

Week 2: Communication Styles

I. Highlights

- A. Communication styles break into four categories (direct, spirited, considerate, precise) based on two dimensions that can be high or low: assertiveness and expressiveness.
- B. Cultural norms about time, space, touch, eye contact, etc. affect how we use language and communicate with others.
- C. Sometimes have to adjust our communication style to accommodate the other person.

II. Homework

- A. She will send us stuff through Angel. Print, complete, bring to class these three inventories (similar to what we did tonight):
 1. Psychological style (version of Meyers-Briggs)
 2. Flexibility & change style (where are you on continuum of flexibility)
 3. Professional orientation (assessing how you look at your job as a professional)
 4. These are all things we need to know about ourselves, and things we need to think about for
- B. Not everyone has the book, so she'll send us articles through Angel and tell us which ones to read for next week.
- C. Look for an email about the Child Development Training Consortium (CDTC).
It's time to complete our student profiles to get stipends. Need to be employed in a licensed center or family child care. The forms will be all electronic, so fill it out COMPLETELY on the computer. (Missing fields will cancel the application.)
Then print it out, have the director sign. Bring it to Terry and she'll bring it to

Leslie Hotta for us. Can get a \$75 to \$100 check in June for turning this in. Check email!

III. Introduction

- A. Textbooks are listed in the syllabus. Please order both ASAP.
- B. Exercise: get back to back with a partner. Practice giving instructions: tell the other person what to do to their paper. Do it to yours at the same time. Compare results at the end. This is harder than you think!
 1. You have to be very descriptive. Be very precise/detailed.
 2. The recipient has to have good auditory processing skills. Also need a way to ask for clarification when there are too many ways to interpret a given direction.
 3. We give instructions a lot in our job in ECE. Think about what worked in giving and receiving information, where the issues came from. Realize how different each of our communication styles can be.

IV. Communication Styles

- A. Worksheet: inventory / test to determine our communication style. From Paula Jordy Bloom's book *Blueprint for Action*. (Is another good book for our professional library.)
 1. Don't overthink the answers; go with your gut response. If you say "At home, this, at work, that..." go with the work answer in this case.
 2. We're not 100% one of these, usually we're somewhere on the continuum, but tend toward one style more than others. May have to change for a particular situation. One is more comfortable for us than others.
 3. Two measures:

- a) “assertive” (direct, task oriented, confident) vs. “non-assertive” (reserved, deliberate, easy-going)
 - b) “expressiveness” = degree to which we exhibit or control emotions and feelings while communicating
4. Most answers in column A = “direct” = tell it like it is, get to the point, task-oriented. Assertive + less expressive/emotional. Gets the job done.
 5. Mostly column B = “spirited” = lot of enthusiasm, gets caught up in the task at hand, less listening. Assertive + more show of emotion. May embellish stories for dramatic effect.
 6. Mostly column C (most of us in this class) = “considerate” = easy-going, flexible, supportive, more reserved about our own emotions/opinions. Non-assertive + more expressive of emotions. (Less about our own emotions, more about our emotions about the situation or the feelings of others.)
 - a) Very supportive, highly in tune to the feelings of others (opposite of “direct” communicator). Non-assertive, less expressive quadrant of this continuum.
 - b) This easy-goingness can be perceived as wishy-washy because we don’t always directly express our opinions. May be overlooked because we’re not assertive about our thoughts and opinions.
 - c) Highly empathetic, so our position in a debate or argument can be misread because it seems like we’re supporting the other point of view, when really we’re just understanding their point of view, not necessarily agreeing with it.
 7. Mostly column D = “systematic” or “analytic” = accuracy, objectivity, removing yourself from the emotional piece of the situation. Lot of precision in speech, lot of detailed language. Methodical/careful in relaying who said what, no exaggeration (opposite of “spirited” communicator).

- B. This test is more grounded in research than the circle/triangle/square/squiggle activity is. More cross-culturally relevant too.
- C. Can see how a systematic and a spirited communicator will have very different descriptions of the same event. Neither one is lying; they just have different styles. The spirited communicator may exaggerate somewhat for emphasis.
- D. If we're all considerate communicators, can be hard to get anything done because no one speaks up first. But a direct communicator can feel like a bulldozer, running over everyone else and coming across as tactless.
- E. Can complement each other well with different styles. Example: an analytical systematic thinker can help a considerate thinker lift out of the cloud of emotion and see what the real needs/logistics are. The considerate thinker can help the group members work together and feel heard.
- F. Can have cultural rules that cause you to express your communication in different ways. Maybe your family taught you "Young ladies simply do not raise their voice..." but your style is "spirited," so instead of yelling you slam doors, have big theatrical sighs, plop your purse down loudly, etc.
- G. Spirited or direct person will see an upset person and respond, "What's wrong with you?" Considerate person will ask, "What did I do wrong? How can I help you feel better?"
- H. We have professional/work/public behavior that may be different than how we act at home. Different things may be allowed in different contexts based on social rules, but probably won't be radically different. Your personality/temperament isn't going to change too much.
- I. Of course we all have all of these within us. Different scenarios will bring out different elements of each of these in each of us. There are times a considerate communicator will stand up and say, "This is my opinion, like it or not." It's harder for a direct style to say, "I understand your point of view..." but it can

happen. We are professional, well-educated people in society, so we can adapt to different situations as needed.

- J. Have you had an experience in a communication scenario where you got feedback about your style, or experienced tension between your style and the other person's style?
1. New co-teacher told her she wasn't direct enough, needed to tell her exactly what to do and when. Is a precise communicator, needed to be told what to do, but the lead teacher is a "considerate" style and not as specific about every detail every day. Co-teacher is struggling with the go-with-the-flow approach of the center and the lead teacher's considerate communication style.
 2. She's always "spirited." Is considerate at work (as a restaurant server), is direct in personal life, but is spirited always because that's her strongest style.
 3. Systematic wants details. Direct wants the Cliff Notes abbreviated version. Can drive each other nuts in a relationship!
 4. Can be good to have these styles complement each other. If a family is all considerate circles, can take half an hour to decide what to watch on TV!
- K. As teachers and supervisors, need to understand how our style plays into whatever relationship dynamic is going on. At work, we often have to modify our own style much more than we can expect the other person to modify theirs. We have to get closer to their style to be heard sometimes. Have to stay grounded for ourselves to be able to step out of our comfort zone for someone else's benefit.
- L. Need to be very self-reflective/self-aware to be able to do this. Need to be aware of how different people respond to our communication style so we can know how to modify it to connect with different people effectively.
- M. Can hurt a "considerate" person's feelings if a "direct" coworker starts the morning with, "We're here to do this job..." instead of starting with a personal

empathetic “How are you doing?” Direct is more task-oriented, considerate is more relationship-oriented. Direct wants to get it done, then relax and talk about life. Considerate can’t get the work done until we feel connected and “tuned in,” so feels very important to check in first. The direct person can learn to “check in” for a minute first, then get to work. That way everyone is connected and able to work together more harmoniously.

- N. Can feel like an abrupt/rude intrusion when a “direct” director walks into the classroom with a question needing a yes/no answer, then leaves. Helps to start with “Hi, how’s it going?” first.
- O. Some of this is cultural. Some people answer the phone with, “Hi...” and others start with “What are you doing?” Can feel rude to start out directly if the person’s culture/family expects a “Hello” to start. Culture includes race/ethnicity, family of origin, geographic area, gender, rural vs. urban, etc. All those things bring expectations about task orientation vs. relationship orientation. (Will do a different assessment about this later on.)
- P. Personal space, physical touch, etc. can be part of communication. These vary a lot by culture too. (Do you hug only after you’re best friends, or can you hug any new acquaintance?)
 - 1. Important to have conversations about these things on staff to avoid silent misunderstandings. In some cultures, you show love by spoon-feeding all children. In other cultures, even infants should be drinking their own bottles. Every program/philosophy can have its own approach to this, so need to talk about what your program’s norms are so everyone is on the same page. (Some centers are going with “no touch” policies because of lawsuit worries, but this is not a licensing rule. It’s totally okay to touch our children.)
 - 2. Communication is learned in childhood, along with language. Eye contact, personal space, who gets to talk and when, etc. all matter in communication.

No one way is right or wrong, just different, so it's important to have open discussions about this.

3. An outspoken woman who initiates a firm handshake and direct eye contact (as many American women are taught because it's valued here) may be very offensive to a man from another culture.

Q. Groups of four: discuss page 2 of the communication style inventory

1. If your style is direct, your goal is to get the job done, but your natural style may be to take charge and bulldoze through. When working with other styles, you can meet the same goal, but approach it as, "This is what we need to get done. What are your thoughts about how we can do it?" Make sure you're not doing 100% of the talking. Listen.
2. Be aware of your own limits in tolerating others' style differences. You can put up with a lot in the beginning, but it will build up over time. Bring it up before it explodes!
3. Direct person is looking for clarity, consistency, just the information first. When working with a direct person, try to shorten or pause the emotional part and provide them the information they need first.
4. Considerate people can read into a conversation too much. When a direct or analytical person is quiet one day, don't assume they have a hidden agenda or they're mad at you. If they were upset, they'd tell you. Don't worry so much.
5. If there's a problem, the direct person will bring it up to fix it. It's not a personal attack.
6. A systematic communicator will present accurate data. Don't take the lack of emotional flowery detail as a lack of caring or to mean they're mad.

V. **Cultural norms:** In your family, think about coming together at the dinner table at holidays or every night.

- A. Terry's British-English family went to grandparents' house for Thanksgiving. Children and adults sat together at the same table, were all expected to participate in the conversation. Oldest man sat at the head of the table, would start the meal by passing the food around the table, would start the conversation. One person talks at a time, no overlap or interrupting. Eye contact/ glance communicates whose turn it is to talk next. No hugging in this family.
- B. In contrast, her husband's family begins by hugging. Pass food every direction across the table, not in a circle. Everyone talks at the same time, multiple conversations going at once, everyone tracking multiple conversations. Not chaos to them, felt like chaos to Terry the first time. Leave by hugging everyone. They thought Terry was very quiet because she never got the signal that it was her turn to talk.
- C. Another family is formal in the beginning, then say grace, then it's a free-for-all.
- D. Everyone stays until everyone is done, then everyone helps carry the dishes into the kitchen. (Unspoken but formal end to the meal.) Then the men go to a different room, the women stay in the kitchen.
- E. Another family is loud, busy, wives making plates for husbands to try to get them to come to the table, dogs underfoot trying to get food that drops. Loud, emotional, multiple conversations going all the time. Would feel super uncomfortable in a more formal family meal.
- F. Patterns of behavior come with how we learn language and socialization
 - 1. Time
 - a) Measured approximately or precisely
 - b) Timing between speakers in a conversation (overlap, or wait a split second, or pause longer and speak more slowly)
 - c) Western culture (and especially Silicon Valley) tends to value every minute more, time is money, but other cultures are more "you'll get to it

when you can" and that's okay, they don't look down on you for being more flexible in when you arrive or turn things in.

2. Space

- a) Personal space for different types of communication varies a lot by culture
- b) How much space do we use for different purposes?
- c) Who is allowed to be where? If you went to a friend's house, did you play in the living room or were you allowed to play in the bedroom (more private space)?
- d) In an office, does it bug you if someone else touches or sits at your desk? It depends on whether it's personal space or public space for you.
- e) In Terry's house with 5 girls, everyone shared bedrooms, but the bed was defined as personal space. No one sat on each other's beds. The rest of the house is communal space, anyone can sit anywhere, but their bed and dresser were the space they had individual control over. (Now it's her desk in her office, but same space.)
- f) Different rules about how we use private, public, or shared / communal space depending on culture.
- g) Even if we have permission to be there, some of us feel like we'd be violating someone else's space based on our own cultural rules. (Example: I will tell my coworkers to go into my backpack and take some Advil or whatever they need, but some of them won't do it, even with direct permission. They'll bring me the bag and have me take it out.)

3. Relationships (friendships, coworkers, etc., not romantic)

- a) Sometimes a group is together for a long time, takes a long time to build relationships, then can be hard to break into those established groups. (East coast does this more; west coast people move around more.)

- b) In other places, relationships are “quick and easy” and don’t last as long. They serve a purpose (project at work, etc.), can start and stop casually. Californians have a reputation of being really friendly but not building deep, long relationships. Easier to join or leave those groups.
 - c) For some of us, being part of that stable trusting group is important to us, helps us to get work done. For others, it’s easy to come and go from relationships, doesn’t matter as much to us. This depends on culture. (Again ties into the task-oriented vs. relationship-oriented thing.)
 - d) Am I in the group, or out? Am I liked or not? Am I at the top or bottom of the totem pole? We need to know these things to work in relationships. In places where relationships are more long-lasting and important, it takes longer to get accepted and feel “in” the group, takes time to build status. In places where it’s more come-and-go, you can get status more quickly and get invited to the Friday night happy hour more easily.
4. Utility, getting work done, being productive
- a) Have to look again at task orientation vs. relationship orientation
 - (1) Task-oriented = task takes priority, get the work done, then relax and have fun together, need that focus, frustrated by the early chit-chat/ social piece
 - (2) Relationship-oriented = need that social connection in the beginning, can’t get started working effectively until we check in with each other, can feel like a waste of time to task-oriented people but is necessary for these people, then they get the work done efficiently in the remaining time
 - b) Can compromise by keeping the chit-chat to five minutes instead of twenty, but is necessary to have everyone included

- c) Be thinking about this for myself. What messages have I gotten from my family / culture? What's normal for my coworkers?