

## All Bosses are not Created Equal

### *Understanding Different Styles of Communicating is Key*

One of the key challenges in business involves getting employees and their managers and supervisors to overcome their personality and communication differences to work together so everyone is “on the same page” in its drive for organizational success.

It is difficult to get along well and communicate well with someone you don’t understand. You will often misinterpret another person’s actions or words, and you will become frustrated with people whose personalities are the opposite of yours. If you want to reduce conflicts with the person who is precise and analytical, then be precise and analytical with him/her. A better understanding of how people talk and convey ideas differently will go a long way toward improving communication and resolving conflicts.

*For employers:*

The next sections discuss specific communication ideas for employers (i.e. managers and supervisors).

#### **Managers must be Flexible**

A manager or supervisor must be flexible in how he/she communicates with employees, even if the manager’s style of communication is very different. However, before a manager can better understand another person’s personality style, he/she needs to OBSERVE the employee, looking for certain characteristics such as how the person communicates non-verbally (i.e. the individual’s body language, etc.)

#### **Different Styles of Communication**

The next part of this article will define and explain the four major behavioral styles (i.e. approaches) of communication. It also presents tips on how managers can utilize the strengths and weaknesses of each style to increase cooperation and productivity.

#### **Dominance Style (D)**

The dominance or “D” communicator is direct, opinionated, wants the bottom line, seeks immediate results, and enjoys challenges. Communicators who

use this style like to win, will take risks, and work hard to get desired results. “D” communicators prefer a fast pace, new activities, change, variety, and use a direct approach to solve problems. They are confident leaders and believe in pragmatic principles – if it doesn’t work, get rid of it.

➤ *Putting into practice for managers* – To be effective with these employees, show them the simplest and quickest way to be productive. In managing a “D” worker, it’s important to clearly define the limits of his or her authority. When faced with conflict, “D” communicators will confront the opposition and defend their position. They will often use intimidation tactics in order to win an argument. However, when they feel the conflict is a no-win situation, they will mentally “leave” the conversation and sometimes physically exit.

<b>“D” Style Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Born leader	Bossy
Excels in emergencies	Intolerant
Goal-oriented	Overdemanding
Motivated	Workaholic
Logical thinker	Impatient
Confident	Rude/tactless

#### **Influence Style (I)**

Influence or “I” communicators like to interact with people. They are fast-paced, animated, enthusiastic, and like to express their thoughts and feelings. These outgoing people desire results, and are very sociable in their interactions. They are excellent communicators and are viewed as friendly, creative, and persuasive.

➤ *Putting into practice for managers* – To be effective with this employee, avoid overwhelming details and request specific feedback to check on their understanding on how to complete a project. Use public praise and provide opportunities for them to interact with others. Use fast-paced, enthusiastic descriptions with an “I” communicator. Remember also that they are very persuasive and vocal in a conflict situation. They will talk at length



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on a variety of topics – quickly moving from one topic to the next.

“I” Style Strengths	Weaknesses
Magnetic personality	Exaggerates
Storyteller	Compulsive talker
Entertaining	Undisciplined
Friendly	Immature
Creative and colorful	Interrupts
Enthusiastic	Disorganized

## Steadiness Style (S)

The steadiness or “S” communicator is very accepting of others. They like cooperation and harmony and are good at calming other people. “S” types also like security, being part of a team, and stability. These people are not risk-takers and dislike change – especially abrupt change. “S” communicators are patient, loyal, and wonderful listeners. They prefer to work with others and like to take time in establishing group cohesiveness. They have a predictable manner and are known as peacemakers.

➤ *Putting into practice for managers* – Use a step-by-step plan for development with an “S” communicator. Provide one-on-one, hands-on instruction and regular informal feedback on improvement. Use warm and sincere statements, complimenting his or her efforts. Be patient and sincere when managing an “S” communicator. These are loyal employees who respond positively to group achievements. In times of conflict they will seek win-win solutions. During intense disagreements they can become stubborn and uncommunicative.

“S” Style Strengths	Weaknesses
Cooperative	Indecisive
Patient	Procrastinates
Well-balanced	Passive
Team-oriented	Sarcastic
Steady and easygoing	Too accommodating
Mediator and good listener	Fearful and worried

## Conscientious Style (C)

The conscientious or “C” communicator is cautious, detailed, and demands quality. They like to work under known conditions, and prefer to follow written standards and procedures. These people are neat and orderly, they value accuracy, and are

tactful and diplomatic. They have a perfectionist nature and an analytical view of the world, thereby analyzing situations and problems, utilizing high standards for themselves and others.

➤ *Putting into practice for managers* – To be effective with this communicator, provide precise, factual statements and specific performance expectations. Use accurate, detailed statements, and check for understanding and acceptance of information. Be specific and detailed when managing a “C” communicator. Before a meeting, prepare information to be discussed prior to the conversation. This style asks many questions so allow extra time for your meeting. In a conflict they will stand behind the facts rather than opinions.

“C” Style Strengths	Weaknesses
Artistic and musical	Perfectionist
Schedule-oriented	Moody
Keeps emotions in check	Suspicious
Long-range goals	Inflexible
Serious and analytical	Pessimistic
Likes charts and graphs	Slow to action

## For a Strong Team, Mix them Up!

A work group that has all four styles can be an effective team. Each style brings different strengths to the team. However, it is important for the manager to set a positive tone by demonstrating mutual respect, trust, and acceptance. It will be a challenge to minimize the interpersonal conflicts that will naturally arise within the group, but if management can create the right environment, minimize conflicts, and allow the group to motivate themselves, this team can achieve outstanding results.

*For employees:*

The next sections discuss specific communication ideas for employees.

## Promoting Positive Office Politics

Improving communication also involves having a better grasp of “office politics.” How often have you been right, but everyone hates you for it? That’s the gap you need to understand. It’s not about walking on others to get what you need, but it *is* about comprehending unspoken messages.

One of the most important political alliances to cultivate is your relationship with your boss (i.e. manager or supervisor). Ask yourself this question, “*Do I actually manage my relationship with my boss...or*



just try not to make him or her mad?” Most people do only the latter. Turn this around and start creating a more positive relationship with your manager or supervisor by answering these key questions:

## **1. What is the method of communication with which my boss is most comfortable?**

Is it face-to-face, email, or voicemail? Sarah had a boss who responded best to voicemail. He wasn't big on face-to-face because it required too much time. However, if you sent him a voicemail, you almost always got an answer the same day, even when he was busy. This strategy also made Sarah look self-sufficient because she wasn't always in his office asking questions. On the rare occasion when she asked for time on his calendar, he would accommodate her because he knew it was important.

## **2. During what time of day is my boss most receptive to talking?**

Your boss may be a morning person, or more open to longer conversations as the day winds down and the phones stop ringing. If your boss is talkative and you need a quick answer, check his or her calendar or understand his/her lunch schedule and pay a visit 15 minutes before the meeting or when your boss typically leaves for lunch.

## **3. Is there a particular day of the week that is better for your boss than others?**

One governmental group waits until Wednesdays to ask for anything important from their manager, because on Tuesdays the boss meets with the Board of Commissioners, and Mondays are spent preparing for this meeting.

## **4. When the boss needs advice, whom does he or she consult?**

Build a good relationship with this person so he or she says good things about you to your boss. Remember, this is someone your boss listens to and whose opinion your boss values.

## **5. What is the last business book your boss has read?**

You can still use this strategy even if your boss isn't a big reader. Simply select a book that is short

but packed with insights, so your boss will be willing to spend an hour reading it, and then give it to him/her. Never put the cost of the book on an expense report. This is a gift and an investment in your career. Surely your career is worth \$20 or \$25!

## **'Political Rules'**

The following are three quick “political rules” for successfully dealing with bosses:

### **1. Remain neutral about new bosses.**

When you get a new boss, people will ask what you think about him or her. These people will repeat what you say throughout the organization, so simply say: “*She seems very smart, but I haven't worked with her for very long.*” This is both non-committal and positive.

### **2. When your boss says something nice about you, don't deflect the compliment with modesty or with your humor by cracking a joke that, “maybe this is a good time to ask for a raise.”**

This devalues the compliment and creates an awkward situation for everyone, even if they know you're kidding. Here's the perfect reply: “*Thank you so much. That means a great deal to me, coming from you.*” You've now tripled the chances your manager will say more nice things about you in the future.

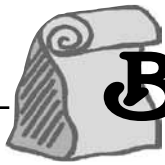
### **3. Never speak badly about your boss in the workplace.**

By not saying anything bad, you send a clear, unspoken message throughout the organization that you are patient, resilient, and loyal. You enhance your value and reputation simply by shutting up.

## **Summary**

Understanding individual differences in communication styles, and better recognizing how positive office politics work will improve understanding and reduce conflict.

Sources: Margaret Morford, author of “*Management Courage: Having the Heart of a Lion*”; and Deanne DeMarco, an award-winning trainer, business coach, and the co-author of “*Speaking of Success: World Class Experts Share Their Secrets.*” For more information, visit [www.breaking-boundaries.com](http://www.breaking-boundaries.com).



## Keeping Conflict to a Minimum



By Patti Fralix

Most people's actions are done with little regard to their impact on others. When one person's behavior is not understood and/or accepted by the other person, conflict ensues. Conflict isn't so bad when it's done without anger, negativity, or hurt feelings, but all too often this isn't the case.

Conflict occurs when people have differences yet do not discuss them openly. There are two types of conflict-resolution styles that are often ineffective: avoiding and ignoring. Avoiding conflict is similar to "hiding one's head in the sand," hoping that the issue will go away or be resolved on its own.

Ignoring, on the other hand, involves making a conscious decision to not deal with the issue, a decision that *can* be negative, or positive. For example, sometimes a decision is the result of choosing to "let this one go" because it just isn't a matter that has to be addressed.

The following are several additional ways that can help prevent and resolve conflicts:

❖ **Make sure there is a common understanding of responsibilities and deadlines.** Too many conflicts occur because managers fail to provide employees with information related to their job responsibilities and the company in general.

Who is accountable for what becomes even more important to clarify in an environment of teamwork and project work. Also, with most

people having so many responsibilities, it's imperative that priorities and deadlines are clear to everyone.

❖ **Commit to conflict management.** Discuss conflict on a general level so that employees understand that change and opportunity always involves conflict. Make sure people understand that managing conflict *effectively* and *constructively* is a company expectation.

Treat employees as adults, and expect them to solve their own problems whenever possible. When an employee complains to a manager about another employee, the manager's first question should be, "*Have you discussed your concern with [name of employee]?*" The manager should be available as a *resource* in helping employees to manage their own conflicts.

### Summary

Given increased change, layoffs, and stress, we should expect more workplace conflict. However, understanding different styles of communication, distinguishing positive from negative office politics, and utilizing strategies like these are helpful for managing conflict. When conflict is understood and managed effectively and constructively, results and relationships are improved.

*Patti Fralix is the founder of The Fralix Group, a leadership excellence firm; and author of "How to Thrive in Spite of Mess, Stress and Less."*

