



The Style Guide

Style is effectiveness of assertion

George Bernard Shaw

Why is it that we get along so much more easily with some people than with others? There are people we feel rapport with in a matter of minutes. There's no effort involved, we just 'click' with them and the relationship has got off to a great start.

The answer is style – their style matches our style and we immediately 'understand' one another. Style is like a surfboard that you use to ride each other's wavelength.

If you're naturally easygoing and laid-back then you'll get on with someone else whose style is similar.

Whatever your style, whether you're quiet, outspoken or cheerfully sociable, you'll almost certainly get on better with someone who's style matches or fits with yours.

So what is our 'style'? Whether we realise it or not we all have a set of behaviors which are considered 'typical' of us. Our friends and family know about them, even when we don't. They're familiar with our most common responses and ways of behaving.

Our personal style is based on these usual behaviors and will carry through to our working lives too. Of course we don't just stick to one style the whole time. No-one is that one-track! Even the most direct and forceful personality will have laid-back, easygoing moments. But each of us has a style which is predominant and will come across most often. So while it's not a good idea to put everyone you know into boxes, it can be useful to know which style you identify with most clearly and the styles of those you need to communicate with.

Doing this will give you a head start. Once you know how to identify styles you can build rapport with people who are not at all like you. It might not come naturally, as it does with someone of a similar style, but with a little effort you can still make it happen.

Instead of jarring with someone whose style is very different you can work with them, know what to expect from them and respond in ways you know they will understand and connect with. In other words you will be better able to mirror, match, pace and lead.

This chapter is a guide to the main behavior styles you will come across. As you read through the descriptions and charts you'll probably recognize yourself and most of the people you know. It's great fun and can also be very helpful. When you're in new or demanding situations you'll be able to recognize the styles of the people involved. Then you can use your inside knowledge to build rapport, persuade and influence.

People have been recognizing and using styles for thousands of years.

In fact some of the available information about styles comes from sources as far back as Hippocrates in 400 BC.

The version I'm going to give you is my own take on the style principle, based on many years of working with people and borrowed from a blend of approaches.

The Four Key Styles

We all fall into one of four key styles and these are:

Direct

Analytical

Social

Expressive

Let's go through them one at a time. I'll give you the main characteristics of each one before going on to show you what you can do to build rapport with someone who displays that particular style.

Direct

This is the attitude of the direct person:

Please get to the point as soon as you can. Time is important to me and I don't like people who waffle. Promise me early in the meeting that you will stick to the agreed timing and then do it.

I like it when you tell me what you want at the beginning of the meeting – don't make me wait because I can usually tell what you are going to say anyway.

I have a short attention span. I like control and I'll take it if I see you're not doing so fairly early on. You'll know I'm losing interest when I ask you to hand me any papers you've brought with you so that I can look through them and take the meeting in the direction I choose. If it's a presentation I'll flip through anything you've given

me while you're talking. I'll probably start to squirm around in my chair if you're not getting to the point – I may even sigh loudly. I may also start to look at my watch – sooner than you expect.

I will ask you direct questions from early on in the meeting and I'll expect you to give me well-prepared, brief, answers to my questions. I probably won't give you a long meeting so be prepared to cut to the salient points. I'm usually a decision-maker so be sure I know what you want from me or those who work with me. If you don't know, say you don't know. I am usually calm, controlled, formal and orderly.

Small talk usually doesn't impress me. I respect focus and clarity. I can come across as gruff and curt sometimes, but stick with me – I need to hear good ideas and I like smart, interested and enthusiastic people as much as the next person.

My answering machine will also be brief and will say something like: 'You have reached...please leave your name and number'. That's it.

How do you recognize one?

Environment is tidy and organized

Impatient

Questions and answers short, pointed, precise

Little if any small talk

Likes specific evidence

Responds well to confrontation

Energetic, forceful

To build rapport with the direct person:

Be punctual

Keep the meeting short

Be prepared for every possible eventuality and question

Start with the point or outcome you want

Use evidence or back-up that is very specific and factual

Make your message or presentation well-structured

Be able to answer questions in a direct, brief and decisive way

Make your questions incisive – show that you know what you're talking about

Don't bother with small-talk or try to be too friendly

If you write a letter, put what you want in the first brief paragraph including any next steps you may have discussed.

I have a client whose firm I have worked with for 10 years. Our relationship, which is good, constructive and on-going, consists of an annual five-minute phone conversation. That's what he wants, that's what he gets. It is enough for him. My instinct would be to talk to him more, to meet, chat, get friendly. But he's a direct person and for him the five minutes is perfect.

Analytical

This is the attitude of the analytical person:

I'm usually on time and fairly disciplined. I like technical and logical challenges. You may see charts and graphs in my office and when I describe things I may do it with lines arrows and continuums.

I love detail. I enjoy the process of hearing about how you did what you did because it helps me to understand you and decide whether what you're saying has merit. If your method is well-thought through, then your idea has a good chance of getting my go-ahead. It's a good idea to find out who I am in advance and to send me details before we meet.

I don't like confrontation very much so I'm not likely to embarrass you or ask you questions that may make you look bad, although you've messed up on the detail I'll eat you alive.

I will give you the time you need to get through your argument. I may divert you sometimes because I want a detailed answer to some aspect of what you are telling me. Don't dismiss me; just give me a good answer that satisfies me you have thought this through. Your safest bet is to build your argument for me step by step, showing me your thinking or workings at each stage.

I don't respond well to a direct approach and I'm not influenced by bravado. One other thing, I like to consider things so I may take a bit longer to make a decision.

My answering machine might say: 'Good morning...you have reached the voicemail of...on Thursday the 16th of June 2004. I am not at my desk at the moment but I will return at 3pm this afternoon. If you would like to leave a message, do so after the beep – leaving your name, phone number your time of call and the reason you are calling. I will get back to you as soon as possible.'

How do you recognize one?

Environment is tidy and organized

Questions are precise, pointed and technical

Keeps emotional issues out of small talk; likely to say “How was the traffic? Rather than ‘How are you feeling?’

Logical, fact oriented

Will ask for supporting data, details and sources

To build rapport with the analytical person:

Be on time and have your information clearly ordered and ready to go

Be pointed and technical

Don’t rush the pace, take your time

Support your answers to questions with as much evidence as possible, preferably two or three types of evidence

Be low key in your style – careful, sincere and orderly without too much enthusiasm or bounce.

Don’t use words like intuitive, think, believe, feel, etc.

Do use words like rational, know, prove, demonstrate, analyse etc

I had a client who was so biased towards the analytical that he would only ever approve an idea if it was presented to him in a certain way. Everyone who worked with him learned to give him the detail he insisted on. This meant that first you had to explain how you came to the idea and your thinking behind it. Then you had to present any tests or insights you had found to reinforce your thinking. Finally you could come to the idea itself. Approach him any other way and you’d be sent back to the drawing-board. He had to know the background before he would understand or believe the idea. He also to have each major issue explained in at least two ways – with the evidence to back them up.

Social

This is the attitude of the social person:

If I'm late for a meeting it's because I was looking after someone or trying to resolve a conflict or problem. I really like to get involved in the personal, emotional and human side of things.

I don't like friction. I'm proud of my relationships and friends and people describe me as warm, supportive and patient. I like balance and harmony. I need to you make small talk with me.

The downside is that I can be very political. I like meetings and sometimes I attend them even when I am not essential to the objective. People rely on me to understand the 'softer' issues and sometimes invite me to come along to get a 'read' on the situation. I sometimes have a lot of influence in an organisation. I can be very important to a decision-maker and have his/her ear.

If I'm a decision-maker, I'm interested in what it would be like to work with you. I want to know how everyone feels about things before I make my decision.

I may have family pictures around me, as well as drawings, colourful paintings and inspirational sayings. People issues are very important to me so I'll be looking to see whether you'll fit into the team and get along with the others in the organisation.

A successful meeting to me is one where we may not get to the objective – the most important thing is that we build rapport. I won't mind scheduling another meeting to get to the business side of things. I don't like confrontation very much so you might not know exactly how I feel about something when the meeting ends.

My answering machine message might say: 'Hello, you have reached... I'm sorry I'm not here to take your call. Please leave your name and number and I will get back to you as soon as possible. I look forward to speaking to you soon. Good-bye and thanks.'

How do you recognize one?

Environment relaxed, family photos around

Questions and answers are usually based on how others think and feel or may be affected

Likes plenty of small talk

Dislikes being rushed or pushed into a decision

Usually avoids confrontation

To build rapport with the social person:

If you're late have a good people reason

Be warm, friendly and talkative

Don't rush, go at a relaxed pace. Avoid a sense of urgency

Wait to begin the business side of things until the other person indicates that they are ready

Show that you are aware of how others will be affected by what you are proposing

Talk about your personal experience where relevant

Your personal promise will be more important than statistical back-up or factual evidence

I have a client who was known for looking after his team better than anyone else in his organisation. Everyone wanted to get on his team because it was a sure way to get the sort of work you wanted to do and have fun. They often socialised together and had a wonderful camaraderie.

I made a classic error with this man. I can be pretty direct and I inadvertently upset one of his team members when we were working late at night on a high-pressure presentation. The following day the client came back to me yelling at the top of his voice and very upset about how I had done this to his colleague. After he'd vented his anger I apologised and later in the day went to the person I'd upset with chocolates, flowers and an apology. After that, this client and I were great friends. He was satisfied that I'd put things right and I knew exactly which approach to use with him and his team.

Expressive

This is the attitude of the expressive person:

I am considered to be a good communicator – not necessarily clear, but expressive and open and with lots of energy. I often have my ego tied up in what I say, so be careful about how you respond. It's best to hear me out. When you do respond, I like it when you have a creative way to explain what you mean.

I don't like process very much – don't bother with detailed explanations. I have a tendency to think in terms of the big picture so paint a picture of the final result for me, with lots of colourful description and adjectives. I like to feel inspired and excited.

Expect some personal questions. My small talk will be personal and positive. I can be recognised by my high energy, animation, and intuitive approach. I'm excitable so make sure we have an agreement, not just an adrenaline-fuelled session.

I may also jump around in my thinking, you might get lost, so make sure you can keep up. I tend to be judgmental and easily bored. If you're not creative or emotional I may think you're dull.

I'm likely not to have a tailored answering machine message, I haven't time for such trivialities.

How do you recognize one?

Environment colourful and slightly disorganized

Will ask creative questions and seek creative answers

Likes positive personal small talk

Likes to be entertained

Excitable, articulate, animated

May take things personally

Hates detail

To build rapport with the expressive person:

Be on time.

Be confident and dynamic.

Be warm, creative and colourful

Don't compete

Bring in the big picture early in the meeting then use the rest of the meeting to bring the picture to life

Keep detail to a minimum

Keep pace with what the other person is thinking and saying

A major advertising agency client of mine was so expressive that his meetings were almost theatrical. When he spoke he gestures were big – his voice full and loud, his language descriptive and colourful. During meetings, while others were talking, he would often wander slowly around the room, rubbing the shoulders of his team members who were seated – pausing while standing over the person speaking. He would also occasionally lie on the floor at the back of the room to rest, much to the dismay of whomever was talking. He was highly creative and got away with this most of the time because he was so successful. Some of his clients found it amusing, but others found it egotistical and rude. Whichever way you took him he was slightly mad – and a classic example of an extreme expressive.

Look for Clues

In some cases you'll find that someone seems to be a combination of two styles, both equally weighted. Some direct people are very expressive too, and vice versa. In the same way some analytical people can also be very direct or quite social. Some combinations don't work, though. Analytical types are rarely if ever expressive, and social types are rarely direct. It is also more difficult for expressive and analytical types to build rapport as it can also be for direct and social types. Again, no boxes here – we seem to default to our comfort zone under pressure.

Because it isn't always obvious which type or mix of types someone is take your time and look for clues when assessing how to approach them.

I had a client who seemed to be a clear social type. He was friendly, warm and chatty and he liked to spend plenty of time on personal conversation before getting down to business.

Because of this I made my approach to him equally social, concentrating on the people and human aspects of the presentation. Mistake! When it came to business this very sociable man was in fact highly analytical. He wanted detail, evidence and facts – and plenty of them. I had to go back and re-do my proposal, making it far more analytical, before we could do business. Recognizing someone's style isn't a guarantee that things will go well. It may give you an advantage. You'll feel more confident and in control and have a clearer idea of how to respond to them in a way that will help you build rapport and reach the outcome you want.