

The People Puzzle

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One of your most valuable skills in any business is the ability to "read" people. The people you interact with each day send you signals on how to work with them most effectively. If you learn what to look and listen for, each person will tell you exactly how to treat him effectively.

So what is there to read? Dozens of signals--verbal, vocal and visual, tell you when to speed up or slow down, when to focus on the details, or when to work on building the relationship with the other person. But why does your technique work sometimes and not at other times? Mostly because people are different.

Personality Needs

Everyone experiences the same basic human needs, but with each person some needs are more dominant than others. The four major groupings of needs are results, recognition, regimentation, and relationships.

For example, one person may be the type who measures his success by *results*. To him, the finished product is the most important thing, and he'll do whatever it takes, within reason, to get the job done. His dominant need is for accomplishment.

Then there is the sensitive, warm, supportive type of person whose dominant need is *relationships*. This appeal that would work well with a results-oriented person might be totally inappropriate for the person interested in relationships.

A third type of person usually places high value on *recognition* and measures success by the amount of acknowledgment and praise he receives.

Conversely, another person will be more concerned with the content than the congratulations. The primary need appears to be for *regimentation*. In other words, things must be put together in neat packages that can be clearly understood.

You can quickly see that a different type of appeal is necessary for each of these four "personalities." Recognizing this is very important because once you've learned the needs of each major behavior pattern, you will know how to work more effectively with each type of person.

Behavioral Style Characteristics

When people act and react in social situations, they exhibit clues that help to define their behavioral styles. You can identify behavioral style by watching for

the observable aspects of people's behavior -those verbal, vocal and visual actions that people display when others are present. Undirected, you could observe and try to catalogue thousands of behaviors in any one person. That would quickly become an exercise in futility. But identifying behavioral style is possible by classifying a person's behavioral on two dimensions: openness and directness. It is much like measuring a foot for a shoe; make it wide enough for the widest part and long enough for the longest part, and the rest of the foot will fit someplace in between.

Openness is the readiness and willingness with which a person outwardly shows emotions or feelings and develops interpersonal relationships.

Others commonly describe open people as being relaxed, warm, responsive, informal, and personable. They tend to be relationship-oriented. In conversations with others, open individuals share their personal feelings and like to tell stories and anecdotes. They tend to be flexible about time and base their ' decisions more on intuition and opinion than on hard facts and data. They also are likely to behave dramatically and to give you immediate nonverbal feedback in conversation.

Guarded individuals commonly are seen as formal and proper. They tend to be more guarded and aloof in their interpersonal relationships. These people are more likely to follow the letter of the law and try to base their decisions on cold, hard facts. Guarded individuals are usually very task oriented and disciplined about time. As opposed to open people, they hide their personal feelings in the presence of others.

Now consider the second dimension--directness. This refers to the amount of control and forcefulness that a person attempts to exercise over situations or other people, their thoughts and their emotions.

Direct people tend to "come on strong," take the social initiative, and create a powerful first impression. They are fast-paced people, making swift decisions and taking risks. They easily become impatient with others who cannot keep up with their fast pace. They are very active people who do a lot of talking and appear confident and sometimes dominant. Direct people express their opinions readily and make emphatic statements.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, indirect people give the impression of being quiet, shy, and reserved. They seem to be supportive and easy-going. They tend to be security-conscious-moving slowly, meditation on their decisions, and avoiding risks. They frequently ask questions and listen more than they talk. They reserve their opinions and make tentative statements when they must take a stand.

Openness and directness levels vary among individuals, and any one person may be high in one, low in the other, or somewhere in between. In other words, everyone has some usual level of openness and some level of directness.

Behavior Styles

When directness is combined with openness it forms four different, recognizable, and habitual behavior patterns or behavioral styles: the socializer, the director, the thinker, and the relater.

Each style represents unique combinations of openness and directness and is linked to separate and unique ways of behaving with others. The name given to each style reflects a very general characteristic rather than a full or accurate description. As you better understand why people behave the way they do, your knowledge can help you communicate with others effectively and openly to help them feel more comfortable in their interactions with you.

Socializer: Open and Direct

The socializer is high in both directness and openness, readily exhibiting such characteristics as animation, intuitiveness, and liveliness. He is an idea person--a dreamer--but he also can be viewed as manipulative, impetuous, and excitable when displaying behavior inappropriate to a particular situation. The socializer is a fast-paced person with spontaneous actions and decisions. He is not concerned about facts and details, and tries to avoid them as much as possible. This disregard for details may prompt him at times to exaggerate and generalize facts and figures.

The socializer is more comfortable with "best guesstimates" than with carefully researched facts. He thrives on involvement with people and usually works quickly and enthusiastically with others.

The socializer always seems to be chasing dreams, but he has the uncanny ability to catch others up in his dreams because of his good persuasive skills. He always seems to be seeking approval and pats on the back for his accomplishments and achievements. The socializer is a very creative person who has that dynamic ability to think quickly on his feet.

Director: Direct and Guarded

The director is very direct and at the same time guarded. He exhibits firmness in his relationships with others, is oriented toward productivity and goals, and is concerned with bottom-line results. Closely allied to these positive traits, however, are the negative ones of stubbornness, impatience, toughness, and even domineeringness.

A director tends to take control of other people and situations and is decisive in both his actions and decisions. He likes to move at an extremely fast pace and is very impatient with delays. When other people can't keep up with his speed, he

views them as incompetent. The director's motto might well be "I want it done right and I want it done now."

The director is typically a high achiever who exhibits very good administrative skills; he certainly gets things done and makes things happen. The director likes to do many things at the same time. He may start by juggling three things at the same time, and as soon as he feels comfortable with those he picks up a fourth. He keeps adding on until the pressure builds to such a point that he turns his back and lets everything drop. Then he turns right around and starts the whole process over again.

Thinker: Indirect and Guarded

The person who has the thinker-style behavior is both indirect and guarded. He seems to be very concerned with the process of thinking, and is a persistent, systematic problem-solver. But he also can be seen as aloof, picky, and critical. A thinker is very security conscious and has a strong need to be right. This leads him to an over-reliance on data collection. In his quest for data he tends to ask many questions about specific details. His actions and decisions tend to be extremely cautious.

The thinker works slowly and precisely by himself and prefers an intellectual work environment that is organized and structured. He tends to be skeptical and likes to see things in writing.

Although he is a great problem-solver, the thinker is a poor decision-maker, he may keep collecting data even beyond the time when a decision is due, justifying his caution by saying, "When you are making vast decisions, you cannot do it on half-vast data."

Relater: Open and Indirect

The fourth and last style, the relater, is open and unassertive, warm, supportive, and reliable. However, the relater sometimes is seen by others as compliant, soft-hearted, and acquiescent. The relater seeks security and belongingness and like the thinker, is slow at taking action and making decisions. This procrastination stems from his desire to avoid risky and unknown situations. Before he takes action or makes a decision, he has to know how other people feel about it.

The relater is the most people-oriented of all four styles. Having close, friendly, personal, and first-name relationships with others is one of the most important objectives of the relater's style.

The relater dislikes interpersonal conflicts so much that he sometimes says what he thinks other people want to hear rather than what is really on his mind. The

relater has tremendous counseling skills and is extremely supportive of other people. He also is an incredibly active listener. You usually feel good just being with a relater. Because a relater listens so well to other people, when it comes his turn to talk, people usually listen. This gives him an excellent ability to gain support from others.

What's Best?

You may have concluded that one or more of the behavioral styles is better than others. This is not the case. There is no "best" behavioral style. Each style has its own unique strengths and weaknesses, and successful people as well as failures populate each style group.

By now you may have identified in yourself some characteristics of all four behavior styles. That's natural. People possess traits from all four styles in varying degrees. Depending upon circumstances, on any given day one style may be more dominant than any of the others: however, most people do have a single dominant behavioral style. Like a theme in a musical composition, behavioral style is a recurring and predictable component. But like variations on a theme, people also possess traits that vary from their dominant style traits. And in selling situations, it is very important to be aware of the style that the other person is exhibiting at each and every contact.

Your Responses

Behavioral flexibility is something you do to yourself, not to others. It occurs when you step out of your own comfort zone—your own style preferences—to meet another's needs. It occurs each time you slow down for a relater or thinker, or when you move faster for a director or socializer. It occurs when a director or thinker takes time to listen to a personal or family story from a relater or socializer.

Let's look at some specific guidelines for implementing behavioral flexibility as you work with each of the four behavioral styles.

Be Agreeable with Socializers

The socializer likes to interact with other people, so try not to hurry the discussion. Attempt to develop some mutually stimulating ideas together. Focus your conversation on opinions, ideas and dreams; then try to support those.

If, during the conversation, you come to some point on which you are not in agreement, try not to argue. You can't win an argument with a socializer. Remember that the socializer deals in opinions and intuitions. Instead of arguing, try to explore alternative solutions.

When you do reach an agreement with a socializer, iron out the specific details concerning what, when, who, and how. Make absolutely sure that you both agree on the specifics, and summarize in writing what you both have agreed upon even though it may not appear necessary.

When prospects are Socializers:

- Be stimulating and show your interest in them. Allow them time to talk.
- Meet them boldly; don't be shy. Introduce yourself first.
- Study their dreams and goals as well as their other needs.
- Propose your solution with stories or illustrations that relate to them and their goals.
- Confirm the details in writing. Be clear and direct.

Talk Business with Directors

Directors are easy to deal with so long as you are precise, efficient, time-disciplined, and well organized. Make sure you keep your relationship businesslike; do not attempt to establish a personal relationship unless that is one of the director's objectives. Focus your conversation around the director's goals. Remember that the director is the most goal-oriented, achievement-oriented, and task oriented of any of the four behavioral styles.

If, during the conversation, you must take issue with a director, argue the facts, not personal feelings. Make sure you can back up your statements with solid, tangible proof. You should provide the director with options; directors like to make their own decisions. Above all else, make sure that you get right to the point and do not waste time.

When working with Directors:

- Plan to be prepared, organized fast-paced, and to the point.
- Meet them in a professional and businesslike manner.
- Study their goals and objectives—what they want to do and how.
- Proposed solutions and clearly defined consequences and rewards that relate specifically to the director's goals.
- Provide two or three options and let the director make the decision.

Thinkers Want Accuracy

Try to be systematic, exact, organized, and prepared with the thinker. Try to support the thinker's organized, thoughtful approach. Any contributions you can make toward the thinker's objectives should be demonstrated through actions rather than words whenever possible. Thinkers may request solid, tangible, factual evidence that what you say is true and accurate.

List the advantages and disadvantages for anything you propose and have viable alternatives for dealing effectively with the disadvantages. If you do not bring up the obvious disadvantages, the thinker will certainly find them and assume that you are hiding things. That will be the end of the relationship.

Try not to rush the decision-making process with thinkers; they need time to verify your words and actions. Above all else, be accurate in your dealings with thinkers; they demand it.

For best results with Thinkers:

- Plan to be well prepared to answer all their questions.
- Meet them cordially, but get down to business quickly.
- Study their situation in a practical, logical manner. Ask lots of questions and make sure your questions show a clear direction.
- Propose logical solutions to their problems and offer documentation.
- Don't push; give them time to think.

Approach Relaters with Warmth

Try to support the relater's feelings, project the idea that you are interested in him as a person. Move along in a slow, informal manner and constantly show the relater that you are actively listening.

If you must disagree with the relater, do not debate facts and logic; discuss personal opinions and feelings. If you quickly establish an objective and come to a fast decision with a relater, try to explore any potential areas for misunderstanding or dissatisfaction. The relater likes guarantees that any new actions will involve a minimum risk. So, offer assurances of support. Try not to rush the relater, but do provide guidance. Project genuine sincerity in your relationship.

Relaters will respond if you:

- Get to know them personally. Be likable and non-threatening, professional but friendly.
- Go at a slow pace. Develop trust, friendship, and credibility.
- Study their feelings and emotional needs as well as their practical needs. Take time to get them to spell out what is really important to them.
- Don't push or rush. Offer personal assurances whenever you can.
- Be consistent and regular in your communications. Give them nurturing and reassurance.

The Benefits to You

The ultimate reward for practicing flexibility is the establishment of trust, rapport, and credibility with others. This can be accomplished only in open, honest, tension-free relationships. When you treat other people inappropriately, it makes them feel uncomfortable with you and raises their tension level. And that is certainly counterproductive to any selling situation.

Accepting and understanding the fact that people are different and therefore need to be treated differently is crucial if you want to effectively sell your services to others. Go one step further and acquire competence in identifying these critical differences in people. The practice of sales flexibility will lead to less tension and higher levels of trust and credibility in all your sales relationships.

The bottom-line payoff is better rapport with all your prospects. These improved relationships combined with greater sales productivity are powerful benefits for simply learning how to be flexible in working with different types of people.