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I See What You Say

Using Communication Styles at Work

People communicate in different ways. Conversing in ways that work for you may not work for the colleague or staff member you're communicating with. Here are a few powerful tips that leave both communicator and listener feeling empowered:

Listen first. Begin by listening to what

your co-worker has to say. Then paraphrase what you just heard. Listening before speaking also helps you to figure out what the other person's preferred communication style is.

Understand their styles. Most co-workers communicate in one of four general ways:

- **Peacemakers** ask how you feel about the situation being discussed. They seek to establish consensus with you.
- **Truthkeepers** voice logical, rational facts backed by research about the workplace issue being discussed. Feelings are less important than knowledge and straight fact.
- **Solutionseekers** want to get to the bottom line as quickly as possible. For them, discussions need to lead to action.
- **Risktakers** generally move any discussion to the big picture, that is, the challenges, changes and possibilities for the future. They use a lot of verbal emotional energy and bodily gestures to get their points across.


Mirror the style. To make sure the dialogue really works for both of you, subtly copy the communication style of the

co-worker with whom you're speaking. Incorporating your co-worker's style into your own communication creates a connection, even if you move to your own style later in the discussion.

Check your assumptions. For many workers, the assumptions they make about what was said create the majority of communication problems. Always ask about what you are assuming the other person meant. Say, "This is what I understand. Is this what you meant?" Checking assumptions immediately helps to clarify the communication.

Give them what they need. As with mirroring the communication style, when you give a staff member what she needs, you build communication rapport. Some examples: Reassure the Peacemaker that all is well between you, even if you disagree about the issue at hand. With the Truthkeeper, be sure to acknowledge his expertise. When talking to a Solutionseeker, keep the conversation short and focus quickly on a solution. With a Risktaker, express excitement about her long-range plans.

Ask for what you need. Don't be afraid to tell your co-workers what your own communication needs are. Some examples: If you are a Peacemaker, say, "I need some time to check out how I really feel about this issue." If you are a Truthkeeper, say, "Let me think about this and I'll get back to you when I have more information." If you are a Solutionseeker, say, "Just give me the bottom-line for now, I'll get the details later." If you are a Risktaker, say, "I'm really excited about this, so hear me out and then let me know how you feel about it all."

End with an affirmation. Always end the conversation by thanking your colleague for taking the time to discuss the situation with you. You may not agree on the outcome, but both of you will feel the respect in the communication connection. Ending a workplace dialogue with a note of gratitude always leads to more positive communication down the road. 

Sharon Bowman is a Nevada-based speaker and corporate trainer, and author of six popular training and motivation books. The tips for this column were taken from her book How To Give It So They Get It and used with permission.

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