Thinkers include engineering, accounting, architecture, and computer programming.

Thinkers often prefer to communicate in writing. If you need to make a change to something you've previously communicated, tell them the reasons why the change is being made. Provide detailed information and documentation whenever possible.

Relater (Open and Indirect)

These workers are “genial team players ... who care greatly about relationships with others,” according to the authors.

They prefer careers that offer them job security and the opportunity to be part of a team, says Alessandra. This encompasses a wide variety of careers including customer service, office assistance, teaching, social work, and financial services. If you want a Relater to go the extra mile for you, take the time to develop a friendly relationship with them. Instead of barking out an order when you need something done quickly, ask for their help to get the job done, and remember to thank them when they come through for you.

Activity:

Introduction (5 min)

The teacher should write the words “communication styles” on the board and ask students to define this term. Once they come up with different types (forceful, condescending, cooperative, friendly, etc.) and all understand it, the teacher can explain the importance of having a persuasive communication style in meetings that is clear and accessible to others. They will do a few activities today and then learn about what kinds of styles leaders can have. After all the games are played, the class should have a more comprehensive discussion about what was learned through the activity.

Activity (5-7 min)

Have students sit in pairs face to face with one student's back to the board. There should be certain images on the board and students will tell the other to draw it but without using certain words. *Put the images up AFTER the students are in the right position.*

So if there is a red triangle on the board, the student has to explain what it is without saying red, triangle, or shape. There should be four such shapes on the board [red triangle; blue circle; yellow rectangle; green star]

Activity (5-7 min)

Have students sit in pairs back to back with one student's back to the board. Now they have to do the same without being able to look at facial expressions and gestures. The student drawing before should now do the describing and the one describing before is now drawing.

The images on the board should be different now. [a yellow smiley face (don't say smile, smiley, or face); a stop sign (don't say red, stop or sign); a peace sign (don't say circle, peace or sign)].

Teacher-led activity (5 min)

The teacher should explain the communication styles, writing the names for each on the board. She/he should refer to the teacher background section for description.

Networking (15 min)

Ask students to talk to their partners from the start of class and discuss each other's communication styles. Did they see one style emerging as their preferred style? If the other student had a different style, how did they adapt? Did the Golden Rule "Do unto others as you would like them to do to you" apply or does the Platinum Rule? Do they like similar communication styles or different ones?

Closing Discussion (10 min)

As a group, discuss preferred style of the speaker and preferred style of the listener for each. What emerged from the activity and networking task?

Tying It All Together:

In this lesson, students learn a great deal about communication styles and then analyze one another's styles to understand what their preferred styles are. They should also think about the Platinum Rule that says the speaker should treat others however the other person would like to be treated and not how the speaker prefers it. By understanding that everyone has different communication styles, students will have greater awareness for differences and how to accommodate others' communication styles.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:

The students found some of the signs very simple. The teacher should come up with images that are relevant and challenging for his/her students.

References:

This lesson has been put together with information from the article: “Communication Styles at Work” by Tag and Catherine Goulet.

<<http://career.jobboom.com/workplace/challenges/2008/03/14/5002741-fab.html>>

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