

Communication Styles on the Job

Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

Have you ever felt like nobody at work understands you? Have you worked with a colleague you just couldn't get through to? If so, you and your colleagues probably need to learn a little bit about differing communications styles. Some people are more to-the-point when it comes to communicating. They tell it like it is, lay it on the line, and work best when others can handle their bluntness. Others are more comfortable taking a softer approach. They avoid conflict and take things more personally. So how can these two communication styles get along in the workplace? The secret is understanding differences and knowing how to deliver messages to different communication types.

There are many labels for communications styles. Psychologists throughout the years have come up with many different categories into which most people will fall. But all of these different labels are based on the same two elements, says David G. Jensen. Jensen is the managing director of CareerTrax Inc. of Sedona, Ariz. (www.careertrax.com), an organizational development consulting firm for biotechnology companies. He says that the two elements used to determine an individual's communication style are the person's level of openness and the person's level of directness.

You can determine a person's level of openness by listening to how much that person talks about him or herself. Individuals who are very open like to share information and are comfortable with emotions. They speak expressively and open up soon after meeting new people. On the other end are those who are reserved. They keep their feelings, thoughts and emotions to themselves. When it comes to directness, you can determine where an individual falls by how he or she speaks, how willing he or she is to take risks, and by his or her mannerisms. Direct individuals like to take charge of situations. Indirect individuals value security, are far less likely to take risks, are less outgoing, and value careful planning.

Jensen says that being familiar with these four categories of communicators will make it easier for you to communicate with anyone in the workplace. He offers the following suggestions on how to communicate with each style.

Individuals who are open

Jensen says that open individuals express their emotions freely. They like to chat before getting down to business, like to get to know others in the department, and often have personal mementos or pictures on display. Therefore, barging into the office demanding quick answers to a question is not appropriate. Jensen says you should first ask some non-business related questions. If you are interviewing with an open communicator, ask that person how long he or she has been with the company, what was his or her first job, or other questions about his or her career path. "These people need to be comfortable with you first," he says.

Individuals who are reserved.

Reserved individuals do not share personal information about themselves. If you are an open communicator, you need to recognize that these individuals do not want to share details about their personal lives or how they are feeling about things. Asking a reserved individual personal questions will only make that person feel uncomfortable.

Individuals who are indirect.

If you are interviewing with an indirect person, Jensen says you can make slight changes in how you speak to make the other person more comfortable. "One of the best things you can do is to match the speed of your speech to the other person," he says. For example, indirect communicators speak slowly and deliberately. If you enter the office speaking loudly, talking fast or being overly aggressive, you will turn an indirect communicator off. In addition, these individuals value facts and figures. Make sure you have numbers to back up your claims.

Individuals who are direct.

These individuals speak more loudly, more quickly and are more animated than indirect communicators. They are risk takers, assertive and often referred to as "Type A" personalities. If you notice that your interviewer is a direct communicator, make sure you get to your main points right away. Be confident in your answers. Give solid examples of your accomplishments, and be lively when you are speaking. These individuals relate to high-energy people who seem to be full of life.

Jensen says that the most important thing for all communicators is the ability to adapt. He points out that the "Golden Rule" that most of us know is really different when it comes to communicating. Instead of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, "the golden rule in communicating is to communicate with others they way they wish you to."

Kate Lorenz is the article and advice editor for CareerBuilder.com. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues. Other writers contributed to this article.

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